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Wisdom in China and the West

Chinese Philosophical Studies, XXII

edited by

Vincent Shen

Willard Oxtoby †

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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In Memory of

Julia Ching (1934-2001)

This One



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PREFACE

VINCENT SHEN

Wisdom is the knowledge of the Truth beyond all delusions, the all-knowing that transcends the limit of any particular knowledge of particular object. It is the ideal state of knowledge much cherished and searched for in all cultural traditions East and West. The term "Wisdom" appears in almost every scripture of all religious and ethical traditions, such as Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Christianity, Islamism...etc. The study of wisdom brings together all these different traditions as well as different disciplines, such as religious studies, philosophy, history and social sciences.

In wisdom, human understanding is able to overcome all illusions and attain the Ultimate Reality, arguably without any discrepancy between subject and object, knowledge and action, or appearance and reality. Wisdom, claimed to be of perennial value, is seen as capable of offering the right answer to urgent contemporary situations. The interpretation of religious scriptures, philosophical texts and moral admonitions inevitable involves the concept of wisdom. In today's situation, when the hope for science and technology to offer human beings a meaningful future has been challenged, all cultural traditions and politico-economic communities need wisdom more than ever to tackle urgent problems that humankind now faces.

The theme of wisdom is taken as the focus of this book because it is a central concern of the late Julia Ching, University Professor, University of Toronto, and member of Canada's national academy, the Royal Society of Canada. This book is resulted from a conference organized by myself together with the late Professor Willard Oxtoby, Julia's husband, with the theme "Wisdom in China and the West" in memory of her. The conference took place on November 21-22, 2002, in the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Toronto. Julia Ching was an inquirer of wisdom. "Acquiring Wisdom" was the title of her first book, and the theme of wisdom was a life long research program of hers. All contributions presented in the Conference were by Julia's best friends, colleagues and PhD students. It was a very touching atmosphere and a most friendly occasion in which all discussions seemed to lead to a sense of

intellectual harmony inspired by Julia Ching. Because of that atmosphere, Professor Willard Oxtoby was most happy and felt released at the end of the Conference. He intended to co-edit this volume with me but, unfortunately and very sadly, he died very soon, probably because of his unconscious desire to join Julia, within six months after the Conference took place. When editing this volume, I always think of this marvelous couple, Willard Oxtoby and Julia Ching and the sparkling of their lives shedding light on those of so many others.

The content of this volume is organized into three parts. The first group, entitled "Wisdom in Cross Reading", contains essays putting wisdom in the Chinese tradition into dialogue with Christianity, Judaism, other traditions in the West, and the Japanese tradition in the East. These are papers by Robert Neville, Hans Küng, Jordan Paper, Alan F. Segal, Milton Wan, Lloyd Sciban and Barry D. Steben.

The second group of essays, entitled "Wisdom in Confucianism", focuses on wisdom in the Confucian tradition, which is the major concern of Julia Ching, in its various facets such as hermeneutics, philosophy, poetry and law and arranged according to historical order. These are essays by On-cho Ng, Vincent Shen, Alan K.L. Chan, John Berthrong, Richard John Lynn and Graham Mayeda.

The third group, entitled "Wisdom in Daoism, Buddhism and Religious Experience", contains essays on Daoism, Buddhism and religious experience, which are also subjects of interest of Julia Ching as an eminent scholar in religious studies. Here readers will find papers by Livia Kohn, James Miller, Helen Xiaoyan Wu, Wing-cheuck Chan, Simon Man Ho Wong, Alison R. Marshall, and Jinfen Yan. In fact, the last paper by Professor Jinfen Yan, entitled "Wisdom in Women's Religious Experience and Existential Choice" is a study of religious experience taking Julia Ching as an example of what she calls "woman mysticism".

Since this is a special volume dedicated to Julia Ching, let me say a few words about her life and works. Born in Shanghai in 1934, Julia Ching completed her high school education in Hong Kong, studied at the College of New Rochelle in New York and then served as an Ursuline nun for two decades, completing a master's degree at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, before obtaining a doctorate in Asian Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra. She taught at

Columbia and Yale before joining the University of Toronto faculty in 1978.

Julia Ching worked for all her intellectual life as a mediator to bridge China and the West, philosophy and religion, tradition of the past and life in the present, cultural China and political China. She tried to bring out the best resources in Chinese philosophy and intellectual history for the understanding of Western scholars and today's Chinese people. She made the effort to bridge Chinese culture with Western culture on a deeper layer of philosophical thoughts. In this respect, she published, just to name a few, *Confucianism and Christianity, A Comparative Study* (1977), and together with her husband, Professor Willard Oxtoby, *Moral Enlightenment, Leibniz and Wolf on China* (1992) which evidenced the relation between Chinese philosophy and the Enlightenment movement in Europe. She also co-authored with Hans Kung, a famous Catholic theologian, on *Christianity and Chinese Religion* (1989).

Julia Ching was an expert in Confucianism, especially Neo-Confucianism. She began her scholarly career by studying Wang Yangming (1472-1529), a Neo-Confucian of idealist orientation in Ming Dynasty, and published *To Acquire Wisdom* (1976). She edited with her own major contribution the English translation of the *Records of Ming Scholars* by Huang Zongxi (1610-1695). In year 2000, she published *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (1130-1200), a Neo-Confucian of realist orientation in Song Dynasty. Instead of clinging either to the idealist type or the realist type of Neo-Confucianism, Julia Ching tried always to find out the best of their wisdom. She paid special attention to the religious dimension of human experience, though always equilibrated with a humanistic philosophy. We may say that she had a humanist concern for religion, with a hope that the human person could transcend him/herself into a better world by self-cultivation, holistic world vision and good governance

In her *Mysticism and Kingship in China* (1997), Julia Ching mediated religion, philosophy and politics by working on the myth of the sage and its relation to kingship. There she has examined shamanic kingship and kingship as cosmic paradigm, and the sage both as moral teacher and as metaphysician. The idea of the sage-king had deeply influenced not only Chinese political philosophy but also self-cultivation and family life. She explored all these with a sense of criticism, showing that the idea of sage had, like benevolent despotism in the West, hindered to the

development of democracy in China. In Julia Ching there was an enthusiastic concern for a better future of China, both cultural and political. One of her books, *Probing China's Soul, Religion, Politics and Protest in the People's Republic of China* (1990), was dedicated to a "brighter future in China".

For her scholarly achievement, Julia Ching was named incumbent of the R.C. and E.Y. Lee Chair of Chinese Thought and Culture, elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and recently named to the Scholars' Council of the U.S. Library of Congress. In 1994 she was named University Professor of the University of Toronto. She died on Oct. 26, 2001, after a long battle with cancer.

I am very much inspired by Julia's intellectual generosity. From her I understand that openness to others, generosity to others, and gratitude to others is the beginning of wisdom. Let me thank all authors in this volume for their generous intellectual contributions. Special thanks go to all sponsors of the conference: to Faculty of Arts and Sciences and its Dean Professor Carl Amrhein; to School of Graduate Studies and its Dean Professor Michael Marrus; to Victoria University and its President Professor Paul Gooch; to the Department of East Asian Studies and its Chair Professor Rick Guisso, and the Department of Philosophy and its Chair Professor Cheryl Misak. Also I want to thank Graham Mayeda, who gave me his generous assistance when I was editing this volume. Especially I want to thank Professor Willard Oxtoby for his cooperation and wise advices during the preparation of the conference and his good intention to co-edit this volume, though sadly he died too soon after the conference. In memory of his kindness, let me keep his name as co-editor of this volume.

At the end, let me quote from Julia's words in her autobiography, *The Butterfly Healing* (1998), to conclude this preface and open to the reading of this book on wisdom:

...[For] meaning is what we make of life. It's present in our effort to acquire it. It slips through our fingers when we give up the quest. Meaning is also called wisdom, even compassion—loving others as we do ourselves, or at least trying to do so. Call it Buddhism, Taoism, or Christianity. The labels don't matter. Meaning is found in living and loving, in giving and receiving, and hopefully, also in dying when the time comes.

Part I

Wisdom in Cross Reading

CHAPTER I

THE CONTEMPORARY MUTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CONFUCIANISM AND CHRISTIANITY: A WAY OF WISDOM

ROBERT CUMMINGS NEVILLE

The honor of opening this conference dedicated to Julia Ching sets me two delightful tasks. One is to pay tribute to her pioneering scholarly work in retrieving the past of Confucianism. Her 1976 book, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming*, along with Tu Weiming's book of the same year, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)*, brought Neo-Confucianism into a larger philosophical conversation that has been carried on by Antonio Cua and now many others, most recently Warren Frisina (Cua 1982; Frisina 2002). Herbert Fingarette's 1972 *Confucius – The Secular as Sacred* had opened the philosophical conversation with Confucianism, and Julia Ching interpreted the whole of that tradition during her long career.

The second task of remembering her in this conference is the one to which she put us: the development of philosophy and theology for the future out of resources that integrate Confucianism and Christianity. Her retrievals of the past were always also prospective, advocating the truth and helpfulness of the Chinese tradition for our own intellectual and spiritual needs. Her work with Hans Küng, especially *Christianity and Chinese Religion*, was explicitly about this task. She was one of the first to point out what most of us at this conference now know, that a philosophical approach to the world's problems framed by both the Confucian and Western traditions is far stronger, more enlightened, and readier for creative innovation than an approach by either tradition alone. Undergraduates and journalists understand that each tradition by itself is pretty much of a dead-end in this world of competing civilizations, global ecological problems, a global economic system struggling with intensified local cultures, instant internet world-wide communications, and a new vision of war in which the terrorism of simple technologies

flanks the sophisticated might of superpowers. Perhaps only Leibniz in the modern West addressed philosophy prospectively as an agent for understanding and reconciliation while imaginatively embracing the Chinese tradition with an intellectual vigor and curiosity like that called for today. Interestingly, one of the main lessons Leibniz drew from China was that the binary yin/yang system can be used to represent all numbers and also the letters of alphabets so that a total binary system of all representations is possible; that is, Leibniz invented the main idea for computers out of what he learned from China. You can read all about this in the book Julia Ching wrote and edited with her husband, Willard Oxtoby, *Moral Enlightenment: Leibniz and Wolff on China*.

My desire here is to further the project of developing a contemporary philosophy from the twin resources of Confucianism and Western philosophy, especially Christianity. To this end I shall comment on three points: the connection between reformation of the heart and loving the world; the location of the most strategic points for ethical analysis and intervention; and the roles of action and forbearance, or retreat, in the pursuit of peace. Although it should go without saying, it needs to be said that the discussion here does not treat either Confucianism or Western philosophy and Christianity as monolithic; it retrieves and reconstructs positions within each that are controversial with their own traditions.

FROM REFORMATION OF THE INNER HEART TO LOVING THE WORLD

The first point I want to develop is that both Confucianism and the West, especially Christianity, have important strands of thought and practice that connect the reformation of the inner heart with the proper loving of the world. This is the famous point of Wang Yangming in the controversy of his school with that of Zhu Xi. In his reading of the *Great Learning*, Wang argued that making the will sincere and rectifying the mind in some sense precede the task of acquiring knowledge because knowledge will be distorted if the inquiring agent is not set straight. More than many other Confucians and Neo-Confucians, Wang construed the self as an activity so that even knowing is a form of acting well cognitively. Moreover, his doctrine of the continuity of thought and action attacked the distinction between inner life and outer action that was always so tempting to the Confucian tradition.

Because the true character of things is to be events shaped by Principle (*li*), in both the afferent action of perceiving and the efferent actions of response, the self as agent whose inner nature is Principle is in potential continuity with all things (Wang 1963, 279). If the clear character of that inner nature of Principle is manifested along the lines of actions, then all the things touched by a person's influence will be loved in the double sense of being appreciated and transformed into a greater manifestation of Principle on their own account. This is how to be "one body with the world" and to "love the people," Wang's interpretation of the phrase from the *Great Learning* that others translated "renovating the people."

Wang differed from other Confucians in his stress on the difficulty of becoming sincere and rectifying the will-mind. Mencius, for instance, had said that the impulses to virtuous action and thought, the "four beginnings," lie innate in all people and only need to be allowed to flourish. If covered over with the corruptions of society, the moral point is to remove the corruptions and they will sprout again like shoots from stumps on a logged over mountain. Wang saw the corruptions of the heart as more difficult. Selfish desires are not mere learned behaviors overlaid on innately good impulses but ways by which the heart-mind's action is fixated on objects and loses touch with its inner principle. Tu Weiming goes so far as to say that the work of overcoming this is like a Kierkegaardian conversion in which the will's commitment to become a sage means to become sincere with rectified mental activity and action that proceeds from true knowledge as its natural extension. This commitment to sagehood is an existential choice that must be repeated and steadied in long practice (Tu 1979). The overall point is that improving one's moral relation to the world depends on first correcting the heart. Once the heart is corrected, the moral attitude and action toward the world is comprehensive but still has the character of the heart loving.

The theme of personal conversion as a precondition for public morality has an important history in the West. In the *Republic* (518B-C) Plato said that true knowledge is not like pouring information into an empty head but rather like turning the head so that it can see what is there: the foundation for increasing knowledge is a conversion to look in the right direction. This point was greatly intensified in early Christianity (for instance, 1 Corinthians 1-3) with its emphasis on conversion and the development of an existential faith as the precondition for correct

understanding. St. Paul was even more insistent than Wang Yangming on the bondage of selfishness within the soul: it led to the contradiction that he did not do the good he wanted to do, and did the evil he wanted to avoid (Romans 7). Paul's solution was to return to the law of God that was innate in him but confused by sin; the way to this was through faith in Christ, for Paul, which allows a restoration of the active effectiveness of God's innate law, in other contexts described as the divine image.

Some parts of the Christian tradition, in accord with various forms of Western dualism, have stressed that the justifying power of Christ is God's action, whereas the process of sanctification or holy living is human action. Other forms of that tradition, however, for instance those following from John Wesley, have emphasized a mutual interpenetration of both divine grace and joint human responsibility, and that in continuity from the innermost parts of converting the heart to the most external of loving political actions. In one sense everything is simply the manifestation of divine creative and re-creative grace working from individual hearts to the perfection of society; in a completely compatible sense everything in that continuum is registered in terms of human response and action.

The relation of inner divine law and effective grace to Neo-Confucian Principle is a sufficient analogue to justify reconstructing both together for a contemporary philosophy of the grounds of moral life. This philosophy needs to say that public policies, moral programs, and movements for justice will be shallow and unsteady without a concomitant conversion of the heart to be in tune with the power of real value. At the same time this philosophy needs to say that conversions of the heart, devotions to meditation, and personal perfection, are hypocritical and powerless if they do not issue in action to rectify the world in ways that express love for all concerned.

THE LOCATION OF ETHICAL ANALYSIS AND RECTIFYING POWER

The second point I want to develop is the contribution of the Confucian notion of ritual to ethical analysis and action. Ritual is the other sense of *li*, which Wang Yangming identifies with the first sense, Principle (Wang 1963, 16). The Confucian to which I would advert on this point, however, is Xunzi. Briefly put, Xunzi argued that the natural endowments of human beings are too

underdetermined for civilized life, and that conventions or rituals are needed on top of natural endowments to make possible significant human relations and thus fulfill nature. These rituals range from definite ways of making eye contact and greeting one another through language itself to formalized family and court rituals. Without a rich tapestry of rituals the wide-open variability of human movement, the capacity for making sounds, and the instinctive behaviors of fighting, fleeing, or mounting would never allow for meaningful human interactions. We would put Xunzi's point in evolutionary perspective by saying that we could not have evolved our complicated human flexibility if we had not at the same time evolved rituals that channel our indeterminate potentials into determinate meaningful relations. The western way of putting this is that human beings need to learn semiotic behavior in order to function as human beings. Aristotle observed that infants babble in the phonemes of their parents' language, an early learned semiotic behavior.

Pragmatic semiotics is a well-developed theory that provides a ready language for translating the insights of over two thousand years of Confucian reflection on ritual. Both emphasize the point that signs, rituals, or semiotic behavior are what allows human beings to engage reality and one another. Rituals are not artificial stumbling blocks to natural interactions, as Daoists might say; signs are not substitutes for their objects, as European semioticians might say.

Just as language makes it possible to say something to someone else but does not determine what you will say within the structures of the language, so rituals and semiotic systems generally make significant interaction possible but without dictating entirely what that interaction is. Much of moral behavior has to do with specific actions and responses to specific situations; much has to do with long range policies to sustain institutions or make changes. These are the kinds of moral behavior in which it is not too difficult to assign responsibility to individuals and groups. Nevertheless, specific actions, policies, and programs all take place within a semiotic environment that makes them possible. That is, all presuppose some ritual context that gives their terms meaning and expresses the underlying values and cultural projects. Those ritual contexts themselves have moral freight. Confucius himself inveighed against the corrupt rituals of his time, arguing that they did not allow for peaceful settling of disputes, for faithful family life, for honest public administration, or even for mutual education. He called for improved rituals for his time, not specific

policies and programs, but ritual education. He thought the better rituals could be found among those of the ancients.

A serious Confucian contribution to our own time is the analysis of the rituals that underlie our personal, social, intercultural, and international relations. Racism is not a deliberate policy of many people anymore, but it is a ritual in which nearly everyone participates. No one wants to destroy the environment, not even those who prefer to get rich at the environment's expense; nevertheless the ritual basis of our economies includes the degradation of the environment. No religion says women ought to be oppressed or abused, though the ritual practices of many religions do that in fact. We do not have efficient rituals for cosmopolitan interaction among people with different ethnic, gender, class, and cultural backgrounds. We do not have efficient rituals for rich family life in meritocratic cultures where extended families are discontinuous. We do not have efficient rituals for the peaceful resolution of disputes even though we have political agencies such as the United Nations to deal with those.

Contemporary philosophy needs to adopt the Confucian understanding of the pervasiveness and positive importance of rituals and undertake systematic critiques of the rituals of our global societies. Ritual ethical analysis can downplay the more customary but counterproductive Western emphasis on identifying a villain, and direct attention to the ritual systems that ought to be changed. Then it can identify the nature of inadequate ritual systems and point out where and how to amend them. Such a project would be a reformation in ethical analysis that might allow for greater realism in light of our seemingly intractable social problems. Meanwhile, the integration of Confucian ritual theory with Western pragmatic categories of semiotics and the habitual foundations of specific actions can tie the Chinese philosophical tradition with the Western in extremely fruitful ways.

PEACE, ACTION, AND RETREAT

My final point about peace, action, and forbearance or retreat is more difficult to formulate than the others because it arises out of current events, not out of comparative scholarship. I have in mind the justifications of pre-emptive war that have characterized ideology of the Wahabi Muslim terrorists led by Osama bin Laden and the response of U.S. President George W. Bush and his advisors. The former uses weapons of terrorism, the

latter those of sophisticated military technology. Both agree that some identifiable enemy constitutes a real threat to their way of life, that their way of life has something like divine sanction, and that the very existence of a credible threat justifies pre-emptive action to remove that threat. Both bin Laden and Bush are in contradiction to the mainline traditions in their respective religions regarding the conditions for a just war, according to which pre-emptive war is not justified. Is there a credible political alternative to this kind of thinking which seems to have the force of necessity in this day in which the threats to prized ways of life are very real and the powers to carry out the threats seem unstoppable without tragic loss of innocent lives?

Neither Confucianism nor the main traditions of Christianity have held to absolute pacifist principles, although both have urged pacifist positions in various contexts. Yet both stand against pre-emptive war, and might offer alternative models for how to behave.

The first point in this regard concerning Confucianism is the importance of the model of the scholar-official. To be a sage is to be engaged in public life in large or small ways. To be an official is most of all to be ministering to, or protecting and enhancing, the institutions that give the ritual substance of human life. In line with my first point earlier, the inner rectification of heart, mind, and will needs to manifest itself in explicit overt work to improve the world. In line with the second point, one of the most effective places for this is in caring for ritual, that is, institutional, life. This is not alien to Plato's claim that the purpose of philosophy is not to know for its own sake but to guide people in matters of state and family. It is also like John Wesley's characterization of the Christian life of service.

So what happens when affairs are such that one's ministrations are ineffective, when the barbarians come with no regard to negotiation, virtue, or good sense? When the terrorist fanaticism of Wahabi Islam is bent on destroying predatory capitalism and vice versa, and scholar-officials on both sides are blown aside, what can be done by those whose hearts strive to manifest the Principle of Heaven and the Image of God? Plato said that in a seriously unjust world, sometimes a just person can do no better than hunker down behind a wall until the storm blows over. The Confucian scholar-official, in those circumstances, goes on retreat, retires from office, and attempts an alternate life in a remote spot, recognizing the frustration of not being able to live publicly. In the Chinese tradition, Daoists too go on retreat, but in

military fashion, seducing the enemy to extend the lines of supply too far so that the small forces of the Dao can be deployed to overcome the aggressor. The Confucians generally did not take that line of winning through seductive weakness. Rather, the Confucian conviction, at least ideally, has been that forbearance itself is a virtue in face of temptation to violence, pre-emptively to protect one's own.

The contemporary argument is that without pre-emptive war, the enemy can destroy one's way of life and will do so, and that therefore pre-emptive war is necessary. I am not suggesting that either Confucians or mainline Western, especially Christian, thinkers would or should refuse defensive war, although pacifists make that claim. I do suggest, however, that a Confucian-Christian sense of forbearance would decline the option of pre-emptive war and accept the risks inherent in the threat of the enemy. Permit me to suggest some virtues of this position.

First, if forbearance in the face of real threat were public practice and understood as such, it would remove at least one of the reasons the enemy might engage in counter-pre-emptive war, namely, fear of one's own intentions. Iraq would have no motive to pre-emptively use weapons of mass destruction, or terrorism, if it were reasonably sure that no pre-emptive action would be taken against itself.

Second, forbearance in the face of understandable real threat would demonstrate a public moral commitment to limitation of violence that could give confidence to one's enemies and one's own people that morality, not only force, limit one's use of powers at hand.

Third, forbearance in the face of real threat calls into question the ritualized interactions of threat and counter-threat that prompt both sides to pre-emptive war. Forbearance breaks the ritual cycle.

Fourth, forbearance in the face of real threat and the possibility of pre-emptive strikes from one's enemies is the only way to extend inner Principle to the loving of all affected by one's actions, including one's enemies. Christianity and Confucianism are agreed that, in this large political sense, the proper attitude toward enemies is loving them, even when exercising defensive force against their attacks.

The greatest obstacle to forbearance in the face of real threat of a pre-emptive attack against one's people is that those who depend on you, your children, your institutions, your

traditions, and much that you hold dear, can be destroyed because of your refusal to take pre-emptive action against the enemy first. Thus pre-emptive war is redefined as defensive war, the argument made by Bush and bin Laden. The mark of real forbearance is willingness to risk such tragic losses.

This willingness is justified, I believe, on the following ground. To say that pre-emptive war in fact is defensive war in face of the threat is to say that selfish desires to protect one's own loved ones, possessions, and culture, override the inner Principle to love all the world. It is to reject the rectification of the heart, mind, and will so as to put them in harmony with Principle, the divine law, or the image of God, in favor of an absolute obligation to selfish desires. The Christian theme of divine and human self-sacrifice stands opposed to such selfishness, even when it recognizes the tragedy of putting innocents at risks. So does the Confucian theme of retreat when action cannot be taken without betraying sincerity.

My colleague John Berthrong points out that when war seems inevitable Confucians recognize that the way of the sage is impossible. But rather than the great tragedy of battle with massive loss of life, rulers should first embrace the lesser moral and human tragedy of intrigue and assassination. That acknowledges the loss of the moral high ground. Nevertheless, that loss is far more benign than the moral depravity of pre-emptive battle. Confucians and Christians, at least some of them, have seen through the attempt to disguise the depravity of pre-emptive war as heroism.

I do not want to gloss over the complexity of attempting to define defensive violence in an age of multiple meanings for every act. But I do want to advocate an aggressive philosophy of conversion of the heart so as to turn action to effective love, of the analysis and amendment of the rituals underlying social interactions, and of public forbearance so that everyone understands that pre-emptive war by one's enemy or against one's enemy is not necessary and that scholar-officials can minister to institutions that serve the justice of all sides.

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CHAPTER II

WISDOM AND A GLOBAL ETHIC

HANS KÜNG

INTRODUCTION

As a dear friend and colleague, Julia Ching played a decisive role in my life. This is no exaggeration, but an expression of my deep gratitude. I met her in a crucial period of my personal and scholarly life – in 1971 – after the period of my ecclesiological research during the sixties which culminated in the book *Infallible? An Inquiry*, and at the beginning of my research into a new foundation of Christian theology with the book *On being a Christian*. When I first met Julia at the National University of Australia in Canberra, I was immediately fascinated by her personality. She encouraged me to write a chapter on “The Challenge of the World Religions” in my book *On being a Christian*. In my following volume *Does God Exist?* we co-operated intensively for the chapters “God’s many names in Chinese Religion” and “The nameless God in the Buddhist Religion” and the ensuing mutual challenges for both Asian religions and Christianity.

Two subsequent trips to the People’s Republic of China played a critical role in revealing to me the significance of China as a spiritual superpower. Shortly after Mao’s death in 1979, we both proposed to the former head of the Peace Corps, President Kennedy’s brother-in-law Sargent Shriver, a common trip to China. As a result, we were both part of a delegation of the Kennedy Institute for Bioethics in Washington D.C. I had already had the opportunity to deliver a lecture on the function of religion in society to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Later, in 1987, we made some other trips together for several weeks with Julia’s husband Willard Oxtoby. They provided me with a living impression of the current political and social upheavals in Mainland China as we travelled together from Shanghai and Julia’s birthplace Wuxi to Lhasa in Tibet. That journey gave me many inspirations for the TV series on the World Religions I made ten years later. One of its seven films is about Chinese Religions.

But the highlight of our co-operation was certainly the dialogue lectures we delivered at the University of Tübingen in the summer semester of 1987. Julia spoke about Chinese Religion and I gave my response as a Christian theologian. We jointly published the lectures in the book *Christianity and Chinese Religions*.

Here we have reached the topic of this memorial lecture on "Wisdom and a Global Ethic." Let me briefly summarize a few core ideas on which I wrote in my books. More and more I learned how closely Chinese wisdom and global ethic can be interrelated. Before speaking on this relationship, I would like in the first part to present some thoughts on the relationship between Chinese wisdom and biblical wisdom.

CHINESE WISDOM AND BIBLICAL WISDOM

As is well known, the wisdom teachers appear as early as the middle of the turbulent time of the Spring and Autumn period after the sixth-century B.C. They usher in an epoch-making paradigm shift in Chinese culture and religion. It is amazing that almost at the same time as the Greek Pre-Socratics, a shift also took place in China from mythology to philosophy, to a new human self-awareness. It is an entirely practical, experience-dominated, ethical wisdom. In complete contrast to, for instance, Greek philosophy (which developed around the same time), it does not aspire to a speculative explanation of the world. It also does not recount the constant miraculous intervention of God in world affairs, as the Hebrew Bible writings do. Rather, it seeks in astonishingly rational fashion to instruct in the proper valuation of things and in the correct behaviour for everyday life. In spite of and in all its worldliness, it retains the notion of Heaven, that is, a transcendent horizon. Indeed, the express purpose is to understand the will of Heaven and to follow it.

The wise man is the basic type of the Far Eastern wisdom religions. In a quite different way the mystic is the basic type of the Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. And the prophet is yet another quite different basic type of the three prophetic religions from the Middle East, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed, the Chinese religions form a third independent religious river system, of the same value in cultural history as the religions of Middle Eastern and Indian origin. This system finally extended to Korea and Japan, to Vietnam and Taiwan. So talk of "East and West" is as superficial and sweeping as talk of "Western and

Asian values". Let me recall at this point that the idea of three religious river systems was a major insight I received in my dialogue lectures with Julia Ching.

But I would now like to dwell for a moment upon the prophetic tradition which contains also some elements of wisdom literature, and this not only in the Hebrew and Greek texts of the so-called Old Testament, but also in the New Testament on which I shall focus. The prophetic tradition to which Jesus of Nazareth belongs takes a critical stance toward the world, the establishment, societal institutions, and traditions. Yet, at the same time, Jesus' stance does not avoid public confrontation. Indeed, Jesus provoked his society with a message he had to proclaim because he understood himself as chosen for this task by the Father in heaven.

In contrast to such old wise men as Confucius, Laozi, or Zhuangzi, this led to what one typically calls the fate of prophets: it led to conflict between this still young man and the powers of law and order, a life-and-death struggle in which literally everything was on the line. It is the end of his life that confirms what we described as the profile of those world-historical, important figures: Jesus was neither a political reformer and educator like Confucius, nor an apolitical escapist and quietist like Laozi or Zhuangzi. He was the type of the admonishing and threatening prophet.

The incontrovertible fact is ultimately his death. No matter how one judges Jesus, his death makes him unambiguously distinct, not only from Gautama Buddha and Kong Fuzi, but also from Laozi and Zhuangzi. As a result, whether it is understood or not, *the cross* has remained until today the *proprium christianum* wherever it is found, even in China. No, here I do not mean the cross as moral sledgehammer and ornament for prelates (difficult to understand for Confucians, Daoists, and Buddhists). I mean the cross seen realistically as the warning sign and yet also as the sign of hope that promises deliverance, freedom, and redemption to all those in this world who, even in suffering, pain, and death, are crucified.

Indeed, this certainly made it possible to speak in a new kind of dialectic about the *wisdom of God* instead of his contradictoriness. The apostle Paul did it in his confrontation with *Greek wisdom*. Sophia, philosophia, wisdom? In Corinth at Paul's time this was a major theme. Was there wisdom for the Christian? Yes, but without the harmonization with which the Hellenistic teachers of wisdom rendered suffering and death harmless. The horrible suffering and death of Jesus in total abandonment had to

be taken seriously. And it was precisely this suffering and dying of one who revealed to all the suffering and dying people that the wisdom of God, without contradicting itself, reaches to an entirely different depth than does human wisdom. For, similar to the Dao, God is unlike any human idea about him. The Chinese person may perhaps be reminded here of the line from the *Daodejing*: “The soft conquers the hard, the weak conquers the strong” (chap. 36). Indeed, for Christian faith, the weak and powerless Christ, as God’s self-attestation, calls all human wisdom radically into question. Why? Because the wisdom of the world is here literally crossed out by that wisdom of God which in fact appears in yet another way than it did with Job in the Hebrew Bible. It is no longer arrayed in the splendid attire of the creator, but in the figure of foolishness – the foolishness of the cross, of lowliness and insignificance.

What then is the goal of Christian wisdom? This goal is not a harmonious accommodation to the world as with Confucius. It is also not seeing through the doubtless ambivalent and transitory character of the world and getting off as with Laozi and Zhuangzi. Its goal is to make it possible to live with another Great Ultimate, a God who is wholly other and in whom one can put one’s unconditional trust. The goal is not the ability to live in harmony with the world (Confucius) or to let go of the world (Laozi). The goal is to let go of all false ideas of God and implicate oneself with the one God, the one Dao, the one Heaven that lets the rain fall on the good and the evil alike. This then also means implicating oneself with one’s fellow human beings, good and bad. For Christians, the outward symbol is not the strict moral mien of the Confucian, nor the knowing laughter of the Daoist, but rather the realistically involved and quietly trusting in-spite-of-everything of the prophet and apostle: “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:23-25 RSV).

Confucians, Daoists, and Christians should today engage in dialogue about this form of wisdom. But I do not want to deepen this point but proceed to the second part about the relationship between Chinese wisdom and Global Ethic. Now I, a theologian, am wearing another hat, the hat of the religious scholar, philosopher, ethicist. And I am sure that many in this

audience share my view that these two approaches do not contradict but complement each other. It is just a change of perspective.

CHINESE WISDOM AND GLOBAL ETHIC

In this part I do not want to repeat what I wrote in my book on a Global Ethic, *Projekt Weltethos* (English edition: *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic*), which was published in 1990. Already three years after the publication of that book, the Parliament of the World's Religions, meeting in Chicago in 1993, adopted after heated discussions the "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic". I had both the honour and the burden of writing the draft in a rather complex consultation process, and of course Julia Ching and Willard Oxtoby were also involved. Later I was asked to draft the proposal of the InterAction Council of former heads of state or government for a "Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities". Canada was represented by Pierre Trudeau and the United States by Jimmy Carter. This document marked a further step, followed in 1999 by the "Call to our Guiding Institutions", issued by the Third Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town.

This process made an impact also on leading personalities in the United Nations system. In 2001, the International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations (in opposition to a "Clash of Civilizations"), UN Secretary General Kofi Annan convened a group of twenty "eminent persons" to write a manifesto about the dialogue among civilizations, based on the principles of a global ethic. I shall speak about this new paradigm in international relations in the American Association of Religion conference.

But in my lecture now I can emphasize that global ethic is precisely not a superstructure imposed for instance by the west on the rest of the world. Rather, it means the integration of values and standards of the different cultural traditions into a global consensus. And there is perhaps no other tradition which shows so vividly that you can find principles for such a minimum of common ethical standards than the Chinese tradition. "Humanity" (*ren*) could very well also be the *basis* today for a fundamental ethic – not only in China, but for humankind as a whole. According to Confucius, humanity is to be understood as "mutuality" (*shu*), as mutual respect, as he explains it in the Golden Rule: *What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others.*

In October 2001 our Tübingen Foundation for a Global Ethic organized *The Second Conference on Global Ethic and Traditional Chinese Ethics in Beijing*. I still see in my mind the bright eyes of several hundred students when I explained that they can find fundamental principles of a Global Ethic already in the *Analects* of Confucius.

The Chinese scholars at the conference felt deeply that many problems facing humankind were closely related to global ethic, particularly in view of China's further integration into international society, various issues in the world in the new millennium, the escalation of violent conflicts and terrorism, and the polarization resulting from economic globalization. On the basis of the discussion in the last few years, participants at that conference deliberated upon the *Chicago Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*. Adopting the principle of "seeking common grounds while recognizing differences", participants at the conference discussed the following issues:

- I. The two fundamental principles of humanity: every human being must be treated humanely; what you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others;
- II. The four irrevocable directives:
 1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life;
 2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order;
 3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness;
 4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

I shall now closely refer to the report of the Beijing conference (Institute of Sino-Christian Studies 1993). In the Confucian spirit of "harmony in diversity", scholars believe that the harmonious co-existence of different cultures is the foundation of modern human existence and development. Confucian ideas such as "'benevolence' means loving your fellow men"; "'benevolence' means man"; "a benevolent man helps others to take their stand in that he himself wishes to take his stand, and gets others there in that he himself wishes to get there"; and "do to others what you wish others to do to you" make a positive contribution towards the fundamental principles of humanity. "Do not impose on others

what you yourself do not desire” expresses the basic principle of respect for others.

According to traditional Chinese thought, “using violence against violence” is not the right way; “the virtue of respect for life” is the great virtue. Both Confucianism and Daoism oppose violence and preach “stop killing” and “treasure life”. As the ancient saying goes, “the people are my brothers; all creation is part of me”. Buddhism advocates not only respect for human life but also respect for all forms of life. These ideas contribute to internal peace among humankind as well as harmony between humankind and nature.

The Confucian precepts that “government is the representative of justice” and “righteousness means appropriateness” reflect the search for social justice. Confucianism emphasizes that the foundation of social justice lies in the human being’s moral and spiritual self-cultivation. It advocates “self-rectification” and upholds “the priority of righteousness”. These teachings contribute to the establishment of a just social order. The Confucian view that “no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others” is a classic articulation of the spirit of human sympathy. The saying “all human beings within the four seas are brothers and sisters” demonstrates the ideal of human solidarity.

The Confucian ideas that “honesty-sincerity is the Dao of Heaven” and “to be honest and sincere is the Dao of human beings” provide a transcendent basis for honesty and sincerity as between human beings. Chinese traditional thought advocates “consideration for others”, and suggests that “great virtues have a huge capacity to contain things” and “to tolerate is a sign of greatness”. These ideas contribute to the spirit of tolerance that a modern society needs.

Traditional Chinese ethics recognizes the importance of the family and views the family as the foundation of society. Among the “Five cardinal relationships”, three relate to the family. As the ancient saying goes, “The way of the superior man may be found, in its simple elements, in the intercourse of common men and women; but in its utmost reaches, it shines brightly through heaven and earth”. “Filial piety and brotherliness” are considered to be the origin of human moral sentiments and benevolence. Confucianism advocates “love for one’s family members, then benevolence for all people, then love for all things”, “cultivate the person, then regulate the family, then order well the state, then bring peace to the whole world”, so as to bring about the realm in which people “honour the elderly of others as we honour our

elderly, and take care of the young of others as we take care of our young". This spirit is totally consistent with that of global ethics.

When we discussed in the Group of Eminent Persons global ethic as a basis for a new paradigm of international relations, I was happy that everybody agreed that we have to introduce two basic principles of a global ethic: The principle of humanity and the Golden Rule. Our manifesto *Crossing the Divide. Dialogue among Civilizations* (Picco et al. 2001) includes in its section on common values a special chapter on humanity, reciprocity and trust. It proceeds toward a global ethic with liberty and justice, rationality and sympathy, legality and civility, rights and responsibility and culminates finally in a, as I believe, beautiful chapter on *wisdom* (99 ff.). It was especially my dear colleague and friend Tu Weiming who gave the most precious suggestions for this part of our book.

In this manifesto, we can read the following: Humanity and trust underlie the common values. Without them, liberty/justice, rationality/sympathy, legality/civility and rights/responsibility will not have the wholesome ethical environment in which to become fully realized. Yet, the acquisition of common values requires a kind of personal intelligence that has been the focus of philosophical reflection since the dawn of human civilization. The Socratic ideal to "know thyself" entails the spiritual exercise and moral self-cultivation, the humanist way of learning, to be fully human. While intelligence signifies the ability to learn from experience, to acquire and retain knowledge and to use the faculty of reason in solving problems, it is through *personal intelligence as wisdom* that human beings have survived and flourished.

In light of the grave dangers that seriously threaten our viability as a species, the need for wisdom is compelling. Wisdom connotes holistic understanding, profound self-knowledge, a long-term perspective, common sense and good judgement. Personal knowledge ... can only be cultivated through persistent effort. If we go after short-term gains at the expense of long-term benefits, we may be smart, but never wise. Although thinking in a long-term perspective implies a prophetic vision, wisdom, far from being speculative thought, always brings about concrete results. The ability to take a variety of factors into account in making judgements is a sign of wisdom. While healthy dialogue requires suspension of preconceived opinions, the non-judgmental attitude does not mean the absence of good judgement. The judgement of

the wise is measured and balanced; it is the middle path transcending opinionated extremes.

Advances in science and technology have so significantly broadened our horizons and deepened our awareness of the world around us that many feel that the wisdom of the great religions and philosophical traditions is irrelevant to our modern education. Surely, globalization has greatly expanded the data, information and knowledge available for our use and consumption, but it has also substantially undermined the time-honoured ways of learning, especially the traditional means of acquiring wisdom. We cannot confuse data with information, information with knowledge and knowledge with wisdom; we need to learn how to become wise, not merely informed and knowledgeable. There are three essential ways to acquire wisdom worth special attention in our information age.

First is the *art of listening*. Listening requires more patience and receptivity than seeing. Without patience, we may listen but fail to grasp the message, let alone the subtle meaning therein; without receptivity, the message will not register in the inner recesses of our hearts and minds even if we manage to capture what is said.

The second way is *face-to-face communication*. Talking directly with another is the most common and simplest way to communicate, but it is also the most challenging and rewarding. Conversation over the telephone, or using even more sophisticated electronic devices, is no substitute for a face-to-face talk. A partner is required for this kind of communication. Face-to-face communication is the most enduring method of human interaction and, in the last analysis, the most authentic way of transmitting values. If it is relegated to the background, there is little chance that we can become wise.

The art of listening and face-to-face communication are the indispensable ways to access the third timeless way of learning: *the cumulative wisdom of the elders*. ... The wisdom of the great religious and philosophical traditions teaches us how to be fully human. The cumulative wisdom of the elders refers to the art of living embodied in the thoughts and actions of a given society's exemplars. Only through exemplary teaching, teaching by example rather than by words, can we learn to be fully human. We cannot afford to cut ourselves off from the spiritual resources that make our life meaningful.

Learning to be fully human involves character building rather than the acquisition of knowledge or the internalization of

skills. Cultural as well as technical competence are required to function well in the contemporary world. Ethical as well as cognitive intelligence is essential for personal growth; without the former, the moral fabric of society will be undermined. Spiritual ideas and exercises as well as adequate material conditions are crucial for the well-being of the human community. Cultural competence is also highly desirable. Ethical intelligence is necessary for social solidarity. Spiritual ideas and exercises are not dispensable luxuries for the leisure class; they are an integral part of the life of the mind that gives a culture a particular character and a distinct ethos.

The values specified above are selective rather than comprehensive. Acting in accordance with these values is necessary for an effective and enriching dialogue among civilizations; these values can also be cultivated through the actual process of the dialogue. They are common values that have been articulated by all spiritual traditions in different contexts and historical situations. These values can be taught through example, story sharing, religious preaching, ethical instruction and, most of all, dialogue.

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CHAPTER III

WISDOM AS NON-WISDOM IN THE ZHUANGZI, THE PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ, AND MEISTER ECKHART

JORDAN PAPER

The common understanding of “wisdom” in the West is that it is an additional quality to both intelligence and knowledge. Wisdom is understood to involve the use of both in a mature fashion; hence, wisdom is an attribute often related to elders who have both intelligence and considerable experience. In early Chinese literature, there are but a few instances of the two terms (*zhe* 哲 and *zhi* 智) usually translated as wisdom. In the *Mengzi* 孟子, we find, “It requires wisdom for a small state to serve a larger one [and survive]” (IA:3); and “To study without tiring is wisdom” (IIA:2). The first use relates wisdom to intelligence, and the second, to knowledge. The *Zhongyong* 中庸, in referring to prudent governing, quotes from the *Shi* 詩 as a proof-text: “To be intelligent and moreover wise / is the means to preserve oneself” (28). Here, more explicitly in one of the Chinese Classics, wisdom goes beyond intelligence.

But there is another meaning of “wisdom” that is antithetical to the normative meaning in that it refers to a mental state that is devoid of content, a state where there is neither intelligence nor knowledge. This conception can be found in virtually all traditions in which religio-philosophical understanding is put into writing (not that it does not equally occur in non-literary traditions). Three examples will be offered representing three cultures, China, India and Western Europe, over a time span of nearly two millennia, via three texts: the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the *Prajñāpāramitā-Hrdaya Sutra*, and the sermons and writings of Meister Eckhart.

THE ZHUANGZI

The *Zhuangzi* is an early Chinese text whose extant version was edited seventeen hundred years ago. It is generally agreed that there are at least three chronologically different layers in the text. The earliest, which includes most of the first seven chapters and, perhaps, elements of later chapters, was written approximately

twenty-four hundred years ago, reputedly, and quite probably, by a person named Zhuang Zhou 莊周. It is the earliest of the received versions of the three primary *dao* 道家 texts.¹

It does not help the development of this thesis that the Chinese terms for “wisdom” do not occur in the text, but as pointed out above, the explicit Chinese terms for “wisdom” are exceedingly rare in early Chinese literature. Yet it would hardly be controversial to take as a given that the *Zhuangzi* is very much about wisdom. An early commentary posits that, in one instance, the word for “knowledge” (*zhi*¹ 知) should be read as “wisdom” (*zhi*⁴ 智), and so it has been read by some translators (Watson 1968, 31), but I do not agree with that particular substitution.

This possible use of the term “wisdom” occurs in the concluding part of the first discourse in the first chapter. It is a discourse that, using many examples, points out the differences in understandings and accomplishments between beings, most mythic or legendary, of different sizes, ages, abilities, etc. The point made is that the lesser simply do not have the same understanding as the greater, and so the lesser scoff at the deeds of the greater as being impossible; that is, people tend to assume that no one can experience anything beyond what they themselves have experienced.

The final example in this discourse is that of the legendary figure, Liezi 列子, who could fly about on the wind for a long time and for a great distance but was still limited in such traveling by the capabilities of the wind. Yet, according to the text, it is possible to be unlimited. One could instead travel on the very elemental forces themselves – Sky and Earth and the changes of the Six Phases – and thus be boundless, unlimited. Certainly, the topic of this discourse seems not to be about traveling in and of itself, which is put in metaphorical language, but to be about a boundless and unlimited understanding; in effect, wisdom.

To this somewhat enigmatic ending of the first discourse there seems to have been later attached a saying:

Therefore, it is said, the Successful Person [in the spiritual quest] (*zhiren* 至人) is without a self; the Spiritual Person (*shenren* 神人) is without accomplishments; the Sagacious Person (*shengren* 聖人) is without a name [*ming* 名 – read as “fame” in most translations].

Much of what follows in the earlier strata of the *Zhuangzi* can be seen as an elaboration on the meaning of the first discourse, including the sense of the later addition, which but sums up the relevant following material. Hence, I will base my case on an elaboration of these three passages.

It is generally agreed that the three different types of persons listed in the above saying are to be understood as three references to the same phenomenon, that these are three different ways of describing essentially the same kind of person. Hence, all three of the enumerated qualities can be understood as interrelated.

To be “without a self” is explicitly dealt with in the beginning of the second chapter. A person is described as being in a deep trance, as though the animating life-force was gone from the body. Someone who was attending him asks how he could have temporarily been so different, as if to all intents and purposes the person was dead. The person who had been in trance responds, “I had lost [in the sense of having died] my I-ness [my self].” What follows is an attempt to explain it, followed by a play on words on the subject of ineffability and on the ultimate meaninglessness of logic. This leads to statements very similar to the beginning of the extant version of the *Daodejing* 道德經: “The Dao that can be spoken of is not the constant Dao / The Name that can be named is not the eternal Name.” This is then followed by, in effect, the point that what was experienced in this trance state was beyond ordinary understanding; it is an understanding beyond that which can be spoken. It is this ineffable understanding that arises from the experience of self-loss.

To be “without accomplishments” does not mean not to have done anything but that all that one has done has no existence in a timeless present. As there is no self, there is no memory, no knowledge, no achievements. In Chapter Six, there is a discourse that describes the steps usually involved as the mystic experience proceeds, although it is put in terms of days rather than minutes or even seconds. The end-state is one where past and present are no more, anymore than there is life or death. A later anecdote in the chapter uses another phrase for the experience of literally forgetting everything by, as it is put, “sitting in forgetfulness.” It is explained by what follows in the discourse:

I allow my limbs and body to fall away, expel my
intellectual faculties, leave my substance, get rid of

knowledge and become identical with the Great Universality; this is sitting in forgetfulness.

To be in a state of forgetfulness is to have not only no intelligence or knowledge, but, in effect, no awareness of, let alone concern for, accomplishments.

To be “without a name” is related to the above experience. In Chapter Four, Zhongni 仲尼 (Kongzi 孔子 – “Confucius”) describes what is termed “fasting the mind” in a somewhat circular fashion due to its ineffable nature:

Unify the will. Do not listen with the ears, listen with your mind; [rather] do not listen with your mind, listen with your essence. Hearing stops at the ears; the mind stops at what computes with it; essence being empty, awaits everything. Only the Dao gathers in emptiness; the fasting of the mind is [this] emptiness.

On hearing this, Kongzi’s disciple, Yan Hui 顏回, says, “Before I came to attain this [understanding], I was certain I am Hui. Now that I have attained this [understanding], there is no Hui. Is this what is called ‘emptiness’?” Kongzi replies, “Indeed.” Thus, in the experience of emptiness, name disappears along with the awareness of self and accomplishments.

Hence, I would posit that wisdom in the *Zhuangzi* consists of two stages. First, one must have the mystic experience – the null or zero-experience.² This experience not only involves having no self, no accomplishments, and no name, it entails having no intelligence or knowledge. The early strata of the text seems written to assist persons with such an experience to come to terms with the experience. This experience is more common than assumed, usually lasting less than an hour. I have estimated that approximately ten percent of the human population has had such an experience (*Paper forthcoming*). (The later stages of the text, are to a degree different, as they take terms relevant to the mystic experience and apply them to the primary concerns of the elite of the late Zhou 周 period: effective governing and the extension of life.) Secondly, having had the experience, one must accept that the feeling of ultimate reality that is part and parcel of the experience is indeed the nature of existence and the cosmos. To be wise then is to have null-wisdom, for it is a wisdom beyond intelligence and knowledge. It is a wisdom

that understands nothingness to be the sole reality.

This understanding of nothingness as ultimate reality came to be the basis of the Chinese understanding of cosmogony, that ongoing and ever continuing creation itself arises from the null-experience. Embodied in the important notion of *ziran* 自然 (that which comes of itself, nature, spontaneity) is the cosmogonic formula: From *wu* 無 (nothingness) [spontaneously (*ziran*)] comes *you* 有 (somethingness), which is arbitrarily called in its undivided singularity the *Dao* 道, which on dividing becomes two (Sky and Earth from the material aspects, and *yin* and *yang* 陰陽 from the energy aspect), which on conjoining produces the myriad things which exist. This cosmogonic formulation mirrors the actual experience of nothingness. As one comes back into consciousness from nothingness, one at first but perceives an undifferentiated somethingness, which quickly differentiates into the realm of existence as we commonly experience it.

At the same time this philosophical formulation developed about two thousand years ago, we also find the same experience of nothingness, along with an understanding that it is fundamental reality, to be a common poetic theme:

When I looked, my startled eyes saw nothing;
 When I listened, no sound came to my amazed ear.
 Transcending Inaction, I came to Purity,
 And entered the neighborhood of the Great Beginning.
 (Hawkes 1959, 87)³

THE *PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ-HRDAYA SUTRA*

For the primary texts of the Mahayana Buddhist Mādhyamika school there can be no perplexity over identifying the understanding of ultimate wisdom *per se*, for the texts are named the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) *Sutras*. The elements of the ideas contained therein can be traced back twenty-one hundred years, reaching its early mature phase with Nagarjuna, approximately nineteen hundred years in the past (Conze 1960, 35). In his *Mādhyamika-karikas*, we find an early formulation for the notion of *śūnyata*, emptiness:

There are absolutely no things,
 Nowhere and none, that arise;

Neither out of themselves, nor out of non-self,
Nor out of both, nor at random. (Hamilton 1955, 170)

The Perfection of Wisdom texts vary considerably in length, from a massive, multi-volume tome to the ultra-brief *Hrdaya* (Heart) *Sutra*. Although the *Heart Sutra* is at the end of the school's development, having been written about fifteen hundred years ago (Conze 1968, 123-147), scholars, such as Edward Conze, do consider that the shortest of these does indeed encompass the very essence, the heart, of the *Perfection of Wisdom* texts. It is on this text that the following brief discourse will rely; it must be brief else it would be longer than the text itself.⁴

The text begins with Avalokita, a Bodhisattva (Wisdom Being), in the state of "Wisdom which has gone beyond" and looking upon all that is from that experience: "He beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own being they were empty." These heaps are the *skandhas*, the constituents of our being and personality. "In their own being" means their essence, their actuality. "Empty" (*śūnya*), means that they may appear to be there, appear to exist, but in reality, there is nothing there whatsoever. The text goes on to list each of the *skandhas* and reiterate that each is empty. This is followed by similar statements about the *dharmas*, the individual constituents of matter and events, that they never have actually existed. All of this is again repeated to make the point inescapable and indisputable: there is in actuality nothing whatsoever, including ourselves. There is no existence, no non-existence, no attaining of non-existence, no path to the attaining of non-existence; there is simply nothing at all.

Thus, in the Wisdom School of Buddhism there is no ambiguity with regard to the subject of this essay. The experiencing of emptiness is the state of Perfect Wisdom. It is to be noted that some scholars, unfamiliar with the experience, understand emptiness to be but a matter of logical extrapolation rather than an actual experience. But the text itself begins with a description of an experience, which hardly need be understood as metaphorical.

MEISTER ECKHART

Of all the Christian mystics, it is the 12th to 13th century German Dominican monk, Eckhart, who has most appealed to Westerners interested in comparative mysticism. His sermons in the German language, sermons in the vernacular by an eminent

theologian being novel in his time, addressed the mystic experience in plain language. Therefore, they were accessible to all without a theological education or bent. This appeal is also a modern one. Meister Eckhart was charged with heresy but died before his trial date, and his preaching of a potential oneness with God unmediated by the Church had long been buried by the Roman Catholic Church. In the late 19th century, his works were “discovered” and became increasingly popular among those, especially non-Catholics, interested in mysticism.

There is little direct reference to wisdom in either his Latin or German corpus, but he does write of an “unfathomable wisdom of God” and “Divine Wisdom” (Colledge and McGinn 1981, 199 and 242). Such wisdom is far removed from mundane human wisdom. What is this Divine Wisdom?

For Eckhart, as in the *Zhuangzi*, one can only come to know the ultimate reality, God, through self-loss, through sitting in forgetfulness. Eckhart’s sermons in the vernacular, using phrases similar to that of the *Zhuangzi*, a treatise not available in Europe at that time, could not have been more explicit in this regard:

If you could only become unconscious of everything all at once and ignore your own life...This is the way a man should diminish his senses and introvert his faculties until he achieves forgetfulness of things and self.

... ..

If you are to know God divinely, your own knowledge must become as pure ignorance, in which you forget yourself and every other creature.

... ..

Further, I say that if the soul is to know God, it must forget itself and lose [consciousness of] itself, for as long as it is self-aware and self-conscious, it will not see or be conscious of God. (Blakney 1941, 99, 119 and 131)

Meister Eckhart preached that the experience of God was open to all, the intervention of the Church unnecessary, and this experience was, in effect, of nothingness, and in this experience, one became a nothingness. From this experience, one realized that there was in actuality nothing at all. The charges of heresy against Eckhart were

laid out in the Bull “In agro dominico” (1329). In the Bull, we find a charge for preaching this point:

The twenty-sixth article. All creatures are one pure nothing. I do not say that they are a little something or anything, but that they are pure nothing. (Colledge and McGinn 1981, 80)

Eckhart defended himself to an earlier, similar set of charges in 1326. His defense on the above point is most telling of his approach:

As for the fifteenth, when it says: “All creatures are pure nothing,” it must be said that this is pure, devout and useful truth, leading to the formation of character, contempt of the world, love of God, and love of him alone. To believe the opposite of this is the error of inexperience.... (Blakney 1941, 272)

Eckhart not only reaffirms the truth of nothingness, but posits that if one does not understand it, it simply means that the denier has not had the mystic experience.

Divine wisdom, then, is to have experienced nothingness and to understand this experience to be unity with the Divine in which all is nothingness, including God:

... there is only unity in the Godhead and there is nothing to talk about. God acts. The Godhead does not...The difference between God and the Godhead is the difference between action and nonaction...[In the Godhead,] even God passes away. (Blakney 1941, 226)

Hence, for Eckhart, Divine Wisdom is a null experience, a null wisdom.

Eckhart, of course, is far from the only Christian mystic to posit nothingness as the ultimate, as have some Jewish and many Sufi mystics (Paper *forthcoming*). One of the clearest Christian accounts is found in the writings of St. Symeon (949-1022) of the Byzantine world. As Meister Eckhart, Symeon is not hesitant to call God a “nothing”, this being an understanding arising from the mystic experience itself:

He is transcendent and surpasses the understanding of very mind, since He is nothing. (Krivocheine 1986, 186)⁵

Attend to the mystery of God ineffable: mysteries unutterable, strange, and altogether unheard of. God truly is, He really is...but he is nothing, absolutely nothing of all the realities we know, nor of the things which angels know. And in this sense I say: God is nothing, nothing [at] all. (Krivocheine 1986, 190)⁶

Perhaps the most telling difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church is that Symeon was not charged with heresy for the above statement, whereas Eckhart was. In contrast, Symeon was considered a saint by the Orthodox Church, while Eckhart was forgotten by the Roman Church, until non-Catholics celebrated his understanding in the 20th century. But for the Orthodox Church, this understanding of nothingness would not be deemed Divine Wisdom, as that notion is reserved for the theological concept of the Wisdom of the Father, which is God entering the world in person as the Son: "The Son is the Hypostatic Wisdom of the Father" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa as cited in Lossky 1986, 83).

CONCLUSION

Whether it be implied wisdom, as in the *Zhuangzi*, the Perfect Wisdom of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, or Divine Wisdom in the works of Meister Eckhart, the understanding is the same. Ultimate wisdom arises from a particular experience, an experience in which the self, as well as all else disappears, an experience which the experiencer *post facto* understands to be the true reality and which colors all that is understood ever after. These three texts from diverse cultures over a considerable period of time but indicate how widespread this type of wisdom is throughout human cultures, for it arises from a human rather than an explicitly cultural experience. And this wisdom is a non-wisdom, for it exists no more than anything else.

Now I have just used a great many words to discuss nothing. This is the bane of the life of scholarship in relation to the sole utterly

ineffable experience. How much more to the point is the following discourse:

Emperor Wu of Liang requested Mahasattva Fu to expound the Diamond Cutter Scripture [*Prajñāpāramitā-Vajracchedikā Sutra*]. The Mahasattva shook the desk once, then got down off the seat. Emperor Wu was astonished. Master Chih asked him, "Does your Majesty understand?" The Emperor said, "I do not understand." Master Chih said, "The Mahasattva Fu has expounded the scripture." (Cleary and Cleary, 2: 424)

NOTES

1. All translations are my own. An expanded analysis of the *Zhuangzi* in this and related regards will be found in my *The spirits are drunk: Comparative approaches to Chinese religion* (Chapter 5).

2. The term "null-experience" has been used by several psychologists, and the term "zero-experience by the anthropologist, Agehananda Bharati (1976).

3. Last Lines of "Yuan yu".

4. All of the quotations and interpretations are from Edward Conze, *Buddhist wisdom books*.

5. Archbishop Krivocheine adds a phrase to this sentence, "that men can say of him." But as the following quotation makes clear, I trust, Symeon meant exactly what he said, with no need for an added qualification.

6. Here, again, Archbishop Krivocheine has added two words "created things," requiring the preceding preposition "of", which I have changed to "at", given my assumption that Symeon meant exactly what he wrote.

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GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

Dao 道
Daodejing 道德經
daoia 道家
Kongzi 孔子
Liezi 列子
Mengzi 孟子
Shi 詩
wu 無
you 有
Yan Hui 顏回
yin and yang 陰陽
zhe 哲

*zhi*⁴ 智

*zhi*¹ 知

Zhongyong 中庸

Zhongni 仲尼

Zhuang Zhou 莊周

ziran 自然

CHAPTER IV

COMPARATIVE TRANSFORMATIONS: DAOIST ASCENT AND MERKABAH MYSTICISM

ALAN F. SEGAL

It is a pleasure to be back on the fourteenth floor of Robarts Library where my office used to be from 1978-1980, though we are now in another apex of it. Although Julia Ching's office was never in this building, we both came to Canada to serve in the Centre for Religious Studies, which used to be one apex of the triangle away from here. It always took trigonometry to get around this building but now instead of looking up the value of a sine to get to the elevators, I have to remember the cosine.

This was the place where Julia and I met. I entered Canada in 1978 and Julia followed the next year. Will Oxtoby, who was then Director of the Centre for Religious Studies, suggested that I give her some moral support because she had a very complicated emigration process, due to the adoption of her nephew John from mainline China as she was entering Canada. Surely this represented another one of Julia's achievements, accomplished by both vision and great effort, as so much of her scholarship was. It was the beginning of a life-long friendship between us.

SOME COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

I propose that we compare two different ascent traditions, Daoist Ascent and Merkabah Mysticism. You know I would never attempt anything like this, had not Julia championed East-West comparative religious studies herself and left us with several important exemplars of it. Will too asked me if I could address these two extraordinarily different traditions. I agreed with some trepidation. I think of myself as an historian. But as traditions, Merkabah mysticism and Daoism are so isolated from each other that no argument of influence has convinced me. Yet, in spite of the lack of any influence of one tradition on another, there are certain underlying interesting similarities.

Let us start with some obvious differences so that no one will mistake what I want to say. The sociology of the two forms of

ecstasy is not the same. Daoist meditation and Daoist adepts were wisdom traditions in China as was Merkabah mysticism in Judaism. But they do not have similar social locations. Though the knowledge was esoteric in China it was widely available to those who were interested in it. It was even practiced at court. Not so with the Merkabah mystics. They were a small minority amidst the minority of Jews themselves, meeting in semi-secret groups.

But, in spite of the very different sociology, some of the relationships between the two traditions are uncanny. They both describe scenes in which the adept is in trance while his soul travels the heavens. In the Merkabah tradition, there are several descriptions of the adept sitting in trance before an assembled multitude who can even ask questions. In the famous scene of the recall of Rabbi Nehuniah Ben Ha-Qanah from ecstasy, the audience can even remove the adept from heaven to ask a question and then allow the adept to continue along his way (Schiffman 1976, 269-281).

The Daoist tradition contains a technique known mysteriously as “the escape by means of the simulated corpse” (*shijie*). As explained by Robert Ford Company, this process involves the temporary substitution of the adept for a person bureaucratically due to arrive in the afterworld (2002, 53-60). It was a procedure used in other circumstances but which had a specific application to the heavenly journey of the Daoist adept. The ruse involved mourning for a recently dead and then writing a “forged” document that presented the Daoist adept as the recently departed who is presumably headed for the heavens. The adept then took a potion or elixir which began the journey. The adept himself reclined with his head to the West, imitating the dead person. The procedure assumes that entrance to the afterlife is made by bureaucratic procedure which can be forged, just as passports can be forged today. While no such practice existed in Judaism, Merkabah mysticism and other kinds of mystic adventure were often begun during all night vigils that mourned the destruction of the Temple.

Both Merkabah and Daoist journeys contained similar motifs along the way. The Merkabah mystic would often show amulets or “gnostic gems” (*kmeiot*) at each of the seven heavenly gates along the way, which turned the angelic guards into friendly helpers. This approximates the talisman (*fu*) or death document which the Daoist adept carried, announcing that he had died of illness on a specific day. Actual examples of both physical objects which the adepts carried with them on their ecstatic journeys have

survived. Both traditions therefore involved trance but of such a specific kind that the adepts could manipulate physical objects in certain ways. Obviously the mystical schools of wisdom would each teach their adepts how to make ascents to heaven and what to see along the way. Although they see no similar figures in heaven when they make their journeys, they see the same types of figures and, what is more important, the journeys have similar structures. It is worthwhile asking whether the phenomenological similarities tell us anything about ourselves as religious human beings. So I will be attempting a logically deductive paper as much as an historical one.

SHAMANISM

One way to describe the relationship between these two religious phenomena is with the term *shamanism*. Shamanism is, in fact, a term that has been used widely to describe Daoism and more recently for Merkabah (Davila 2001, 25 ff.; Kohn 1993a, 81 ff.).¹ It is most often linked with healing practices, which are part of the imagery of the Daoist mystic – the goal of the adept was to achieve such perfect health that he could live forever. It was not at all part of the Merkabah mystic's imagery. No healing was performed; instead, the journey was undertaken to answer some difficult question in Jewish lore, and presented a theodicy, especially answering why Israel appeared to have fallen to such unfortunate circumstances. Yet, in each case, shamanism may be used to the religious experience of the adept. In particular, it refers to an adept's willingness to enter a religiously interpreted state of consciousness (hereafter RISC), to journey to heaven, and sometimes to bring back boons for a person or society (*e. g.* a healing, or a theodicy). In the Daoist case, the journey affects longevity and can even effect immortality. In the Jewish case, the journey normally confirms immortality, promised in other sources, by offering an eye-witness confirmation that the promises of the Bible (especially Daniel 12:3) are true. In both cases, the journey is also understood as valuable for its own sake – as a precious religious experience and even more as a process which in itself transforms a person to an immortal being. I will use the term “heavenly journey” as a short-hand to suggest this culturally rich “shamanic” experience. In the Jewish case and the Daoist case, the heavenly journey itself seems to signify the achievement of the religiously altered state of consciousness.

Yet there is little historical relationship between the two kinds of Shamanism. Shamanism is a tradition of long standing importance in the public and personal life of Asia. In China it goes

back to the warring states period and the Han at least. It may even be evidenced in the neolithic (Xia and Shang) periods (Kohn 1993b, 249; Saso 1989). It was favored by the court. By contrast, Merkabah Mysticism was an esoteric and quite private tradition that characterizes Jewish mysticism only from (at the earliest) the early second century BCE, the early Christian period CE, and enters its heyday in the Gaonic period in Babylonia in the third to eighth centuries CE. If one includes also dream visions, then the Jewish material goes back to the book of Daniel (165 BCE) while the Daoist material is traceable at least to the Song (Kohn 1993b, 271).

If both can be termed shaman yet there is no historical connection between the two phenomena, the immediate methodological question which arises is: What is the meaning of the term shamanism in our inquiry? One possible answer could be that it is a religious and cultural form that diffused in pre-historical times from central Asia Southward into India Eastward into China, Westward as far as Greece and Northward to the circumpolar peoples.² It is my opinion that diffusion is unlikely here as an explanation.

A second possible definition is to refashion shamanism into a universal element of religious life – like ritual, mysticism, prayer, or gnosticism – and detach it from its original historical home. It is that later way in which I intend to use it. Like the terms mysticism and gnosticism, this process of using the term critically will inevitably lead to certain ambiguities because this definition does not necessarily deny the previous definition, at least in more limited cases.

I propose we call off the quest for finding an unlikely historical relationship between Merkabah mystical shamanism and Daoist shamanism and turn to exploring what it might mean to say that they are independent religious phenomena with deep similarities and important differences. In other words, I propose that we can profitably compare Daoist mystical ascent traditions with the Jewish ones from the point of view of the underlying religious experience itself. In order to clarify what I mean by the religious experience, we must digress into a third religious experience because a brain researcher has related his experiences while meditating in it. I am not proposing that Daoist or Merkabah meditation is the same as Zen; to the contrary, I will propose that Daoist and Merkabah heavenly ascent is similar but that they are both quite different from Zen. But the report of a Zen meditator will

help us understand where the differences and similarities come from.

ZEN AND THE CULTURAL CUES IN OUR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In his book on Zen and brain functioning, James H. Austin relates various Zen states to perfectly normal or trainable aspects of brain activity (Austin 1998, 469-480). In one interesting place, he narrates a vision which came to him in Zen meditation – it was a clear vision of a red maple leaf in its full fall colors – which deeply impressed him in clarity and lucidity. He remembered that it was an image which he had actually seen in normal sight through the close-up lens of his single lens reflex camera as he attempted to photograph the maple leaf's brilliant colors. He uses this event as a model for religiously altered states of consciousness.

James Austin therefore suggests that this is an extraordinary but still a natural function of the mind, even giving a quite detailed explanation of the physical processes in the brain which led to the vision. Special as this experience appeared to him, his Roshi reproved him for being distracted from the true nature of Zen meditation. In other words, visions were not a state desirable for Zen meditation and so this red maple leaf vision was forcefully denigrated by his Zen Roshi.

But let us speculate about this experience in another context. If this experience had occurred in an apocalyptic context, the vision would probably have been evaluated in a much more positive way: To an apocalypticist this could have meant that Canada's destiny, symbolized by the maple leaf, was about to change, perhaps to take over world dominance. This suggests forcefully that religious experiences are strongly influenced by the cultural context in which they occur, that the group itself through its leaders decides what is a valid or invalid experience and adepts learn which experiences to validate or valorize. It is not too much to suggest that in the process they learn how to generate the correct kind of physical states and extinguish those that are considered unhelpful.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND SHAMANISM

The issue of consciousness and the evaluation of religiously interpreted states of consciousness (RISC's) is an iceberg underlying our whole discussion.³ So we must look at some of the

consequences of RISC. A group of new brain imaging techniques – CAT scans, MRI's and SPECT's – have made the operation of organs in the brain evident to us in a non-invasive way so that we can ask the subjects what they are experiencing and note the correlation with brain functioning. On this basis, neurological scientists and philosophers who follow the study of the brain have agreed that what we experience as consciousness is an emergent property composed of the operations of a variety of brain organs which we normally seamlessly and unconsciously integrate into a single experience. Since it is made up of such a variety of mental and physiological operations, it is much more varied and variable experience than we normally acknowledge, though it is made up of a finite group of components. Everyone has had the experience of “a bad day” because of a hangover or lack of sleep or caffeine withdrawal or overwork or over-exercise but these are only a few of the innumerable physical stimuli which can affect the various organs in our brain out of which our consciousness emerges in a still mysterious manner. In theory we ought to be able to map all these vague feelings of malaise with the functions of various organs in the brain.

The fact that there are actually a series of finite, independent, and different processes which combine to yield consciousness makes the issue of consciousness and religiously interpreted consciousnesses a bit less complicated but no less miraculous. This is, of course, what keeps any physiological explanation from being reductionism. Since we normally experience consciousness as a seamless unity, the composite nature of consciousness only increases the mysterious character of our mental lives and the *emergent* or *Gestalt* nature of consciousness. The individual experience will depend both on the physiological state and the cultural training as to what the state means and expresses, a much more complicated and varied issue than the physical state itself.

Religiously interpreted states of consciousness (RISC's) would be that part of our mental life that society or the individual categorizes as religious. Obviously, these are socially determined and differ in different societies. Some RISC would merely be experiencing various religious rituals and ceremonies without any necessary extreme changes in consciousness but we know that some religious rituals and acts have been designed to affect our consciousness. Some RISC's would entail relatively rare and specially interpreted mental states like prophecy or specific

meditative states, which are many and must be taught to the specifications of the individual group. Obviously the category would differ in different societies and it might as well occasion conflict in a society, as the use of glossolalia and other charismatic gifts in church services has occasioned conflict and denominational strife in the Christian religion.

There are, then, a variety of different organic states which may be labelled as religious in a specific society and trained for within the tradition. RISC has been used to justify the existence of a variety of metaphysical locations – like heaven or the underworld – as well as a variety of different mental states and a variety of different behaviors, some viewed as subversive by others, others viewed as conducive to societal health and regeneration. There is an implicit notion within these social judgments that some kinds of consciousness are appropriate while others are manifestly insane or at least abnormal. Under the circumstances, I think we should assume that even some accusations of insanity, like charges of magic and witchcraft, are importantly socially determined; actors may assert insanity or demon possession or witchcraft when they want to devalue the behavior of others. I suspect that over time we will come to see insanity as a group of specific neurological abnormality while a wider variety of issues will become sociopathic.⁴

MEMETIC ANALYSIS

The converse must also be true. When a certain cultural trope or *meme* occurs in a society it continuously receives new and important reinterpretations as individuals experience religious life. Our culture does not force us to make decisions but predisposes us to see decisions in certain culturally approved terms. Furthermore, each of the “units” of this software, units Richard Dawkins called *memes* – suggesting both the English *memory* (from the Greek *mimesis*) and the French *même* (“same”) – changes over time, sometimes due to an individual talent but never only because of one person (Dawkins 1993, 13-27).

One of the most interesting functions of memes has been articulated by John Gottsch (forthcoming). Following Susan Blackmore, he suggests that one of religion’s functions is to provide ways to deal with the fear of death (Blackmore 1999). Gottsch suggests that fear of death or death anxiety is a consequence of human self-consciousness and that the early Ancient Near East provides us with many examples of myths designed to provide

culturally plausible ways to reduce death anxiety.⁵ Gottsch demonstrates that many of the religious doctrines of the ancient Hebrews are actually “fitness enhancing” – that is, they increase the chances of survival of the people – even though the ancient Hebrews have few specific memes relating to the afterlife. These would include their abhorrence of human sacrifice and ritual prostitution, on the one hand, and their civil code, on the other. In this regard Gottsch holds out that religion is, or can be, a positive and important fact in human evolution while Blackmore seems much more obviously convinced of its virtually unique ability to delude us.

It is not clear to me whether *memes* need to be real, actual, cultural basic units of transmission or just heuristic devices for linking biological principles of natural selection with cultural norms. If *memes* need to be real, which part of a myth provides us with the basic unit? I am not sure that is a profitable way to go; but I am sure that investigating that now will take us far from the point of this book. I am sure that, however one chooses to refer to culturally transmitted ideas, religion plays a significant role in the perpetuation of culture. And it does so because it must be functional to human needs and desires to survive over time. Indeed, that is the function of the “self-evidence” we call religion.

It seems likely that, in both Merkabah and Daoist ascent, the heavenly journey itself was seen as a primary indicator of RISC (religiously interpreted states of consciousness) and ecstasy which obtains in these states is deeply concerned with the relief or anxiety, perhaps even death anxiety. A first-person heavenly journey narrative is itself at least an important sign that the person is expressing a RISC. If a person narrates a personal experience of heavenly journey in this period of history, it is likely that he or she is expressing what we would call a RISC.

RISC AND CULTURAL INTERPRETATIONS

There are some times when even dreams, a very common human experience, is treated as a RISC. Certainly virtually every culture in the world allows for divine messages to be communicated through dreams. But that is not the only instance of RISC. For instance, in a *New York Times* science article describes an unusual sleep phenomenon.⁶ The article states that a physical condition, known as sleep paralysis, common in some people especially at the onset or subsidence of sleep, has such a strong effect on our

consciousness that it is usually interpreted as a witch attack in Newfoundland (“the old hag”), and even alien abduction in the United States. It can involve paralysis, pressure in the head, weight on the chest, struggle for breath, ringing in the ears, even, as in near death experiences, hurtling through a long tunnel. Obviously, though the physical stimulus is the same in each case, the culture provides the dream figures for interpretation. In Japan, where there is both a predisposition and a regular name for “sleep paralysis” (*kanashibari*), people recognize it as a particular medical complaint. This seems to suggest that many phenomena which are common in our psychic lives are evaluated by whatever religious or cultural phenomena are available. That means that culture imposes an etiology and explanation on a great variety of our experiences. If this is true of our sleep states, it is equally true of our waking states. As we shall see, altered waking states, such as visions, ecstasy, out-of-body experiences, are explained in a culture by whatever mechanisms are available in religion and mythology. Depending on those explanations, the culture makes a decision as to the “sanity” of the actor and the significance of the experience.

The point is not what *we* would do or think, had we been but present. The point is what was normally done then in that historical society, given the cultural explanations available. How were decisions of sanity and insanity, religious ecstasy or error made? As scholars we can only evaluate whether the behavior was accepted or rejected or contested within the society. Otherwise, we are doing nothing more than dressing up our private opinions or those of our society in the guise of historical truth. That is one reason why it is cleaner to use the term RISC than RASC: That term only says that the society believes the experience to be religious and does not actually say what the experience was.

RISC, HEAVENLY JOURNEYS, AND IMMORTALITY

Even before these books in the 70’s and 80’s Huston Smith discussed the prospect that notions of the afterlife and the soul’s immortality were developed out of these feelings which he experienced experimentally with LSD and psilocybin.⁷ He quotes Mary Bernard, who asks: “Which was more likely to happen first: the spontaneously generated idea of an afterlife in which the disembodied soul, liberated from the restrictions of time and space, experiences eternal bliss, or the accidental discovery of hallucinogenic plants that give a sense of euphoria, dislocate the

center of consciousness, and distort time and space making them balloon outward in greatly expanded vistas?" (Smith 2001, 47 note).

What Mary Bernard is saying is that the internal experience seems more obviously the root of the notion of the religious doctrine of the soul's flight to heaven than the other way around. Of course, we know that the situation is far more complicated than that, involving a complex interaction between the body and the culture's explanation of the state. Indeed, the search for explanatory origins is itself a kind of mythological privileging of causation. But, both the traditions have mentioned, which feature heavenly journey use the experience of ascent as a demonstration that immortality can be achieved, indeed experienced in anticipation of the end of life by anyone carefully enough trained in this life.

If we make allowances for the fact that a variety of different stimuli can produce similar effects in ways we are just beginning of understand then we have not so much a justification for the afterlife as an explanation for why the afterlife was located at the end of a heavenly journey. The physical experience and the culture cooperate to produce various experiences which we find impossible to verify from the perspective our cultural norms. Nevertheless, they were real and important and quite normal for those who experienced them. Heavenly journey has a correlative in the functioning of the brain. Exaltation in the mind produces the myth of exaltation to the heavens or *vice versa*; the order in which the events originally took place is unimportant compared to the realization that the myths teach people what to expect when they have them and the reports of the experiences confirm the myths.

Since the nineteenth century we have been aware that the concept of God is – like truth, beauty, the good and other important values in our society – something that can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed by scientific observation (see Diamond 1975). In answer to that question, a number of philosophers proposed the religious experience itself as a self-validating demonstration of the reality of God.⁸ Mystical experience, including the tours of heaven which we have been studying, are proofs of God even when reason in its technical employment is helpless to settle the issue. This approach to religious truth is even more obviously called into question by the neurological research, although the philosophical question of the existence of God still remains beyond the issue of confirmation and disconfirmation. If the issue of the afterlife is obviously partly a question of cultural tradition, so must also the issue of God's existence be partly an issue of culture as well. It may

even mean that the God question is properly speaking an issue of meaning which may be possible to address only within any particular culture.

RECENT NEUROLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND SHAMANISM

Since the 70's a great many new experiments have been done with the help of brain imaging. So there has been a lot of new research on the various neurological bases of religious and other anomalous experiences (Persinger 1987; Cardeña, Lynn and Krippner 2000; Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause 2001; Winkelman 2000). These books demonstrate that perfectly normally functioning brains can spontaneously or by various techniques be stimulated to have anomalous and other religious experiences. These experiences are quite different from the hallucinations that produce permanent mental illness, derangement, and random acts of violence, although they are alike in that they all have an etiology in unusual functioning of our brain.

In fact, it is not necessary for us to understand all the mysteries of the mind to realize that this interaction between various mental states and our cultural expectations is a powerful tool for explaining any religious experience, including very unusual ones like trips to heavens and that there are transformational or transcendent experiences. Trips to heaven are really experienced then. They are self-validating experiences in the sense that people who have them have little doubt that they have them and they learn from their peers what to expect on the trips. After all, part of our own reality testing is accomplished in the same way. If we want to verify that a table is in front of us, we can ask others if they see the same piece of furniture. In the same way, when mystics see the same things on their heavenly journeys they validate the journeys of others as well.

It is unclear whether the myth of heavenly journey or the experience of it in trance came first. And it is not as important for understanding the phenomenon as is normally claimed. After all, humanity has always envied the birds their ability to fly and the early myths of the Ancient Near East certainly imaginatively reconstruct what the flight could have looked like. The fact that they reported sights which cannot be seen – like Adapa's perception of the world as floating in a tub – ought to alert us to the fact that no one actually did fly until technology made it possible. But the exhilaration, the feelings of ecstasy and exaltation were available to anyone who was lucky enough by nature to produce the internal

stimulus or who could train the brain to produce them. Depending on the cultural context in which the subject lives, this anomalous experience can be understood as being the feeling of heavenly journey, being at one with the universe, being one with Brahma perceiving the state of no duality. Obviously, the intellectual scheme used for expressing this state will depend on the cultural assumptions of the subject.

As Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause say in concluding their book *Why God Won't Go Away: God, in all the personified ways humans know him, can only be a metaphor. But as C. S. Lewis' poem suggests, metaphors are not meaningless, they do not point at nothing. What gives the metaphor of God its enduring meaning is the very fact that it is rooted in something that is experienced as unconditionally real.*

The neurobiological roots of spiritual transcendence show that Absolute Unitary Being [their word for the feeling of unity achieved in mystical contemplation when the parietal lobe is quieted] is plausible, even probable possibility. Of all the surprises our theory has to offer – that myths are driven by biological compulsion, that rituals are intuitively shaped to trigger unitary states, that mystics are, after all, not necessarily crazy, and that all religions are branches of the same spiritual tree – the fact that this ultimate unity state can be rationally supported intrigues us the most. The realness of Absolute Unitary Being is not conclusive proof that a higher God exists, but it makes a strong case that there is more to human existence than sheer material existence. Our minds are drawn by the intuition of this deeper reality, this utter sense of oneness, where suffering vanishes and all desires are at peace. As long as our brains are arranged the way they are, as long as our minds are capable of sensing this deeper reality, spirituality will continue to shape the human experience, and God, however we define that majestic, mysterious concept, will not go away (Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause 2001, 171-172).

They frame the question specifically in regard to Western traditions of divinity and unitive mystical traditions. These are not the only choices for religious experience but it is not hard to understand how the issues translate into a variety of different contexts. Like many books which have an easy answer to a complicated question, these neurobiologists have claimed too much for a single physical factor in our brains. There are other mystical states than the experience of "Absolute Unitary Being" and other biologically explanations for other kinds of RISC. There are other

descriptions of transcendent values within human life. But, treated as provisional conclusions, their general methods of argumentation and their conclusions are significant anyway. Indeed, one of the most salient aspects of RISC is that the subject reports with absolute confidence and surity that the experience is as real as anything else in life. This is what convinces Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause that God will not go away: the experiences themselves are valuable to humanity in that they help us confirm our worldview and therefore retain a sense of meaning and importance in our lives. Although the experiences themselves may be due to anomalous mental states we leave with the surety that they have actually taken place. Yet they are not necessarily psychotic; instead, they are biologically adaptive for a society because they lend significance and importance to all human activity within the society.

The specific explanation of the experience will surely depend on the historically transmitted religious categories in the society. What may be experienced as unitive mystical experience of God in one culture may, for example, be experienced as "Moksha" in another society, though I am not propounding that these are the same phenomena at all. I am just trying to rescue D'Aquili's statements from their hopelessly culture-bound formulations.

Something like this must explain many contemporary NDEs that result in a renewed feeling of the meaning of life and comfort from the thought that our dead are lost from us. The very processes which Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause relate are somehow involved in the self-validating experience of heavenly journey and soul flight, typical of the Jewish and gentile Hellenistic world alike. They are crucially important experiences for demonstrating the novel view of heaven we find in apocalypticism in Hebrew thought and the doctrine of resurrection which is party to it. Exegesis alone would never have been sufficient for demonstrating to Hebrew society, which had eschewed views of the afterlife for so long, that God was actually promising resurrection of the body. We shall now see that it is even more clearly implicated in the demonstration of the immortality of the soul for dissociative states were early taken as a demonstration of the separation of the "soul" from the "body."

THE NEUROLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HEAVENLY JOURNEY

There is a quite different etiology to the shamanistic experience in Daoism and Merkabah than there is to the unitive mystical experience that Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rauss is talking

about. Some neuroscientists report that religious feelings of leaving the body correlate quite fully with quieting the proprioceptive processing areas in the parietal lobes of our brain (Alverado 2000, 183-218). This center controls our feelings of where we are in space and when that center is quiet (as determined by CAT scans, MRIs, SPECTs and other medical diagnostic means) subjects report that they can no longer perceive their bodily location. Some people seem to be able to do this spontaneously; others train to achieve the state in meditation; others report the state after disease or trauma or under the effects of various drugs. The drug Ketamine, known as “Special K” in the club circuit, commonly produces out-of-body experiences in its abusers. I suggest that the difference between this experience and a detailed ascent to heaven is due to social and cultural expectations of what a person or a soul is and what happens to that soul once it has been freed from the body. It is possibly responsible for part of the experience of the “Near Death Experience.” A quick check of self-help books in print will yield dozens of books that purport to teach subjects how to “astrally project themselves” or have out-of-body experiences. This suggests to me that it is not that difficult for a motivated learner to have a “heavenly journey” experience. But years of experience are required to use this phenomenon within any complicated cultural mystical tradition.

In her fascinating book, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*, Livia Kohn gives us over 100 pages of text that describe the experiences of the Daoist shamanistic journey to the stars, the techniques for attaining it, sights and visions that can be seen along the way, and its goal in immortalization of the body (1993b, 249-265). I am suggesting that all of this is native to the Daoist tradition and understandable only within it. In the same way, we can easily detail the practice of Merkabah mysticism, its techniques for achieving trance and the heavenly landscape that is found along its own starry way. I am suggesting that both of these traditions have similar neurological bases and that their literatures condition the novice as to what to expect along the way and provide us with the details of the heavenly architecture.

To be more specific, we should test Daoist mystics and Merkabah mystics. Underneath these traditions, we should find a physiological experience that involves the quieting of the proprioceptive area of the cerebral cortex, accompanied at appropriate places by ecstasy and joy. This is quite different from other physiological states like the dominant unitive mystical experience. I would suggest that there is something in the rituals and

techniques used to gain this state which predisposes the adept to have similar experiences and experiences which differ from other possible RISC's.

SOME INTERESTING CROSS-CULTURAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MERKABAH AND DAOISM

In the Zen test case, James Austin noted that an unwanted physical state was extinguished by the Roshi. In both Merkabah and Daoist journeys to heaven we can see that there are great pleasures to be gained by making the journeys and also occasionally dangers to be avoided along the way. Is it possible to interpret these aspects of both traditions as conditions in the RISC which are to be reinforced and extinguished in the same way that Austin's vision needed correction?

The state of mind of the adept is clearly described. Ecstatic ascent is itself a reinforcing experience. In the Daoist description one can almost envision the quieting of the center for proprioception producing the effects of the "out-of-body experience":

My face, like Jade, is flushed with radiant color;
My pure essence is starting to grow strong.
My solid body dissolving into softness,
My spirit's ever subtler and more unrestrained.

Holding to my sparkling soul, I climb to the empyrean;
Clinging to the floating clouds, I ride up further high

I order heaven's gate-keeper to open up the locks;
Pushing the sacred portals wide, he lets me look ahead.
I call upon the Rain God then to lead the onward way,
Ask him to guide me to Great Tenuity. (Kohn 1993b, 254.)

The goal of the heavenly journey is longevity or even immortality and the feeling of ecstasy brings with it the conviction that the goal has been reached.

These texts express most of the anxiety of the experience in anticipation of the start of the "out-of-body" experience:

At night I lie restless, never sleeping,
My soul roving about till the approach of dawn.

Thinking of the infinity of heaven and of earth,

I cry with the eternal toil of human life,
People of the past I cannot reach
People of the future I will never know.

Pacing with restlessness, I yearn to get away,
Confused and close to madness, I long for the eternal,
My mind goes wild, strays off without control;
My heart melancholy, I am ever sadder.

Then suddenly my spirit, off, never to come back,
My body, like a withered tree, left behind alone. (Kohn
1993b, 252)

One of my students, a decade ago, was able to have spontaneous out-of-body experiences, probably related to the trauma of a childhood head injury. They were not in every way pleasant experiences for him. He reported very similar feelings of anxiety before the experience started.

The Merkabah literature also expresses the great joy and ecstasy of the heavenly journey, pointing out the angels and stars responsible for earthly weather and various events on earth. The highest joy, however, is saved for the redemption of Israel by the hand of the messiah, which the adept can experience at the end of the heavenly ascent:

Then the Holy One, blessed be he, will reveal his great arm in the world, and show it to the gentiles: it shall be as long as the world and as broad as the world, and the glory of its splendor shall be like the brilliant light of the noonday sun at the summer solstice. At once Israel shall be saved from among the gentiles and the Messiah shall appear to them and bring them up to Jerusalem with great joy. Moreover, the kingdom of Israel, gathered from the four quarters of the world, shall eat with the Messiah and the gentiles shall eat with them, as it is written,

The Lord bares his holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

and it also says,

The Lord alone is his guide,
with him is no alien god:

and it says,

The Lord will be King of the whole world. (3
Enoch 48A:10, tr. P. Alexander Charlesworth, p. 302.)

The joy of this literature is that Israel will regain its honored place among the nations and God will be recognized by all. The ecstasy of the adept is the demonstration of the realized eschatology. This is clearly as dependent on Jewish history as is the Taoist example on their history in the Chinese court.

In the Merkabah literature, there is a famous crisis, which the Merkabah mystic must pass. It happens in the sixth palace. There, the adept sees the tessellated marble tiles of the palace and is tempted to exclaim that they are water. But he who says “water, water” is lost because untruth is never tolerated in heaven. The tradition therefore suggests a different kind of terror that awaits the adept and tells him how to avoid it.

Now, no one would blithely assume that the kinds of mystic adventurers were having the same experience. They visit different kinds of heaven, seeking different kinds of bliss and needing to avoid different kinds of pitfalls. What the literature expresses is the suggestion of what these adventurers will experience as they travel. Underlying it is the same or quite similar physiological and neurological conditions, let us presume. But the cultural interpretations make the experience into something understandable in its own tradition. In both traditions, we see expressions of the goal and warnings about the dangers along the way.

Shamanism therefore has two aspects – a mental state which is part of our human physiology and a sometimes complicated cultural tradition that seeks to explain and also to produce these extraordinary experiences. The point in both cases is similar. These are real and very intense physical experiences. Those who have them need no further demonstration of the proof of the religious systems that they practice. Indeed, in many cases, the accomplishment of these practices demonstrates that the adept has attained to the highest level of spiritual fulfillment that is available in earthly life and that each can expect special forms of immortality in the coming life, whether it occurs in kings or commoners, rabbis or students, it is a transforming life experience.

NOTES

1. Shamanism is used quite freely and frequently to describe a variety of traditions, both high and local, in Asian religions.

Davila's book, on the other hand, represents an innovation in the study of early Jewish mysticism, but it is a justifiable one. See also Smith 1997, Huntington 1998, Harner 1973, Merkur 1985, Drury 1989, Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, Kendall 1985, and Merkur 1993.

2. One person whose name is significantly associated with this understanding of the term Mircea Eliade, especially in his book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964).

3. It would not be out of place here to cite the "cult" classic: Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1977), though not to imply any agreement with his major points but only to suggest various possibilities in the development of consciousness and especially in the imposition of RISC within it. See more recent studies of consciousness for more plausible theories: Chalmers 1996, Dowling 1998, Dennett 1991, Dennett 1996, Searle 1997, Noerretanders [1991] 1998, and Tart 1969.

4. Even horrible mass murder can be seen as sociopathic, the result of learned but rational behavior, instead of psychopathic behavior. The terrorists who killed thousands at the World Trade Center and the bombers who killed hundreds in Oklahoma City did not seem insane. They made rational decisions about how to kill themselves and the most possible civilians. They rather seem to have been so indoctrinated into a religious or ideological system that they were unable to appreciate that human life was more valuable.

5. For a review of this important concept see Neimeyer and Van Brung 1995, 49-88; and Neimeyer 1994.

6. "Alien Abduction? Science Calls It Sleep Paralysis," in the Science section of July 6, 1999 (pp. 1-2).

7. See the reprints of these articles in Smith 2001.

8. See Proudfoot 1985 for a philosophical inquiry into the adequacy of this argument.

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CHAPTER V

“FEAR OF THE LORD” AS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM: AN ASIAN READING OF THE *BOOK OF PROVERBS*

MILTON WAN

What is wisdom? Chinese philosopher Tang Junyi (唐君毅) furnished two long essays on a comprehensive study of wisdom entitled “The Meaning and Character of Wisdom” and “The Manifestation of Wisdom and Moral Practice”. In one of the essays he defines “wisdom” as “a kind of creative thinking which surpasses [ordinary] knowledge and is [constructed] upon a [targeted] problem, towards a goal, along a direction, and synthetically employing known information”(Tang 1963, 46). According to this definition, wisdom as a distinct ability of thinking and understanding, consists of two aspects:

1. Wisdom as **Perspective**: *a way of perception* “upon a targeted problem, towards a goal, along a direction”;
2. Wisdom as **Judgement**: *a creative synthesis of known information* rendering into an understanding “which surpasses ordinary knowledge”.

In this essay I try to follow these two general schema and see how the *Book of Proverbs* illustrates wisdom in the Judaeo-Christian Wisdom Literature tradition.

WISDOM AS KNOWLEDGE AND DISCERNMENT

Blessed is the man who finds *wisdom*, the man who gains *understanding*. For she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. (Pr 3:13-14)

Wisdom, as described in the *Proverbs*, is generally referred to as “a right attitude and approach to all areas of life”¹ (Woodcock 1995, 112). And a right attitude and approach to life begins with a *right understanding*. According to the *Proverbs*, a person with wisdom can view life differently from ordinary perception.² For example, regarding happiness and sorrow, the *Proverbs* says, “even

in *laughter* the heart may *ache*, and *joy* may end in *grief*" (14:13). As for regarding "to give" and "to gain", the *Proverbs* says, "one man *gives* freely, yet *gains* even more; another *withholds* unduly, but comes to *poverty*" (11:24). This view point is shared by the Chinese Daoist text *Daodejing* 道德經 which also singles out paradoxical concepts in order to direct its readers to a deeper understanding of life.³ But how can one achieve such an unconventional view of life? In fact, the "view", the *perspective*, is indeed the crux of the matter here.

"*Perspective*" (觀 *Guan*), the way one perceives and contemplates, is well studied and discussed in both Chinese and Western philosophical traditions.⁴ In the *Book of Proverbs*, a wise person is one who can perceive life from a *higher level* of perception, namely, *perspective of totality* and *perspective of depth*.

PERSPECTIVE OF TOTALITY

A few years ago I visited the Ryoanji (Temple of Dragon Peace) in Kyoto, spurred by the belief that contemplation upon its famous Stone Garden will lead to attainment of enlightenment. So I decided to give it a try and spend some quiet moments meditating at the Stone Garden. Not long after my mind became restful, there came a group of tourists. Their talking and laughter dissipated the peace and serenity in the air and my effort to attain tranquility was completely foiled. Unable to compose myself again, I looked around aimlessly and saw one of the tourists taking photos of the Garden. Perhaps he realized that it is impossible to capture the artistic garden in one single photo, he took a few more shots from different angles. While I was admiring his cleverness, my attention was drawn to another gentleman who pulled out his video camera and attempted to catch a more comprehensive view of the Garden by walking around the entire area. Looking at these two gentlemen and comparing them with the rest of the group which was satisfied by merely purchasing postcards, I was suddenly enlightened! Different attempts to capture the scenic garden manifested different modes of perspective. A postcard, no matter how beautiful it is, presents only one single perspective of the Garden. Taking several photos can certainly capture more facets of the beauty, yet it was still far from being able to appreciate the Garden in its totality. Not even the gentleman with his video camera could do the job. For there are an infinite number of different ways to perceive the

Garden -- perspective from a helicopter high up in the sky, perspective from an ant under one of the stones in the Garden, perspective from the tree top above the wall of the temple . . . In order to attain a *comprehensive* perspective of the Garden, one has to see it from *all possible* places, which is not feasible at all. However, the more different angles from which one perceives the Garden, the greater the likelihood that one will be able to present the reality of the object.

The way we look at life resembles the same manner one looks at the Stone Garden: It all depends. It all depends on the perspective that we take. Life seems so miserable, regrettable, or hopeless when we confine our ways of looking at it by “tunnel vision”. When we open up our mind and view life from different perspectives, the world is still full of beauty and wonders and life becomes worth living again. And this is how the *Proverbs* tries to contrast “the Wise” and “the Fool”.⁵

The Fool

The Fool is one who stubbornly sticks to his own way. As portrayed in *Proverbs*, “a man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed – without remedy” (29:1). This is because “a fool finds no pleasure in *understanding* but delights in airing his *own opinions*” (18:2). In other words, a Fool refrains from multi-dimensional thinking.

In the *Book of Proverbs*, the possibility of extending the dimensions of one’s perspective does not come primarily from self-reflexive enlightenment, as is in most of the Eastern traditions. Rather, the breakthrough in one’s perception comes from receiving advice from experienced and knowledgeable people. Whereas the Fool “hates knowledge”(Pr 1:22,29) which is different from his own opinions,⁶ the Wise loves to listen to those who think differently. This is why the *Proverbs* puts so much emphasis on the virtue of listening to advice: “The way of a *fool* seems right to him, but a *wise* man *listens to advice*.”(Pr 12:15)⁷

The Wise

In *Proverbs*, learning is both *informative* and

transformative. Learning does not only increase one's informative knowledge. The learning process itself can also serve as a means to acquire wisdom. *Proverbs* 9:8-9 says: "Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wise still." Why does the wise love rebuke? It is because rebuke means somebody is holding an opinion which is radically different from yours. The wise would take this as an opportunity to open up new dimensions of thinking. And this is why *Proverbs* says a wise person will love you even more if you rebuke him. When a person is capable of opening up his view to different dimensions of perspective, he will even be able to see the concerns or issues from his counterpart's perspective. As a result, there won't be anymore anger and resentment, but understanding and patience. That is why the *Proverbs* says, "A man's *wisdom* gives him *patience*; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." (Pr 19:11)

PERSPECTIVE OF DEPTH

When we read the *Book of Proverbs*, we find many verses relating anger with the Foolish and staying calm with the Wise:

A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated. (Pr 14:17)

A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly. (Pr 14:29)

But why is it so important that a wise person not be a quick-tempered person? This reveals the next characteristic that distinguishes the Wise from the Fool, namely, the *perspective of depth*.

Impulsivity and a Tranquil Heart

As indicated in many places in the *Proverbs*, temper is only one of the many outward expressions of a person's heart.⁸ A quick temper reflects a restless heart within: "the heart of the righteous *weighs* its answer, but the mouth of the wicked *gushes* evil" (Pr 15:28). It takes a clear mind and a still heart to make wise judgements, but a reactive-impulsive heart will gush forth evil words. Such an understanding seems to echo what is said in Laozi's *Daode Jing*,

The heavy is the root of the light;
The tranquil is the lord of the hasty...

If he is lighthearted, then the root is lost;
 If he is hasty, then the lord is lost. (Book I: Ch.26)

Proverbs encourages *control* over one's anger, and directly relates this virtue with the Wise: "A fool gives *full vent* to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself *under control*" (Pr 29:11)⁹ When one's temper is controlled, one can scrutinize the situation more clearly and comprehensively.¹⁰ And this is why *Proverbs* sees a divine origin in a wise person's listening and perceiving ability:

Ears that hear and eyes that see –
 The Lord has made them both. (Pr 20:12)¹¹

Lower Needs and Discernment

The *Book of Proverbs* also relates wisdom to discernment: "A *rich* man may be wise in his *own eyes*, but a *poor* man who has *discernment* sees through him" (Pr 28:11). The interesting thing here is, *Proverbs* also contrasts the rich with the poor in the same context. Why is that so? The reason could be that a rich person who mistakably regards him or herself as "wise" identifies lower needs (i.e. the physiological needs, the safety needs, etc. (Maslow 1970, 35-58)) with self-actualization. However, despite being deprived of physiological gratification, the Wise pursue the depth of discernment (i.e., "seeing through").

Here it appears that gratifying lower needs is antithetical to a wise heart. "Perspective of depth" here implies a heart that will not rest on superficial and immediate needs. Thus *Proverbs* says,

Listen, my son, and *be wise*,
 And keep your heart on the right path.
 Do not join those who *drink too much wine*,
 Or gorge themselves on meat. (Pr 23:19-20)

Lower needs provide immediate satisfaction, but higher needs like "cognitive needs" (knowledge, understanding, wisdom, etc. (see Maslow 1970, 48-51, 100)) demand discipline, patience and concentration of mind. Perhaps this is the reason why most of the ancient cultures that emphasize the pursuit of wisdom also

emphasize asceticism. And the tradition of the *Book of Proverbs* is no exception. In order to acquire wisdom, one has to “pay tremendous attention” and “apply one’s heart” (Pr 2:2; 5:1). “He who *restrains* his words *has knowledge*, and he who has a *cool spirit* is a man of *understanding*” (Pr 17:27).

A SELF-REFLEXIVE MIND

In our discussion above, we have seen that in order to acquire wisdom, one has to attain a “perspective of totality” and a “perspective of depth”. In fact, when we take a closer look into the ability of attaining these perspectives, we find that both of them are related to the trouble of self-centeredness and settling the place of self in one’s life.

Self-Centeredness: The Cause of Blindness

When a person is too preoccupied with her own opinions or reputation, it becomes much harder to admit mistakes.¹² And in order to defend self-righteousness, stubbornness blinds the person’s eyes so that she can no longer perceive situations from beyond her own perspective.¹³ According to the *Proverbs*, this is how self-centeredness makes a Fool. A Fool is one who has no reflexive mind:

As a dog returns to its vomit,
So a fool repeats his folly. (Pr 26:11)

In the same way, when a person is overcome by desires of immediate gratification or anger, her attention will be engaged and driven by instinctoid yearnings. As a result, she loses her patience and can no longer think freely and reflexively. Attachment, as the Chinese Buddhism frequently claims, is the enemy of wisdom.¹⁴ The *Proverbs* says: “Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both” (27:3).¹⁵

Fear of the Lord as the Beginning of Wisdom

With the above understanding, we are now ready to apprehend why the *Book of Proverbs* claims that a person who fears the Lord can acquire wisdom. But before we relate “fearing of the Lord” with “acquiring wisdom”, we must first find out what is the

meaning of “fear of the Lord” in the *Proverbs*.

When *Proverbs* proclaims that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Pr 9:10), it is not describing a general kind of intelligence that can be acquired autonomously by anyone who cultivates learning and deep thinking. Rather, the “wisdom” and “understanding” mentioned here must first be directly referred to an attitude of reverence towards God.¹⁶ Daniel J. Estes summarizes the meaning of “fear of the Lord” as follows:

The term ‘fear’ (*yir’â*) in the Old Testament can refer to dread (Dt. 2:25) or terror (Jon. 1:10, 16), or more positively to awe or reverence. The expression ‘the fear of Yahweh’ combines the senses of ‘shrinking back in fear and of drawing close in awe’ (Ross 1991: 907). This response is not abject terror which causes humans to cringe before Yahweh, but a sense of awe before the exalted Lord, such as Isaiah experienced when he saw the vision of Yahweh in the temple (Is. 6:1-5).
(37)

According to the *Proverbs*, such a strong consciousness of the presence of God generates four characteristics in the believer:

1. A sense of humility;¹⁷
2. A sense of security;¹⁸
3. A sense of contentment;¹⁹
4. Avoidance of evil.²⁰

“Humility” is the ground for an open of mind, and it enhances one’s ability to apprehend comprehensively. Accordingly, humility before the Lord as an expression of self-renunciation opens one’s mind to advice or opinions that are different from one’s own. As a result, one is on one’s way to acquiring the “perspective of totality”. That is why the *Proverbs* says, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with *humility* comes *wisdom*.” (Pr 11:2)

Regarding the “perspective of depth”, as we have seen, a sense of security and restful contentment are essential to one’s

pursuit of wisdom and the acquisition of a reflexive mind. Similarly, when a person "hates evil",²¹ his purity of heart releases him from an attachment to sensual desires (for example, covetousness or lust) and self-centeredness (for example, anger or pride). With such a tranquil heart, the Wise can perceive the world from a higher level of consciousness, and thus with greater penetration.²²

The statement "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" might not be able to gain universal acceptance, especially for those who do not belong to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As Asians, we do have a long and enriched tradition of wisdom that does not presume a belief in a personal infinite Being like Yahweh. Nonetheless, if we do not regard the word "beginning" as an exclusive term, we can still appreciate one of the world's great religious traditions which provides an insightful contribution to the human inquiry into wisdom.

NOTES

1. For a more comprehensive discussion of the meaning of "wisdom" in *Proverbs*, see Frydrych 2002, 15-23.

2. For example, Pr 14:12, "There is a way that *seems right* to a man, but in the end it leads to *death*."

3. A few illustrative examples are: "something" and "nothing", "the difficult" and "the easy" (Book I: Ch.2), "disaster" and "good fortune" (Book II: Ch.58); "the submissive and weak" and "the hard and strong" (Book I: Ch.36, Book II: Ch.52); "doing nothing" and "nothing that is undone" (Book II: Ch.48, Book I: Ch.37).

4. See, for example, Gadamer 1975, 269 and van Peursen 1977, 188. In Chinese Buddhism, *Zhiguan* (止觀 fixed mind meditation) is a central doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism, and *Fajieguan* (法界觀 meditation of dharmadhātu) is also a major meditative practice in Huayan Buddhism.

5. It is interesting to find that one of the most important Chinese "wisdom literatures," *The Analects* (《論語》) [by Confucius], also contrasts the "gentleman's" (君子 *junzi*) way of life with that of the "inferior man" (小人 *xiaoren*).

6. Pr 23:9, "Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words."

7. See also, Pr 13:10; 15:22; 19:20-21; 27:9.

8. For example, Pr 15:28; 16:21; 16:23; 18:12; 18:14; 20:5; 21:23; 26:23-25; 27:19.

9. See Crenshaw 1981, 83-86, for a discussion on the relationship between “subordination of the passions” and “wisdom”.

10. The *Daode Jing* has a similar saying that says when “I hold firmly to *stillness*, the myriad creatures all rise together. And I *see* thereby their return.”(Book I: Ch.16)

11. Here the seeing “eyes” and the hearing “ears” are not used in their ordinary physiological sense, but refer to the perceptive mind and receptive attitude of the Wise. See Whybray 1994, *Proverbs*, 293-94.

12. Pr 18:2, “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding, but delights in airing his own opinions.”

13. Pr 12:15, “The way of a fool *seems right* to him, but a wise man *listens* to advice.”

14. See, for example, Hui Neng(惠能), *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (《六祖壇經》) on “non-attachment (無住 Wuzhu)”.

15. See also Tang Junyi’s discussion on how “unnatural desire” can obstruct one’s ability to acquire wisdom in his *Founding a Moral Self*, “Appendix: The Manifestation of Wisdom and Moral Practice”(1963, 87-91).

16. Pr 3:5-7, “*Trust in the Lord* with all your heart and lean *not on your own understanding*; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. *Do not be wise in your own eyes*; fear the Lord and shun evil.” Also, Pr 21:30, “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.” See Fontaine 1993, 111-12.

17. Pr 22:4, “*Humility* and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.” Also, Pr 23:17, “*Do not* let your heart *envy* sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.”

18. Pr 14:26, “He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.” Also, Pr 15:16, “Better *a little* with the fear of the Lord than *great wealth* with turmoil.”

19. Pr 19:23, “The fear of the Lord leads to life: Then one *rests content*, untouched by trouble.”

20. Pr 8:13, "To fear the Lord is to *hate evil*; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech."

21. See n.24, Pr 8:13.

22. See Rollo May's discussion on "creative self-consciousness" as the highest stage in a person's consciousness of oneself, in May 1975, 139-42.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCEPT OF HUMAN WEAKNESS: A BRIEF COMPARISON OF CHRISTIAN AND CONFUCIAN THINKING

LLOYD SCIBAN

The author must qualify the reasoning that is offered in this essay. It is highly problematic to opine about the general characteristics of a religion. For every observation, one is likely to find evidence for an opposing view. Furthermore, I am not a scholar of religion by training nor in practice. Add to this the fact that these past four years my research has focused less on philosophical topics. For these reasons, this essay is likely to contain misrepresentations. However, there are practical concerns, such as an increasing interest in Christianity on the part of Chinese intellectuals and the purported rising popularity of Christianity in China, that seem to justify even a limited effort to define what may be important differences between Chinese Confucian and Western Christian religious views and point out important issues in attempting to reconcile them.

JULIA CHING'S RELATED CHRISTIAN-CONFUCIAN COMPARISON

Julia Ching has been at the forefront of fostering a dialogue between Christian and Confucian thought. Her work has helped show the merits of both and that each could gain from learning from the other. *Christianity and Chinese Religions*, written together with Hans Küng, is a clear example of her efforts, as the book states its purpose as the “exchange of information, reciprocal challenge, and mutual transformation,” as well as the “interpenetration and enrichment” of the Christian and Chinese religious traditions (Ching 1989, xvii). Accompanying these themes is consideration of “the possibility of a contextual, inculturated Christian theology in China” (Ching 1989, xvii). In fact the book ends with an epilogue on what is called “dual religious citizenship,” a concept that it eventually rejects as it calls for “the inculturation of the spirit of Jesus Christ” (Ching 1989, 282). In short, Julia Ching, along with

her co-author Hans Küng, have been in the vanguard in offering Christian resources to the Chinese.

The call for a reintroduction of Christianity and its resources to China is being met on a number of fronts. Today, Julia's efforts have taken on special significance in that scholars of Chinese thought are studying Christianity with greater confidence, even advocating that aspects of it be incorporated into Chinese thinking. Moreover, reports are that Christianity is not only recovering the influence in China it had prior to 1949, it is also being enthusiastically received.

The Culture Regeneration Research Society (CRRS) exemplifies the interest Chinese scholars are taking in Christianity. Its objective is to study the latest developments and possible direction of contemporary Chinese culture and to promote its exchange and integration with the moral culture, spiritual disciplines, religious thoughts, and contemporary philosophy of the West (Culture Regeneration Research Society, *Wenhua genxin*, introductory pamphlet). Led by a very active scholar, Thomas In-sing Leung, and headquartered in Burnaby, British Columbia, CRRS has actively pursued the realization of its vision since its founding in 1994. Leung believes that the Christian concepts of a transcendent truth and a transcendent God, which have contributed to the development of rational civil society in the West, could be counterbalances to tyranny in China, which is tied to its traditional political culture. In this period of transformation in China, a Christian understanding of reason, moral principle, and love would create conditions for a better society (Interview with Leung 2000).

With regards to Christian conversions in China, Julia Ching quotes unofficial figures of thirty million in 1992, a phenomenal increase from the official figure of six million in 1982 (Ching 1993, 198). *Missions Today* quotes a figure of eight million Catholics in China in 2002 and claims Protestant Christianity, along with Buddhism, to be the fastest growing faiths in China in recent years (15). Therefore, there are marked indications of the trend that Julia Ching and Hans Küng were encouraging with their publication of *Christianity and Chinese Religions*.

CONTRASTING CONFUCIAN AND CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE

While the project of incorporating Christianity into Chinese thinking seems worthwhile at first blush, there are a

number of concerns that create doubt as to the viability of such a project. For example, there are the philosophical issues of ancestor worship and man's relation to nature, and there is the political issue of ultimate authority. Ancestor worship gives Chinese thinking a strong anthropocentric focus while supporting the view that the universe is the source of its own creation. These beliefs run counter to Christian views that hold humans not to be the proper objects of worship and that all existence has its source in God who is transcendent to His creations. Moreover, in contrast to the Christian-fostered view that man, made in the likeness of God, is justified in seeking to control nature, the traditional Chinese belief in the unity of man and nature promotes a more conservative approach to utilization of natural resources. As well, concern that foreign church leaders would have ultimate political authority over domestic believers led the rulers in Tokugawa Japan to close its borders in the early 1600s and today the government of the People's Republic of China insists that any religious organization active in China have its ultimate seat of authority within the nation.

Apart from these issues, there is a subject of particular significance, namely the contrasting views of Christian and Confucian thinkers with regard to human nature. The views are quite different and have led to different philosophical beliefs and practices. Again, I want to emphasize that I am speaking generally. The Confucian perspective is that man's nature is originally good and that this nature should be developed through self-cultivation. The Christian view, of which I am less sure but will, for the purposes of argument, assume is correct, is that the original nature of man is seriously flawed, and while perfectible, it is through the intercession of God that this takes place.

The Confucian view originates with Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) who coined the concept of *ren* or "humankindness." He held that we could be instantly aware of this quality: "Is 'humankindness' far away? As soon as I want it, there it is right by me" (*Analects*, 7:29); and that this quality should be more important than anything else to us: "It is better to sacrifice one's life rather than violate one's 'humankindness'" (*Analects*, 15:8). Mencius (approx. 371-289 B.C.E.), coming 100 years after Confucius, declared himself to be his disciple and strengthened Confucius' views on the innate goodness of man by offering salient

demonstrations of it. His most famous demonstration shows that the universal reaction to seeing a child about to fall into a well is alarm and distress. It is not a desire to gain the friendship of the child's parents, nor to seek praise from neighbors and friends, nor fear for one's reputation if one does not help the child. It is a spontaneous, thus natural, concern for the child. This is "humankindness" (*Mencius*, 2a:6).

Confucians also recognize that one's nature could and should be developed. Mencius talks of nurturing one's nature and giving full realization to one's heart in order to understand one's nature (*Mencius*, 7a:1). The Confucian classic *The Great Learning* also describes the importance of fortifying man's intrinsic capacities by rectifying one's mind, making one's will sincere, and extending one's knowledge (Reproduced in Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu* (An annotated collection of the *Four Books*); for an English translation, see Chan 1963a, 86).

The Christian concept of human nature, in contrast, emphasizes the weakness of human nature. All men are burdened with original sin, "a depravity, or tendency to evil, held to be innate in humankind and transmitted from Adam to the race in consequence of his sin" (*Random House Dictionary*). This belief was reflected in various Western thinkers such as Augustine (354-430) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Augustine held that original sin had corrupted human nature, inclining man "to choose freely to disobey God's command by selecting egoistic and carnal desires for realization" (Price 1967, 232). Thomas Hobbes saw man as fundamentally motivated by self-interest and fear; that "All society, therefore, is either for gain or for glory; that is, not so much for love of our fellows as for love of ourselves" (quoted in Peters 1967, 40).

Even more salient in contrast than the Confucian and Christian perspectives on the original state of human nature are their respective views on how this nature is developed or corrected. For the Confucian, self-cultivation, through reflection, is the main means to develop one's nature. Through self-reflection, the Confucian comes to experience clearly and understand manifestations of his original goodness. Therefore, Confucius commended his prized student Yan Hui for reflecting on his motivations (*Analects*, 2:9) and stated that reflection that did not reveal guilt created the superior person (*Analects*, 12:4). As well, Mencius had described the awareness of moral beginnings (*Mencius*, 6a:4 and 6a:8) and the courage to face adversity arising

from self-reflection (*Mencius*, 2a:2). Over time, as sages recorded findings based on their reflections, a canon was amassed that formed the content of an education system devoted to developing the character of the Chinese individual. This canon directed its students to reflect on their own natures, to evaluate the truth of the canon in light of contemporary affairs, and to strive to improve themselves with the canon as a guide.

In comparison, the Christian tradition has emphasized the need for external intervention in order to improve oneself. Jesus Christ is said to have died on the cross so that humankind could be saved. Augustine believed that man required redemption through Jesus Christ (Markus 1967, 205). Prayer is used as a means to seek God's forgiveness and intercession on our behalf. Formal confessions proclaim our weaknesses and ask for God's support to overcome them. Furthermore, "although some Christians have held that it is possible to achieve perfection (that is, sinlessness) in this life, the majority have held that the strength of original sin makes this impossible. Moreover, many Biblical texts (particularly I John 1.8-10) imply the Lutheran view that all Christians remain throughout their mortal lives *simul justi et peccatores* ('at the same time justified and sinners'). From a purely philosophical standpoint Kant held that since the moral law requires holiness, and since we cannot achieve it in this life, we must postulate another life in which an infinite progress towards it will be possible" (Owen 1967, 88; see also Kant 1956, 133).

The two traditions, Confucian and Christian, are, in fact, quite different in their perspectives on human weakness and the means to improve oneself. As Julia Ching states in describing their respective views on sin, "Confucian philosophy is to develop, not a theory of sin as offense against God, but a theory of moral evil and its relationship to human nature" (Ching 1977, 75).

COMPARISON OF WANG YANGMING'S AND SØREN KIERKEGAARD'S METHODS OF OVERCOMING HUMAN WEAKNESS

Two philosophers, Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), are strong representatives of the differences between Confucian and Christian thinking in these

regards. Wang strongly asserts the original goodness of man and advocates self-reliance as a means to develop this goodness. Kierkegaard preaches human prostration before God in begging for God's assistance.

Wang, interestingly the declared hero of Julia Ching (Ching 2000, vi), links his concept of human nature to that of Mencius (*Wang yangming quanji* [hereafter *Quanji*], 61; for an English translation see Chan 1963b, 131) and asserts that human nature is originally good (*Quanji*, 61, 62, 123; Chan 1963b, 131, 134, 256). One could guess that Wang believes human nature originally good without even reading his work. The term he uses to describe this goodness, "*liangzhi*" – one taken from Mencius – contains a Chinese character, pronounced "*liang*," which means "innate." Thus, a common English translation of *liangzhi* is "innate knowledge."² This translation is affirmed in Wang's teachings when he points out that from birth, humans have a capacity that, if maintained, will allow them to develop their talents to the point where they can "accomplish anything under the sun" (*Quanji* 14; Chan 1963b 31-32). This capacity is *liangzhi*, and it is often manifested as moral decision. Wang blocks arguments that this quality of goodness is acquired through learning or deliberation, and thus is not innate, by pointing out that both sages and commoners have had this capacity throughout the ages (*Shu zhu shouqian* (Letter to Zhu Shouqian) in *Quanji*, 279). If it were acquired through learning or deliberation, many commoners would not possess it.

The innateness of this goodness is also shown in the spontaneity with which it arises. Mencius shows that the motivation to decide morally – in forms such as compassion – arises without prompting (*Mencius* 2a:6); Wang reinforces this point by comparing the motivation to decide morally to the stirrings of innate desires, like the attraction to beautiful colors and sounds (*Quanji* 32 and 111; Chan 1963b 71 and 228). For both Mencius and Wang, then, the effort to perceive a situation morally does not come about as an inculcated or conditioned response to external circumstances; rather, it arises naturally from within us and as such is innate.

Wang's method for development of human nature has two characteristics that distinguish it from the method commonly used in Christianity. One, the method calls for complete self-reliance, and two, amid efforts to improve himself, Wang continually reaffirms the goodness of human's fundamental nature. Wang

describes a measure, “(self)-examination” (*xingcha*), by which his disciples could put or maintain themselves in a position to evaluate morally:

Self-examination is preserving the mind and nourishing the nature while engaged in activity. Preserving the mind and nourishing the nature are self-examination when we are not engaged in activity. (*Quanji* 15; Chan 1963b 34)

By preserving the mind and nature from which moral decision arises, humans can maintain themselves in a position of readiness to deal with circumstances requiring moral decisions. And while self-examination is required, Wang still emphasizes the goodness of human nature saying that one cannot use cultivation directly on the “foundational self,”

...the mind’s “foundational self” is perfectly good. How can it not be good! If today you wanted to correct your mind, to where in your “foundational self” would you direct your efforts. (*Quanji* 119 and 971; Chan 1963b, 248 and 277)

Since the “foundational self” is perfectly good, it cannot be improved or made better in any way: it is incorruptible. For these reasons, any cultivation of the “foundational self” would be redundant.

Søren Kierkegaard should not be considered typical of Christian views, even those of his own age against which he, in fact, rebelled. However, the strong beliefs that he has in man’s proper subordination to God puts in clear relief the differences Christian views have with Confucian and serves to distinguish the merits and detriments of the former. Interestingly, Kierkegaard has some views similar to Confucian one’s, such as the importance of being sincere and the focus on being good, as the title of one of his works, *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing*, attests. However, his views are also very different in important ways. He believes that humans must rely on God and dwell on their weaknesses in order to improve themselves.

Kierkegaard's belief in human insignificance is read in the opening line of *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing*, "Father in Heaven! What is a man without Thee! What is all that he knows, vast accumulation though it be, but a chipped fragment if he does not know Thee!" (Kierkegaard 1847, 31). He holds that each human should account for themselves to God (Kierkegaard 1847, 185). It is God and humans' faith in God that will allow them to improve themselves (Kierkegaard 1847, 218). According to Alasdair MacIntyre, Kierkegaard holds that God must transform humans in order for them to know what is right and humans can only have faith in God's will. MacIntyre cites Kierkegaard's example of God's demand to Abraham that he sacrifice his son (*Fear and Trembling*). God's command seems absolutely immoral; however, Abraham must take the leap of faith in accepting it (1967, 338; see also Kierkegaard 1843, 121-129). Kierkegaard maintains that humans, to a certain degree, should be passive in light of God's will. They should allow the good to conquer their hearts (Kierkegaard 1847, 171) and providence "to guide each man's wandering through life" toward the good and "back from evil" (Kierkegaard 1847, 39).

In describing each man's need to rely on God, Kierkegaard also emphasizes the need for them to dwell on their weaknesses. Reflecting this is the fact that suffering is a major theme in Kierkegaard's works, the result he believed of each man necessarily confronting his shortcomings. He holds that the more intense human sorrow over guilt a man feels, the better (Kierkegaard 1847, 45); that the longer and more deeply one treasures repentance, the better it becomes (Kierkegaard 1847, 47). Furthermore, when each man is called to give an account of themselves to God, it should be made in the form of Confession (Kierkegaard 1847, 215);³ and rather than love God, it is better that a man fear God (Kierkegaard 1847, 196). In MacIntyre's opinion, Kierkegaard holds that "an inward suffering before God is the heart of Christianity" (1967, 339).

Kierkegaard's views, in spite of their emphasis on sincerity, contrast strongly with their Confucian counterparts. As shown, Wang promotes self-reliance and the human ability to correct and develop oneself. Moreover, the quality necessarily associated with this process of cultivation is not suffering, but happiness. Mencius claims that, "There is no greater joy for me than to find, on self-examination, that I am true to myself" (*Mencius 7a:4*). In a similar vein, Wang compares deciding to cultivate oneself to

planting a tree: As we cultivate the tree we do not focus on the fruits, but we know that if we do not forget to cultivate the tree, that the tree will bear fruit (*Quanji*, 14; Chan 1963b, 32). This description promises the experience of something pleasurable after a period of effort; likewise, a feeling of happiness and joy is expected as humans cultivate themselves (*Quanji*, 194).

MERITS OF THE CONFUCIAN AND CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON HUMAN WEAKNESS

This essay has presented a set of contrasting views from Confucian and Christian traditions with regard to human nature. It remains to describe the comparative merits and detriments of these views. On first appearances, there is one aspect that seems superior in Confucian philosophy. The belief that humans should be self-reliant in achieving a morally superior state empowers the individual to realize this end because they believe that they not only have ability to do so, it is also their duty to do so. The Confucian view places more autonomy with the individual, which increases their moral responsibility. The concepts of morality and autonomy are essentially linked, so that one would be immoral to the degree to which one abdicated the responsibility of making one's moral decisions for oneself.

In the Confucian perspective, one's duty extends beyond putting one's faith in God and the events that would be rationalized as God's will by a Christian perspective remain part of the Confucian's sphere of responsibility. Indeed, the Confucian holds that one can continually expand the range of the effect of one's actions through one's knowledge, to one's will, to one's mind, to one's personal life, family, country, to eventually impact the world (*The Great Learning* in Chan 1963a, 86-87). There is onus on the Confucian to attempt greater and greater affect with one's actions and, therefore, consider one's actions in greater depth.⁴

It also seems that the Confucian perspective would be a better one upon which to found hope. Hope has the advantage of providing encouragement to persevere, especially in times of hardship. When it is centered on one's own abilities, it has the effects of keeping one focused on one's responsibilities and fortifying one's efforts to succeed. For example, in a tennis match

I hope that I can play my best; not that my opponent will be ill the day of the match. In this case, I focus on my game plan and efforts to improve on my weaknesses. This naturally leads to greater intensity on my part, and increased effort.

While it clearly seems that it is better in the case given to found hope on one's abilities, one should inquire about "hopeless" cases, such with terminal illness, or with something one cannot provide oneself, such as life after death. While there do seem to be benefits to founding hope in belief in a force external to oneself in these cases, the existence of these benefits do not detract from the seeming superiority of founding hope on one's abilities whenever that seems at all reasonable. For those cases when founding hope on one's abilities does not seem reasonable, it may be preferable to place one's hope in a force external to oneself. Nevertheless, the Confucian gains from denying this preference; or, at least, minimizing its scope, that is to say the scope of predicaments for which one better places hope for solution in an external force. Why? Because, besides the retention of advantages identified above – maintaining focus on one's responsibilities and fortifying one's efforts – one derives strength from reflection on the fact that one has done one's utmost to deal with one's predicament. This spirit is shown in the story of the mythical bird *jingwei* that resolves to fill the ocean by carrying stones to drop in it. Liu Zaifu, a contemporary scholar, in referring to this spirit calls it the core and "cultural gene" of Chinese culture: "that gene is the spirit of knowingly attempting the impossible. It is just this kind of death defying, disregard of obstacles, non-submittal, unbending, and tenacious spirit that has provided the Chinese people an inexhaustible source of energy" (Liu 2002, 22).⁵ Refusal to admit the hopelessness of one's efforts, and, thus the need for external support, can also be fortifying.

The Christian perspective also has its merits as Chinese scholars such as Thomas Leung, head of Cultural Research Regeneration Society, have noted. The Christian perspective can lead humans to explore for resources, such as the power of faith, outside their rationality. If these resources can be harnessed, they can also provide support for efforts for meritorious actions; for example, in efforts to ignore immediate material consequences in favor of more moral ones. Faith can legitimize, and thus strengthen a decision to refuse the threats of a bully, or for a nation to accept the refugees that other nations have refused. Faced with these predicaments, strength is derived from faith that one will be

fulfilling God's will. Furthermore, belief in a force external to oneself can provide, at least, serenity in cases of absolute hopelessness, such as when one faces immediate death.

DETRIMENTS OF THE CONFUCIAN AND CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON HUMAN WEAKNESS

The perspectives of the two traditions on human nature also have their detriments. The Confucian perspective can be criticized for being too trustful of human willingness to pursue good, thereby allowing for abuse of power and rationalization of suspicious behavior. The tradition in China has been to believe that authority, at whatever level, was virtuous and, therefore, properly occupied the position it did. The metaphor often used was comparing the emperor's virtue to the wind and his subjects' obeisance to the grass that bent before it. Being the most virtuous was sufficient condition to rule. Besides the posturing that this has led to as competitors for or holders of power attempted to portray themselves as more virtuous than their rivals, it also created resistance to putting in place checks and balances against the abuse of power. The underlying rationale would have been that they were an unnecessary expense given man's virtuous nature; rulers were trusted to do the morally right thing.

Although East Asians look with amusement at the litigious nature of Western nations, they are also looking very seriously at adopting aspects of Western legal systems.⁶ They wonder if China's political systems would be less authoritarian and corrupt if Chinese thinking were to adopt belief in the Christian concept of defending against human weakness. There is also the problem of rationalization of one's motives. If – as Confucian thinking emphasizes – the ultimate criterion for judging right and wrong lies in the individual's conscience, there is always the danger that individuals will rationalize immoral behaviour to make it seem moral to themselves (for example, even though one strikes one's child in anger, one insists that their primary motive was to teach him that his behavior was wrong). Kierkegaard's exhortation to continually be repentant would seem to be an effective safeguard against these rationalizations. The individual, instead of being encouraged to rationalize their behavior to show how it conforms to

moral criteria, would be encouraged to seek out their weaknesses and present them to God as acknowledgement of their willingness to be moral.

The Christian perspective also has its detriments: the difficulty in explaining injustice and the likelihood that it contributes to cynicism. Julia Ching and Hans Küng broach the subject of injustice in *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (174-176). The problem is that when an individual disregards their own ability and instead puts faith in that of another, especially another believed to be of an infinitely higher order than oneself, it seems reasonable to expect that that other will create a just outcome. However, as the case of Abraham being called upon to sacrifice his own son or the fact that Christian nations and individuals seem to suffer an equal share of injustice (and here the question might be why they suffer any at all) seems to demonstrate that these expectations are not fulfilled. As well, explanations, such as "God works in mysterious ways," do not seem adequate as human capacity to understand the cosmos expands. We demand a more detailed explanation, specifically searching for active measures to mitigate and prevent injustice or tragedy.

Cynicism, in theory, might not seem a problem, but rather a necessary outcome of the concept of emphasizing human weaknesses. Christians proclaim their weaknesses before God; it would be contradictory, therefore, to deny that they exist. In assuming that others like oneself have the same weaknesses, one is setting the preconditions to see others as strongly motivated by self-interest and thus, be cynical. To a certain degree, the belief may be self-fulfilling as Western society constructs many of its institutions, such as the market system, on the belief that humans are, in fact, primarily motivated by self-interest; and humans, in attempting to adapt to these institutions or by not questioning their underlying premises, unknowingly take on the form they presume. However, whatever the case, there are those who believe that Western society has adopted an excessively cynical view of human beings. They hold that human motivations are much more complex than pure self-interest or that the view has negative consequences in society because it discourages public service and charity. To be fair, Christianity also recognizes the complexity of human nature and the charity of its practitioners is a thing of wonder among East Asians; however, the misgivings of having human weakness emphasized in light of the prevalence of cynicism gives cause for wonder about Christian views.

CONCLUSION: CHRISTIANITY AS A RESOURCE FOR CHINESE THINKING?

Returning to the original question of what resources Christianity might offer Chinese thinking, the above analysis supports the view with regard to perspectives on human nature, that the resources are limited. With regard to development of human nature, Confucian thinking promotes a regime of continual self-reflection and reference to a canon that focuses on the benevolent manifestations of human nature. Given its attractiveness, one wonders how much the Christian appeal to God for aid in overcoming human weakness could offer to the Confucian perspective. Some of the ramifications of this belief, such as the need for safeguards against human weakness – for example, an independent judiciary to guard against bias in the legal system – are definitely worth considering; however, the merits of the underlying belief that justifies them are dubious.

In fact, the Confucian might be thankful that their underlying beliefs in this regard are different from those of the Christian. It seems a much easier task to implement an unbiased legal system than to rid a culture of its lack of self-reliance and cynicism.

NOTES

1. *John* 1:8-10, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” (The NIV Study Bible 1985, 1908).

2. For example, Wing-tsit Chan usually uses this rendering in *Instructions* (Chan 1963b).

3. Kierkegaard’s capitalization.

4. It is interesting to see the differences described herein mirrored in Chinese and Western medicine. Chinese medicine emphasizes self-reliance in achieving good health. Measures extend to detailed awareness of daily activities that are conducive

to achieving good health. Matters such as diet, daily exercise, and psychological balance are all thoroughly considered. Interestingly, it is a model that Western nations are attempting to implement as the reliance on complex and expensive technology is proving expensive to maintain and less effective than hoped.

5. Liu Zaifu has served as director of the Literature Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

6. The Culture Regeneration Research Society organized a set of conferences on anti-corruption under the title of "A Pure Heart Culture – Experience and Culture of Anti-Corruption: Canada and China." CRRS secured funding from CIDA to hold a series of public meetings of high ranking government officials, academics, and lawyers from both China and Canada. The first meeting was held in Shanghai in September 1999 and was followed by another in Vancouver at the end of the following February. The meetings focused on promoting anti-corruption measures and the rule of law in society (Leung 2000).

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CHAPTER VII

WANG YANGMING LEARNING AND THE PATH TO WISDOM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ŌSHIO HEIHACHIRŌ (1793–1837)

BARRY D. STEBEN

ŌSHIO'S APOTHEOSIS AND MISHIMA YUKIO

The name of *Ōshio Heihachirō* 大塩平八郎 (Ōshio Chūsai 中齋, 1793–1837) is well known to students of Japanese history for the fiery rebellion he led against the government of Osaka in 1837. In the history of Japanese thought, he is also remembered as one of the most famous followers of the Wang Yangming school of Confucianism (Jp. *Yōmeigaku* 陽明学). In late Tokugawa and modern Japan, he has been respected by activists of both left and right as a rare example of a philosopher who gave his life to put his convictions into practice, dying to protest the corruption of government and the suffering it was causing among the common people. Because of the influence of his rebellion and his ideas on leaders of the anti-bakufu movement at the end of the Tokugawa period, he has also been regarded as a precursor of the mode of thought and political activism that characterized the Meiji Restoration.¹ Nevertheless, surprisingly little has been written about his philosophy in English.²

In the present article I propose to examine Ōshio's interpretation of "the learning of inborn knowledge" that would lead to wisdom, inner peace, and the transcendence of life and death, with careful attention both to the Sinological sources of his philosophy and to the relationship between his philosophical praxis and his rebellion. The aim of my study is to clarify how such a philosophy, which never inspired anything like rebellion in China, managed to take on a revolutionary and nationalistic character in nineteenth century Japan. This study also aims to situate itself within the context of the study of Japanese conceptions of the self, offering a perspective from early modern intellectual history to complement the predominantly contemporary, ahistorical focus of most recent studies.³

One of Ōshio's greatest admirers in modern times was Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–70), who, shortly before his suicide by *seppuku* 切腹 in November, 1970, published an impassioned philosophical essay decrying the moral torpidity of modern Japanese politics and mass society and exalting the uncompromising dedication to self-sacrificing moral action represented by the Japanese Yangming learning tradition, epitomized in his view by Ōshio (Mishima 1970, 22–45). Largely following the views of Edo Confucian schools put forth by the nationalist Meiji philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944), Mishima portrays the Yōmeigaku tradition as a philosophy that had truly taken root in the spiritual soil of Japan, unlike “foreign” schools of thought like the Zhu Xi school and Marxism, which could never serve as true spokesmen for the Japanese spirit.⁴ In describing the tenets of Yōmeigaku philosophy, Mishima explains that its core concept of “the inborn awareness of the good” (Ch. *liangzhi*; Jp. *ryōchi* 良知) referred to something more than just a cognitive conscience. Rather, entering into the Great Vacuity (Ch. *taixu*; Jp. *taikyo*; 太虚) itself, it signified nothing less than the primal moving force of creativity and action.⁵ In its teaching of the unity of knowledge and action, he emphasizes, Yōmeigaku conveyed a most dangerous message regarding the relationship of cognition and action, a message that can be identified with the samurai principle of action (Mishima 1970, 25). Ōshio's own philosophy, he emphasizes, centered on the concept of “returning to the Great Vacuity” (Ch. *gui taixu*; Jp. *ki taikyo* 歸太虚):

Ōshio taught that the Great Vacuity is the fountainhead of the creation of all things, as well as the ultimate entity that is capable of discriminating between good and evil by means of the inborn awareness of the good. He taught that if a person reaches this Great Vacuity all his actions will return to the righteousness (*seigi* 正義) that transcends life and death. As Ōshio illustrated it, it is like the vacuity within an urn: if the urn is broken, it returns just as it is to the Great Vacuity from which it came and from which it is no different. That is to say, if one's thought has attained the inborn awareness of the good and truly reached the Great Vacuity, then if the physical body that

envelops it is destroyed, it will return in an instant to the eternally omnipresent Great Vacuity (Mishima 1970, 28).⁶

In examining the roots of Ōshio's indomitable will to action, Mishima attributes great significance to a mystical insight into the death-transcending, eternally immovable nature of the inborn awareness of the good that Ōshio experienced while sailing home on Lake Biwa after making a pilgrimage to the school where Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 had taught.⁷ Nakae Tōju (1608–48) – the first patriarch of Wang Yangming learning in Japan – had already combined Zhang Zai's 張載 concept of the Great Vacuity with Yangming's teaching of the intuitive knowledge of the good.⁸ According to this teaching, anyone who can return to the Great Vacuity by eliminating the self-centered desires in his mind will find that, like the sages of old, Heaven itself dwells within his heart. It is because of his insight into this truth, Ōshio wrote, that “The sage does not despise the death of the body, but the death of the spirit” (Mishima 1970, 36). Mishima's essay gives a stirring recount of the mystical experience that enabled Ōshio to awaken to the truth of this teaching, an account based on Ōshio's own *kambun* 漢文 account included in his *magnum opus*, the *Senshindō sakki* 洗心洞割記.

In the sixth month of the year 1832, Ōshio Heihachirō made a pilgrimage to the academy where Nakae Tōju had taught his disciples some two hundred years earlier, that is, to the birthplace of the Japanese tradition of Wang Yangming learning. He wrote the following about his experience in his journal: “I made a visit to the site of Nakae Tōju's academy in the village of Ogawa. On my return, I hired a boat on Lake Biwa and headed south toward Sakamoto. I only sailed the eight *li* from the Ōmi road to Sakamoto. The sky was clear, the waves were calm, and I was enjoying a pleasant journey. Then suddenly, when I was near Komatsu, a great wind arose from the north. The mountains encircling the lake started to howl, and the waves raged like a hundred thousand angry

horses. When I looked down at the water, it looked as if the sea had split and the sky had opened. A typhoon blew in fiercely from both north and south, screeching and gasping in all directions, so that the sail billowed alternately to the front and back without cease. The boat would shift forward and then back, and then forward again. When it swayed to the right, I would stand to the left, when it lurched to the left, I would stand to the right, but water was already flowing into the hull. I said to myself, 'I leave my fate to Heaven.' Yet I could not help thinking of death. Then in a sudden flash I remembered the last line of the poem I had just written at Tōju's academy. 'No one extends this awareness (*wu ren zhi ci zhi* 無人致此知).'⁹ As I reflected on this line in my heart, it occurred to me that I had written it to call people to task for not working to extend their inborn awareness of the good into action, but not to call myself to task. If I didn't call *myself* to task, I thought, then what is the use of all my learning? As I so reflected, sitting still and firm while the waves lashed about me, I felt as if in a vision I was looking right into the faces of Masters Yichuan¹⁰ and Yangming. If I just forget that I am myself, then what can even whirling waves do to worry me? At that thought, in an instant, all traces of fear and regret disappeared like snow melting in boiling water. From then on, I sat calm and motionless in the boat, and the winds of themselves subsided. The boat sailed on peacefully until it arrived at the western shore of Sakamoto. It was already the second watch of the night."¹¹

Ōshio believed that this mystical experience of the true import of Nakae Tōju's teachings changed his life permanently by freeing him from the fear of death. After the experience, he returned several times to Tōju's rustic academy on the shores of Lake Biwa, where he gave lectures to the villagers on the learning of the inborn awareness of the good (Mishima 1970, 34). Let us examine just what this "learning of the innate knowledge of the good" meant for

Ōshio Chūsai and how he endeavored to make it known in a world dominated by teachings that just turned people's minds away from their own inner light.

THE LEARNING OF THE SENSHINDŌ

In 1833, at the age of forty-one, Ōshio completed his most important philosophical opus: the *Senshindō sakkī* (Reading Notes from the Cave of Mind-Cleansing).¹² A searching presentation of the ideas he had found most inspiring in the writings of Chinese Confucianism, he knew that his book had an important message for the world. Yet his contacts with other scholars and officials had convinced him that the people of his generation were still not ready for what he had to say.¹³ Accordingly, after having the work printed privately at his academy, he made up his mind to take a copy to the summit of Mount Asama 朝熊山 at Ise 伊勢 and burn it as an offering to the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神. He would then take another copy to the top of Mount Fuji, where he would bury it in a stone chamber in order to preserve it for scholars of future generations. However, before he had let anyone know of this plan, he received a visit from a Shinto priest and Kokugaku poet and scholar from Yamada in Ise by the name of Ajiro Hironori 足代弘訓 (1784–1856). Ajiro was a man of considerable learning, and he was alarmed to hear of Ōshio's plan. He explained to his host that the Ise Shrine maintained two libraries where it kept books that had been offered to the Sun Goddess, and urged him to desist from his plan of burning the book. Unable to deny the reasonableness of the Ajiro's argument, Chūsai at length agreed to his suggestion.

Nevertheless, he still carried through with his plan to bury a copy in a "time capsule" at the top of Mount Fuji. With several disciples, he climbed the mountain on the 17th day of the seventh month of 1833. After burying his book, he stayed on the mountaintop to worship Fuji at the time of the rising sun, writing a poem to express his deep emotions. On his return, he traveled by sea to Yamada, where, through Ajiro's good graces, he presented a two-volume set of his work to each of the two imperial libraries.¹⁴ The offering of a book at Ise to Amaterasu was for Ōshio the supreme testimony of sincerity and disinterested dedication to truth. As for Nakae Tōju almost two centuries earlier,¹⁵ confessing one's

sincere heart at the Temple of the Sun Goddess was equivalent to making a covenant of one's deepest aspiration (*kokorozashi* 志) with Heaven itself, the source and vindicator of all true conscience. Both the Ise Shrine and Mt. Fuji represent, needless to say, the most important sites in the Japanese sacred landscape where the realm of Heaven meets the realm of man, and the depth of their significance in the world of religio-political symbolism, not to mention the world of poetic sentiment and national identity, is difficult for a non-Japanese to imagine.

The work that Chūsai offered up to Heaven at these two sacred sites begins with the following proclamation:

Heaven does not only mean the vast voidness of the blue sky above. Even the voidness between two stones or the voidness inside a branch of bamboo is Heaven. If this is so, how much more is it true for what Laozi calls the “god of the valley.”¹⁶ Now, the “god of the valley” is nothing other than the human mind. Thus the mystery of the human mind is the same as the mystery of Heaven. This is fully evident in the case of the sage. But the ordinary person has lost this vacuity.¹⁷

The philosophical idealism adumbrated here was the core of Ōshio's teaching at the Senshindō, containing the principles by which he distinguished his version of Confucianism from that of other schools. Its point can be compressed into the one statement that “the mind *itself* is Heaven” (*kokoro sunawachi ten* 心即天). The voidness that is the mind is not *inside* the body, but *outside* of the body, and it encompasses all things. “From the point of view of the body, the mind is inside of the body. But from the point of view of the Dao, the body is inside of the mind. If one thinks that the mind is within the body, then as soon as the effort (Ch. *gong* 功) of holding and preserving is neglected, the self is encumbered by things. If one realizes that the body is inside of the mind, then one can constantly enjoy detachment, and the self will be in charge of things” (*Sakki* A:6).¹⁸ As the body is inside of the mind, the things of the “objective” world outside of the body are also inside the mind. For instance, the mental pain one feels when one sees an animal killed or a plant or even an inanimate thing destroyed proves that these things “actually exist within the mind.” However, if the

mind is plugged up with desires, it is no longer empty, and it loses its original sentience and moral sensitivity. Thus it becomes alienated from and encumbered by things. It ceases, that is, to be the “substance of Heaven,” and its possessor is rightly characterized as a “small person” (A:2).

Rooting it in his own person, verifying it by [the confidence of] the common people, testing it by reference to the Three Kings so as to commit no error, establishing it on the basis of Heaven and Earth so as not to go against their operation, inquiring about it before ancestors and gods so that all doubts are dispelled. This way one can wait a hundred generations for a sage to appear and remain without perplexity.”¹⁹ All of a person’s words and acts must be like this. Only then will the mind-nature be luminous and vast like the heavens and the earth, like the sun and the moon. If one obeys private feelings and lets oneself be ruled by selfish intentions, then even if one’s head is full of ten thousand volumes, it will be nothing more than a library, and nothing to be really valued (A:3).

Ōshio taught his students that “externally directed learning” that focuses only on words and phrases, and “peripheral learning” that aims only at the historical comparison of texts, are nothing but “playing with *things* at the expense of one’s true aspiration” (B:100). “Externally directed learning” here refers primarily to Zhu Xi learning, which Chūsai believed was being pursued by people for external gains like social status and good employment. “Peripheral learning” refers primarily to the philological learning (*kōshōgaku*) developed under the influence of Ogyū Sorai and other Ancient Learning scholars.²⁰ Confucius said, “Do you regard me as a man who studies many things and [endeavors to] remember them? Not so. I connect them all together with one thread” (*Analects*, 15:3). Chūsai comments, “If this one thread is something other than extending the inborn awareness of the good, then what is it?” (In Inoue 1901, 3:252).²¹ The classics and the Four Books must be read, and read with diligence, but one must seek the principles of one’s own spirit (*kokoro*) in doing so (B:122). One must read with the

mind empty and tranquil, in an attitude of freedom from the cares of the world, in order to be able to rise above the consciousness of books, words, images and ideas (B:118).²²

In other words, it is not so important to try to investigate what the text you are studying really meant in its original socio-historical or historio-linguistic context – which lays a net of abstract concepts between the text and one's own subjective concerns – but to find its meaning in the context of one's own life projects here and now. This is the attitude whereby one's reading itself becomes the extension or drawing out of one's inborn awareness of the good, that is, the attitude whereby the original substance of the mind becomes expressed as will (*kokorozashi*). Read in this way, as Lu Xiangshan 陸象山²³ taught, the six classics become the footnotes of one's own mind, or in Chūsai's words, "the text of one's own mind" (*wa ga kokoro no kiseki* 我が心の記籍). For this reason, when a disciple asks him how to identify his brand of learning in terms of previously existing schools of thought, Chūsai rejects every attempt to categorize it.

"Is it the learning of Wang Yangming?" "No." "Is it the learning of Master Cheng and Zhu Xi?" "No." "Is it the commentarial learning of Mao Heng, Zheng Xuan, Jia Gui, and Kong Yingda?"²⁴ "No." "Is it the 'ancient learning' of Itō Jinsai and Itō Tōgai of our own country?" "No." "Is it the classical learning of Ogyū Sorai?" "No. My learning consists only of the pursuit of humaneness. Thus it has no name. If I am forced to give it a name, I would call it the learning of Confucius and Mencius." (*Nihon no yomeigaku* 1: 390-391, 553-554; also in Inoue 1901, 3: 518)²⁵

The attempt to pin down his teaching in terms of any school of thought, he implies, would relativize it and make it just one form of learning out of many, thus depriving it of the power to move the hearts of men directly without the mediation of conventional concepts and categories. But that did not mean that there were no principles of priority in the reading curriculum of his school. The foundation of the curriculum was the *Book of Filial Piety*. This reflects Chūsai's belief that the inborn awareness of the good is nothing other than the innocent "mind of the infant" that

spontaneously reveres its parents – one of the core teachings of Nakae Tōju. Knowing this, and knowing that in the distant future Confucian scholars would be fighting among themselves over the true interpretation of his teachings, Confucius presented Zengzi with the *Book of Filial Piety*, explaining that this book embodied “the supreme virtue and the essential Way” of the ancient kings. Next in order in the curriculum was the ancient text of the *Great Learning*, followed by the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Analects*, and the *Mencius*. After these come the ten classics, the writings of the Song Neo-Confucianists, the histories, and, finally, belles lettres

History must be read with caution, however, observing the directive of the Cheng brothers that one read only the biographies of heroic men and women who were paragons of loyalty, chastity, and filial piety. For such biographies will give rise to shame regarding the condition of one’s own mind and rouse the heart into righteous action (A:173). In one’s literary studies as well, one must read works that express a pure and virtuous heart, avoiding the pursuit of fame through mere rhetorical flourish. For students in the earlier stages of their study, Ōshio prohibited the works of the Cheng-Zhu school written *after* Wang Yangming, on the grounds that “they mostly attempt to exalt Zhu and depreciate Wang artificially from a competitive or sectarian spirit (*kyakki shōshin*).” But even such unwholesome books can be read once the student has found the master (Ch. *zhuzai*; Jp. *shosai* 主宰) of his own mind and is able to make his own judgments regarding what is true and false (A:66).

ŌSHIO’S PHILOSOPHY AND THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*

The phrase “mind-cleansing” in the name of Ōshio’s school is derived from the following passage in first half of the *Xici* 繫辭 commentary of the *Book of Changes*:

The Master [Confucius] said, “Why was the *Book of Changes* written? The *Changes* was [created] to open things [to the light of wisdom] and [enable man to] carry his undertakings through to completion. It encompasses all the principles (*dao* 道) in the realm (*tianxia* 天下). It is nothing more and nothing less than this. Therefore, the sage uses

it to comprehend the will (*zhi* 志) of the realm, to determine the enterprise of the realm, and to cut off the doubts of the realm. For this reason, the virtue of the yarrow stalks lies in their being round and spiritual (*shen* 神), while the virtue of the hexagrams lies in their being square, by which they give rise to wisdom (*zhi* 知). The meaning (lit. “righteousness” 義) of the six lines lies in their changes, by which they inform [of impending good and bad fortune]. The sage relies on these [three virtues] to cleanse his mind. Drawing back and concealing himself in the unmanifest, in both good and bad fortune he suffers together with the people. Through its spirituality he knows the future, and through its wisdom he stores within himself [the constant laws of] the past. Who is there who has been able to enter into this [Way]? Is this not why the wise and discerning of ancient times refrained from killing, even though possessed of god-like martial prowess (*shenwu* 神武)?”²⁶

Like Nakae Tōju, Chūsai considered the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) to be the ultimate fountainhead of the Way, and many principles of his philosophy were derived from it. He even traced the origin of Wang Yangming’s concept of “the inborn awareness of the good,” and by extension the entire philosophy of Yōmeigaku, back to the *Yijing*. Let us consider how Chūsai might have read this particular passage in the context of the ethico-political concerns that burned within him – in other words, what “principles of his own spirit” he would have found within it. The virtue of the *Changes* translated above as “spiritual,” of course, could also be translated as “divine” – belonging to the realm of the gods – as in the “divine principles” of Nakae Tōju. This would also be close to the ancient religious conception of the functioning of the arts of divination that lay behind the sages’ creation of the *Changes*, as opposed to the rationalistic interpretation of the Cheng-Zhu school.²⁷ The second virtue of the *Changes*, the *zhi* translated as “wisdom,” is identified by Chūsai as equivalent to the inborn awareness of the good (*ryōchi*), a concept whose origins he traces back through Mencius to the *Book of Changes*.²⁸ This identification is strengthened by Chūsai’s characterization of Yangming’s learn-

ing in terms of the alternate meaning of the character “change” (*yi* 易) – easy or simple.²⁹ That is, Yangming’s learning brings out the single and simple essence of the Way of Confucius and Mencius. This play on the two meanings of the character also occurs in the same section of the *Xici* commentary from which this and Ōshio’s other *Yijing* quotations were drawn:

[The Simple] resembles Heaven and Earth, so it does not deviate. Its wisdom (*zhi* 知) encompasses all things and its Way redeems the world, so it does not err (verse 14; Honda 1966, 487).

The divinational efficacy of the *Changes* is explained as rooted in the fact that it functions without thought or deliberation just like Heaven and Earth, a functioning which the commentary describes as exquisitely subtle, sublimely simple, unerring, and “god-like.” Such adjectives, as Ōshio later pointed out in his dedicatory essay to the Ise Shrine, apply equally to the functioning of the inborn awareness of the good. “Spiritual” is of Heaven (*yang* 陽), while “wisdom” is of Earth (*yin* 陰). That is to say, the inborn awareness of the mind reflects the nature and potency of Heaven in the human realm (*kokoro sunawachi ten* 心即天). In Yangming’s own writings, as well as those of Nakae Tōju, Miwa Shissai and Ōshio, the inborn awareness of the good is likened to a mirror which reflects things as they truly are, a mirror which must be constantly polished by the practice (*gongfu* 功夫) of eliminating selfish desires.³⁰

In the same section of the *Changes*, we also find the passage, “To labor, but without pride; to have accomplishments, but without taking the credit: such is the height of virtue.” That is to say, as Ōshio constantly admonished himself, actions that arise from the inborn awareness of the good permit of no admixture of motivations for personal aggrandizement. Thus on the basis of this passage Ōshio established the unity of the three fundamental virtues of the *Changes* (*shen*, *zhi*, *y* 神, 知, 易) with Yangming’s inborn awareness of the good (*ryōchi*) and its manifestation in selfless action, a manifestation through which the sage “comprehends the will of the realm, determines the enterprise of the realm, and cuts off the doubts of the realm.” Moreover, in combination with the Mencian notion that the will of Heaven is known through the people, the passage also enabled him to identify

this “will of the realm” (the imperial realm) in its original substance with the will or Mandate of Heaven, reflected in the human realm through the inborn ethical awareness of the mind.

The sage of god-like martial prowess mentioned in the *Yijing* passage quoted above is traditionally interpreted as referring to King Wen, co-founder of the Zhou dynasty and reputed author of the *Yijing* oracles. King Wen refrained from taking up arms against the corrupt last ruler of the Shang dynasty, waiting instead with unperturbed dignity in Shang’s loyal service for the time Heaven would grant him the Mandate (Wang Fuzhi, *Zhouyi neizhuan*, quoted in Honda 1966, 511). The compound *shenwu* (read *jinmu* in Japanese), however, also happens to be the posthumous name of the mythical founder of the Japanese imperial line. The identification of the Zhou dynasty and its concepts of legitimacy with the Japanese imperial line was, needless to say, a hoary tradition, dating back at least to Japan’s first official history, the *Kojiki* 古事記. It was also an important pillar within the Tokugawa endeavor to harmonize Confucianism with Japanese political institutions. In the seventeenth century, Nakae Tōju had implicitly affirmed this identification by associating Amaterasu with Fu Xi, the legendary creator of the hexagrams, and by showing interest in the theory that the Japanese imperial line was originally a scion of the Zhou royal house.³¹ Yamazaki Ansai (1618–82) had taught that “The *Book of Changes* is China’s ‘Chronicle of the Gods’ [in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*] just as ‘The Chronicle of the Gods’ is Japan’s *Book of Changes*” (Asami Keisai, in Maruyama 1980, 625; see also my translation in Steben 1996b).³²

It is clear that Ōshio, as well, had a deep emotional commitment to the metaphorical identification of the Zhou house and the Japanese imperial line, and of their respective founders. King Wen and Jinmu were not only the founders of the ideal form of the political systems of China and Japan respectively, but, like the *Book of Changes* itself, they both represent the meeting point of the will of Heaven (or of the “gods of Heaven”) with the political institutions of man. In the context of Ōshio’s thought, they also represent the point where his cosmological philosophy of mind was translated into concrete ethical action in the context of particular political institutions with a particular historical destiny.³³

CONCLUSION

It is clear that Ōshio's desperate rebellion, which he must have realized could not succeed, was in many ways a logical expression of the principles of his philosophy, combined with the impetuous and idealistic nature of his temperament and the intractability of the objective situation that impelled it. Perhaps only a nihilist like Yukio Mishima, who ended his own life by his own will at the same age as Ōshio to express the sincerity of his own convictions, could totally revere the man without any problem over the ineffectiveness of his strategy. It is clear that to some extent Mishima's image of Ōshio was a creation of his own Nietzschean philosophical convictions and his *Hagakure*-inspired exaltation of dying in the midst of committed loyal action. But at the same time, there is no doubt that Ōshio's philosophy grew organically out of a number of deep-rooted currents in Japanese thought. The concept of the "Great Vacuity," for instance, was also central in medieval Shinto theology and the Confucian-Shinto synthesis of Yamazaki Ansai, and the *Book of Filial Piety* had been held in highest esteem since the beginning of Confucianism in Japan. Moreover, through the shock impact of his rebellion, Ōshio himself lived on after his death in the powerful world of Japanese political symbols. Thus, in spite of the deep Sinitic roots of all of the concepts that went together to form his philosophy, there is no doubt that, as Mishima claimed, there is something deeply Japanese both in his mode of thought and his mode of action. Thus I believe we are justified to include Ōshio – both as a philosopher and as a political symbol – as a part of the world of concepts and symbols that constitute the resources of the Japanese self. Like other concepts and symbols within Japanese political culture, there are elements in Ōshio's mode of thought that are difficult to understand and difficult to empathize with for those who have not been raised in Japanese society, or even for the average Japanese person today. It is hoped that this paper has helped to make this element of the "mystique" of Japanese spiritual culture a bit more understandable, without destroying its profundity, its open-endedness, and its ability to inspire both admiration and bewilderment. And I am sure that Ōshio himself, if he were able to speak from us from the Great Vacuity, would urge us to read his philosophy as a stimulus to the awakening of our own innate awareness of the good, and not judge

it by his own imperfect acting out of that philosophy on the stage of Japanese history.

NOTES

1. Historians have generally looked back to the Tempō 天保 period (1830–44) for the social and economic beginnings of the Meiji Restoration. Some, such as Horie Hideichi, have seen Ōshio's rebellion itself as the beginning of Japan's modern transformation (see Horie 1954).

2. The classic study of Ōshio's thought in English is Tetsuo Najita, "Ōshio Heihachirō (1793–1837)" (1970). In footnote 2, Najita outlines the voluminous history of the interpretation of Ōshio through the 1960s, showing how deeply involved his memory has been with the political and ideological struggles of modern Japan. For a study of Ōshio's motivational makeup that focuses on his life's work as a policeman, see B. Steben, "Law Enforcement and Confucian Idealism in the Late Edo Period" (1996a).

3. In "Researching the Strata of the Japanese Self," Thomas Kasulis shows how the social science approach and the history of philosophy approach can complement one another to give a better understanding of Japanese perceptions of self than either approach alone (Kasulis 1994). In "Self in Japanese Culture," Takie Lebra offers a tripartite analysis of the Japanese self in which the third dimension, the "boundless self," corresponds closely to what Ōshio referred to as the "Great Vacuity" (Lebra 1992, 105-120).

4. Revolutionary thought, Mishima emphasizes, must be naturalized and given flesh by becoming rooted in the soil of Japan. In other words, it must be amalgamated in a creative tension with the spirit of nationalism. But the urban internationalism of Marxism and the divorce of Japanese leftism from the soil have prevented their maturation into a mode of action arising from Japan's true spiritual roots that is capable of shaking people's souls (Mishima 1970, 43).

5. "Where the activist side of Yōmeigaku becomes apparent is, after all, at the stage where one leaps from cognition (*ninshiki* 認識) to action, with the Great Vacuity as the fulcrum. Without the Great Vacuity, we would become submerged in cognition, and we would never be able to extricate ourselves from intellectualism and cognitionism. One could say that Zhu Xi

learning is the road for taking us to this inborn awareness of the good (*ryōchi ni itaru* 良知に至る), while Yōmeigaku is the return road that brings us headlong back to action via a leap from the Great Vacuity, or nihilism, that is the farthest point reached by the inborn awareness” (Mishima 1970, 40–41).

6. All translations in the present article, except where otherwise noted, are my own.

7. On Nakae Tōju’s thought, see Julia Ching, “Nakae Tōju as a Sage: A Religion of Filial Piety” (Ching 1984a), and “The Idea of God in Nakae Tōju,” (Ching 1984b). See also Yamashita Ryūji, “Nakae Tōju’s Religious Thought and its Relation to Jitsugaku” (Yamashita 1979, 307–335), and B. Steben, “Nakae Tōju and the Naturalization of Confucianism in Japan” (Steben 1998, 249–294).

8. Zhang Zai’s (1020–77) philosophy, based on the *Book of Changes* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, is usually characterized as a monism of *qi* 氣 (material force). He taught that the originally undifferentiated Great Vacuity (a rarified state of *qi*) breaks up into Heaven, the Dao, the nature (*xing* 性), and the mind, after which it coagulates into the ten thousand things. That is to say, the mind – the last reality to be formed before material things – remains a mode of the Great Vacuity. Chūsai’s concept that “the mind itself is Heaven,” an idea that is at least implicit in Wang Yangming’s teachings, would seem to be derivable from some of Zhang’s statements, such as “The Great Vacuity is the sincerity of Heaven. ... The Great Vacuity is the sincerity of the mind,” and “Sagehood means absolute sincerity forming a unity with Heaven, and spirit means the Great Vacuity in its wondrous operation and response” (see Chan 1963, 505).

9. In other words, no one is teaching or truly practicing Tōju’s teaching anymore. In the context of Tōju’s thought, the character I have translated as “extends” (Jp. *itasu*) must usually be translated as “reaches” or “realizes” (Jp. *itaru*). While Ōshio obviously intended the idea of *itasu* when he wrote the poem, since the verb in its transitive form implies making effort it is very possible that his enlightenment into the true non-dual nature of *liangzhi*, precipitated by an overwhelming experience that compelled him to give up all effort and completely entrust his fate to a higher power, involved a *satori*-like switch of understanding to the intransitive reading of the word (*itaru*) that is deeply associated with Tōju’s teaching. Interestingly, Mishima also explains *zhi*

liangzhi as “reaching” *liangzhi* (a tranquil, transcendent and luminously conscious reality), rather than “extending” it, suggesting that what has been called Tōju’s “misreading” of Wang Yangming became an integral part of the Japanese Yōmeigaku tradition.

10. Cheng Yichuan, i.e., Cheng Yi (1033–1107).

11. Ōshio’s account appears in *Senshindō sakki*, B:103 (Ōshio 1980, *kanbun* original: 614–615; literary Japanese translation: 509–514). My translation is based on Mishima’s abridged translation of the original *kanbun* into elegant modern Japanese (Mishima 1970, 33–34).

12. *Senshindō* was the name of Ōshio’s private academy in Osaka. His students were mostly colleagues and subordinates from the magistrate’s office of Osaka East – police commissioners and constables engaged in the same sort of law enforcement work as Ōshio himself – as well as village officials of peasant extraction from nearby areas who were related by marriage to Ōshio or his colleagues. The *Sakki* was compiled by putting together and revising notes he had used over several years in his lectures at the *Senshindō*.

13. In an autobiographical letter to Satō Issai 佐藤一斎, he writes: “In addition, the disciples at my school printed my *Sakki*, and it has been added to my library there. This was only to save the labor of writing it by hand, not out of a desire to show it to the public. I would not dare show it to the public. However, my *kokorozashi* (deepest will and aspiration) is contained therein.” (*Nihon no Yōmeigaku*, 1: 382 (*kanbun* original p. 551)).

14. The two libraries are the Miyazaki Bunko 宮崎文庫, attached to the Outer Shrine, and the Hayashizaki Bunko 林崎文庫, attached to the Inner Shrine. Both were founded in the mid-Edo period. The Hayashizaki Bunko has been preserved in the same condition as it was when Chūsai visited it. See Osaka Municipal Museum, special exhibit No. 73, *Ōshio Heihachirō* (1976), p. 25.

15. In 1641, Tōju made a pilgrimage to Ise, where he offered up a poem praising the Amaterasu as the embodiment of “Efflorescent filial virtue that continues without cease / Just like the creative work of Fu Xi / I pray in silence to the sages’ teaching of the divine Way (*shintō*) / Which illuminates the temple of the Great Goddess through all six regions of space.” (Fu Xi was the legendary creator of the eight trigrams, and thus the father of the *Book of Changes*. “Efflorescent” and “illuminates the six regions of

space” are allusions to the *Nihon shoki*). Quoted in Fukunaga Mitsuji, “Nakae Tōju to Shintō” (Fukunaga 1974, 1).

16. *Lao Zi*, ch. 6: “The valley spirit never dies. It is called the mysterious female.”

17. A1, p. 370. Article numbering and pagination for the *Senshindō sakki* is based on the *Nihon shisō taikai* (NST) edition (Oshio 1980).

18. Nakae Tōju had also written, “Heaven and Earth and the ten thousand things are all within my original mind of filial virtue. The deluded person believes that the mind exists only within the body. However, fundamentally, it is the body that is born from within the mind.” *Okina Mondō*, question 13 (Nakae 1974, 32).

19. *Zhongyong (Doctrine of the Mean)*, ch. 29. The subject of the passage, which Chūsai leaves out, is “the Way of the wise man (*junzi* 君子).

20. *Kōshōgaku* scholars influential in Chūsai’s day included Minamoto Kien (1734–1807), Yoshida Kōtan (1745–98), Yamamoto Hokuzan (1752–1812), and Hokuzan’s disciple Ota Kinjō (1765–1825). See Nakamura Yukihiko, “Kinsei kōki Jugakkai no dōkō” (Nakamura 1972, 487).

21. This whole essay is devoted to a defense of the idea that filial piety comprises the essence of Confucian teaching in its entirety.

22. Chūsai introduces this as the reading method of Yang Guishan 楊龜山 (Yang Shi 楊時, 1053–1135), a Northern Song period disciple of the Cheng brothers.

23. Lu Xiangshan (1139–92) was a contemporary and adversary of Zhu Xi who taught that the mind and principle are one, thus giving a higher authority to the intuitive or subjective mind than to “objective” moral norms and principles. His ideas were the seed of Wang Yangming’s (1472–1578) philosophy in the Ming dynasty.

24. These are the writers of the most famous commentaries on the classics from the Han to the Tang dynasties.

25. The quotations collected in *Senshindō sakki* make it clear that what Chūsai regarded as representatives of “Wang Yangming learning” were men of great integrity who devoted themselves without fear of death to popular welfare or national salvation at times of national crisis, as typified by the scholars of the Donglin Academy 東林書院. Like the Donglin scholars, he

condemned the representatives of the so-called left wing of the Yangming school, as typified by Wang Gen 王艮.

26. The last sentence reads: *Gu zhi congming ruizhi, shenwu er bu sha zhe hu* 古之聰明叡智，神武而不殺者呼。The quoted passage is verse 42 in some versions of the text (see, for instance, Honda 1966, 510).

27. When Ōshio offered up his book to Amaterasu, he wrote that his belief that the spiritual radiance of the Sun Goddess was equivalent to *ryōchi* could not be openly stated because it would offend people (i.e., it was a dangerous political idea from the point of view of the bakufu). However, he continued, it will not offend the gods, so it is enough just to understand this truth secretly in the depths of one's own heart.

28. "Mencius derived the term *liangzhi* from the *qianzhi* 乾知 of the *Book of Changes* and the words of Confucius. This *qianzhi* ('Heaven rules') is nothing other than the spiritual radiance of the Great Vacuity.... The spiritual radiance of the Great Goddess (Amaterasu) corresponds precisely to the *liangzhi* taught by Confucius, Mencius and Wang Yangming" (see Oshio, undated, 1: 410–11). *Qianzhi* refers to the following phrase in the first section of the *Xici* commentary: *Qian yi yi zhi, kun yi jian neng* 乾以易知，坤以簡能: "*Qian* (Heaven) rules through easiness; *kun* (Earth) is capable [of bringing things to completion] through simplicity."

29. "Senshindō gakumei, gakusoku, narabini shomoku" (Oshio, undated, 1: 390).

30. If we compare this metaphor with the famous poems of Shen Xiu 神秀 and Hui Neng 慧能 in the *Platform Sutra*, I think it reveals the fundamental differences between Zen and Yōmeigaku concepts of practice.

31. The *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian), *Wu Tai Bo shijia* 吳太伯世家, records that the Zhou royal prince Tai Bo, upon being denied inheritance of the throne in favour of his younger brother Ji Li, father of King Wen, abandoned his country for the barbarian state of Wu, where in accord with local customs he cut his hair and tattooed his body to show his refusal to serve Zhou. The inhabitants of Wu took this as a righteous act, and over a thousand families gave their loyalty to him, making him an important local lord. There was from early times a Chinese legend that he later left Wu for Japan, where he founded the Japanese imperial dynasty. The *Jinshu* 晉書 (History of the Jin dynasty, 265–416 A.D., *Siyi liezhuan* 四夷列傳) states that "The Japanese (*wo-ren* 倭人)

themselves say they are the descendents of Tai Bo." In the early Edo period, influential Confucian teachers such as Hayashi Razan 林羅山 and Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 also showed interest in this theory.

32. The "Chronicle of the Gods," of course, means the legends and myths regarding the founding of the Japanese imperial line recorded in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. Ansai here goes beyond merely trying to legitimize Japan by incorporating it into the Sinitic world-view, for he is implicitly claiming an equal status for Japan with China by claiming an equal status for the books that embody the sacred foundations of their political systems.

33. The Tokugawa identification of the imperial house with the Zhou dynasty was later reaffirmed in the choice of the name for the Meiji Restoration (Meiji Ishin 明治維新), *ishin* being taken from a *Book of Songs* passage (quoted in the *Great Learning*) that reads "Even though Zhou is an old country, its Mandate is renewed." Many of the symbols of royalty still used by the Japanese imperial house are derived from the *Book of History*.

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GLOSSARY OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE TERMS

Ajiro Hironori 足代弘訓

Amaterasu mikami 天照大神

dao 道

Donglin Academy 東林書院

gong 功

Gu zhi congming ruizhi, shenwu er bu sha zhe hu 古之聰明叡智，神武而不殺者乎。

gui taixu (Ch.); *ki taikyo* (Jp.) 歸太虛

Hayashi Razan 林羅山

Hayashizaki Bunko 林崎文庫

Hui Neng 慧能

Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎

Ise 伊勢

Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋

Itō Tōgai 伊藤東涯

Jinshu 晉書

junzi 君子

kambun 漢文

Kojiki 古事記

kokoro sunawachi ten 心即天

kokorozashi (Ch. *zhi*) 志

kō shō gaku 考証学

Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山

kyakki shō shin 客氣勝心

Laozi 老子

liangzhi (Ch.); *ryō chi* (Jp.) 良知

Lu Xiangshan 陸象山

Meiji Ishin 明治維新

Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫

Miyazaki Bunko 宮崎文庫

Mount Asama 朝熊山

Nakae Tō ju 中江藤樹

Nihon shoki 日本書紀

ninshiki 認識

Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠

mi 近江

shio Chū sai 大塩中齋

shio Heihachirō 大塩平八郎

qi 氣

Qian yi yi zhi, kun yi jian neng 乾以易知，坤以簡能。

qianzhi 乾知

ryō chi ni itaru 良知に至る

Sakamoto 坂本

Satō Issai 佐藤一斎

seigi 正義

Senshindō sakki 洗心洞劄記

seppuku 切腹

Shen Xiu 神秀

shen 神

shen, zhi, yi 神，知，易

shenwu 神武

Shiji 史記

Siyi liezhuan 四夷列傳

taixu (Ch.); *taikyo* (Jp.) 太虚

Tempō 天保 period

tianxia 天下

wa ga kokoro no kiseki 我が心の記籍

Wang Gen 王艮

Wang Yangming (Jp. Yō mei) 王陽明

wo-ren 倭人

wu ren zhi ci zhi 無人致此知

Wu Tai Bo shijia 吳太伯世界家

Xici 繫辭

xing 性

Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇斎

Yang Guishan 楊龜山 (Yang Shi 楊時)

yang 陽

Yi jing 易經

yi 易

yin 陰

Yō meigaku 陽明学

Zhang Zai 張載

Zengzi 曾子

zhi 知

zhuzai (Ch.); *shosai* (Jp.) 主宰

Part II

Wisdom in Confucianism

CHAPTER VIII

HERMENEUTICS OF FAITH: JULIA CHING'S READING OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT

ON-CHO NG

The function of criticism, if it has a legitimate function at all, can only be one function – that of dealing with the subconscious part of the author's mind which only the critic can express, and not with the conscious part of the author's mind, which the author himself can express. Either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position), or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots.

– G. K. Chesterton

Why should I begin my small piece on the enormous accomplishments of Professor Julia Ching's scholarship with an epigraph that is a statement by the English novelist and literary critic, G. K. Chesterton? Why should I quote a novelist playing the role of a literary critic when talking about a historian-philosopher investigating Chinese thought? Should we equate the task of reading a novel with that of interpreting the writings of Zhu Xi, a principal subject of Professor Ching's intellectual investigations? I answer in the affirmative in two ways. First, I offer a broad answer. To the extent that any reading is a hermeneutic effort that assumes and embodies the reader's own history and historical situatedness, and insofar as any reading is an interpretation, a hypothesis that claims to have apprehended the original authorial meanings, it has to speak on behalf of the author, be him/her a creator of fiction or a thinker who speculates on the first principles of Being. Second, I tender a narrow answer based on Ching's own avowed hermeneutical goal, that is, to bring to light the meaning and significance of Confucian thought via one central conceptual apparatus: religiosity-qua-wisdom. A Confucius or a Zhu Xi certainly did not consciously frame their ideas in terms of what we and Ching would call religiosity or religiousness. Yet, as Ching's

writings have made crystal clear, it is perfectly defensible and reasonable, if not simply correct, to assert that what can be described as “the religious” animated and substantiated their thoughts and utterances. In so doing, she indeed dealt with that part of the authors’ mind that only she, the reader-interpreter, could express. In other words, she said about Zhu Xi the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots, or in this case, made him turn in his grave, not in disgust but with pleasure, one would happily guess.

In what ways then did Ching actually interpret Chinese thought, and why were her ways not only defensible but also valuable? I shall answer these questions by looking at the major ideas that she propounded in her last two major technical monographs: *Mysticism and Kingship in China: The Heart of Chinese Wisdom* (1997), and *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (2000). I do believe that these two marvelous works sum up her life-long findings about Chinese thought, which, as far as living a meaningful life is concerned, she deemed to be highly relevant to the Western world reared in the Abrahamic traditions. As an interpreter-reader of her works, I will examine her interpretative strategies in light of contemporary hermeneutics, and I will also offer my interpretation of her philosophical interpretations, arguing that they are very much attuned to the sensibilities of a postmodern world.

To study traditional Chinese thought, and therefore to interpret and apprehend it, is to be engaged in an hermeneutic act that has to navigate the distance in space and time, grappling with the inevitable cultural chasms and linguistic gaps. Any successful bridging of such gulfs, as it were, means tenable and plausible representation of what the Chinese thinkers and texts of yore said and thought, which involves piercing the veil of Western preunderstanding and pricking the ears of a Western contemporary audience tuned to a different collective opus of values and assumptions. It is at once coming to grips with traditional Chinese nomenclature and ideas, and coming to terms with the (in)felicity and (in)adequacy of modern English, with its attendant cultural and ideational baggage, as an instrument and medium of explication. To make such prefatory remarks is to say that Professor Ching was one interpreter who masterfully succeeded in plumbing the Chinese mind, if I may use such essentialist language, and conveying her understanding to us. In her steady and confident voice, she assuredly told us that when we probe

Chinese thought in contemporary terms through the medium of English, we need not feel as though we were accompanying a singer who sang in a different key.

That Ching was an able and effective interpreter of Chinese thought was the result of her consciously following her own hermeneutic compass, which yielded certain narrative and analytic strategies. Simply put, first and foremost, she sought to penetrate the traditional Chinese texts through literal translations and meticulous readings. In turn, both of them were purposefully driven and underpinned by “a religio-philosophical interpretation,” as she told us in *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*. In short, this purposive interpretation was her “prejudice,” to borrow Gadamer’s hermeneutic language, which she deliberately and thoughtfully brought to bear on the Chinese texts so as to shed light on them. One may argue that such approach is par for the hermeneutic course, so to speak, and that translation perforce implies and entails interpretation. Yet, Ching was explicit about her method and mode of reading. She unabashedly pronounced that her reading is pursued in the Schleiermacherian hermeneutic spirit, that is, to sympathetically enter the minds of the Chinese thinkers and empathetically relive the meanings of past Chinese writings. In a sweetly ironic way, what Ching strove to achieve was in the main what Zhu Xi taught us to do in his chapters on the *dushufa* (methods of reading).¹ Zhu tells us that the principle of the texts is not to be simply “known” in the technical sense, but it is our eventual goal to internalize it, “turning over and over in our minds what has already become clear to us,” so that we “personally experience it,” and in the process, we make “reading relevant to our selves” (Herman 2000, 220). In fact, reading, in the Neo-Confucian cosmopolis wherein human nature (*xing*), construed as the root and essence of all Being (the *li*-principle), at once endowed by and coeval with *tian* (heaven), presumed the ultimate oneness of the reader and the sages who were the putative authors of the classical texts.² This, as we shall see, also has plangent resonance with Ching’s conception of the Confucian religious mystique in terms of the overarching Ur-notion of *tianren heyi* (the unity of heaven and humanity).

Now, in these dismal days when the deconstructive sensibility still holds sway, texts are seen to be unstable structures and repositories of meanings in themselves. Thus, the integrity of texts, in terms of their inherent meanings, is not to be trusted but viewed with askance. Texts, caught in the perpetual tug between

authorly intentions (which are illusory to begin with) and readerly interpretations (which are constantly in flux as readers' ideological and political stances and imperatives make demands on the texts), are bereft of stable meanings, and in their absence, readers are in the end incapable of discerning truths; they have, to put it another way, only access to temporary meanings and contingent truths. Derrida's suspicion toward the intrinsic meanings of the text is a case in point. To him, it is a superficial and pretentious posture on the part of a text that it contains within it concealed truths. It is in point of fact quite possible that a text has no secret whatsoever, and any attempt on our part to decipher it is futile (Derrida [1978] 1979, 133). Therefore, reading acquires a certain free-wheeling quality as it is emancipated from the trammels of established meaning, not to mention truth and being (Derrida [1978] 1979, 107). In his own way, Paul Ricoeur, espouses a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Although he does grant tradition – textually and verbally embedded and encased in texts and language – a certain ability to vouchsafe meanings and to furnish the consensual context in which interpretations unfold, in the end, he contends that meanings cannot be readily apprehended through the objective knowledge of the knowing subject. Tradition is not as much to be understood insofar as it contains stable innate meanings, as to be demythologized, in that it is ideology, a legitimizing tool of political authority and a symbolic structure constitutive of social reality at a particular time.³

Michel Foucault's reading of Rene Magritte's captioned picture, "This is not a pipe" – the drawing of a pipe with the words "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" (This is not a pipe) written below – is perhaps a telling illustration of Derrida and Ricoeur's hermeneutic disquisitions. When one gazes at the pipe in the picture, one may say that the "pipe" is not a pipe since it is an image of a pipe. But on the other hand, what is being drawn is indeed a pipe, albeit a limned depiction. To state that it is a pipe is not an invalid answer when one is asked what is in the picture (Foucault 1983, 19).⁴ One may say that Foucault's reading here exemplifies the core tenets of contemporary French hermeneutics – that words and images do not have definitive referential power; that meanings are unstable and even capricious; that we can trust neither the author's original intent nor the reader's interpretation in that both are fraught with phenomenological illusion and ideological intervention; and that by extension, the canons and the tradition that they enshrine are

merely received knowledge that does not necessarily communicate truths.⁵

In contradistinction to such hermeneutics of suspicion, whose premise is the meaninglessness of meaning (or the meaning of meaninglessness, ephemeral to be sure), Julia Ching's reading of Chinese thought is firmly grounded on the conviction in the possibility of genuine *Verstehen*, that is, understanding in both the rational and intuitive senses, and as such, her interpretations were products of a hermeneutics of faith, to borrow Ricoeur's phraseology. Her approach may be characterized as conservative, comfortingly so, in that it sought to retrieve the meanings and truths in the Chinese texts produced by venerable thinkers whose intelligent minds had forged a tradition that still has something valuable and perennial to offer us, especially in the way of thinking about the ultimate and the transcendent.

In fact, looking at Ching's reading of Chinese thought, one comes to the conclusion that she not only proclaimed her allegiance to Schleiermacherian hermeneutics, but indeed endorsed the assumptions of much of contemporary German hermeneutic philosophy, as represented by Gadamer's interpretive philosophy: the assertion of the coherence and assent of tradition, through which the historicity of their interpreters may find valid and reasoned expressions; the mediation of historical contingencies (together with their bosh and tosh) by received tradition and its enduring values; and the affirmation of the authority of the classic texts, with whom our dialogue and communication may yield insights into the meaning of human existence and responsibility in both immanent/moral-ethical and transcendent/religious-spiritual terms.⁶

Ching's engagement with the Chinese Confucian philosophical texts and tradition also sported the interpretive procedure and dynamics that Gadamer outlines in his hermeneutics.⁷ To begin with, Ching, the interpreter, brought her own preunderstanding and historical concerns to the hermeneutic act of decoding and deciphering the import and substance of Confucian texts and thinking. In turn, her horizons of preunderstanding (i.e., her historical situatedness) had been formed and informed by her understanding of the Christian spiritual and monotheistic tradition, which was buttressed and influenced by the community of other scholars who had studied the Confucian philosophical tradition, that is, the interpretative community, as Gadamer describes it. Second, Ching, while

acknowledging the radical historical alterity, or otherness, of her position as the interpreter, sought to distill from the Confucian texts and thoughts their cross-temporal and cross-cultural normative values, hinting at their ecumenicality, if not universality. Interactively commingling in a “hermeneutic circle,” the Confucian texts (the language of the Confucian tradition) and Ching (the reader) dialogically forged a process of understanding. As she plumbed the Confucian texts that spoke the answers and revealed the clues, she inserted her own particular prejudice as the interpreter, asked questions, and arrived at conclusions on what Confucian thought had to say to us today, while at the same time relating her views to those of the interpretive community consisting of readers past and present. Indeed, Ching’s individual reading acquired voice, intelligibility and cogency in this larger interpretive context (cf. Gadamer 1994, 265-271 and 291-300). Third, her understanding came from the dynamic fusion of her historically derived prejudgments and the historically forged Confucian tradition (a tradition that constituted a corpus of texts, and a group of thinkers who were members of the interpretive community). In Gadamer’s terms, this “fusion of horizons” breeds “effective history” for Ching, who then expounded what she understood to be the “true” representations of Chinese thought (Gadamer 1994, 300-307).

In her *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, Ching made it clear what her preunderstanding, or interpretative prejudice, was, namely, that the Chinese way of knowing life and the world – its wisdom, to put it another way – rested on the fundamental belief in the ultimate oneness of heaven and humanity (*tianren heyi*). Amassing historical evidence, Ching showed that early on in Chinese civilization, there was already the firm establishment of the paradigm of the sage-king, according to which there was the affirmation of the creative interpenetration and mutual reinforcement between the microcosmic world of human living and the macrocosmic universe of cosmic workings. This sagely kingship, endowed with charisma, blessed with ecstatic power, and equipped with the ability to mediate with heaven, was not only responsible for the rituals and sacrifices dedicated to the heavenly and ancestral spirits, but was also responsible for benevolent government. It represented the ideal of humane living and gave shape to the belief that humanity was open to the divine and the spiritual, which engendered a distinct mysticism (Ching 1997, *passim*, but especially 170-205).

Similarly, in *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*, Ching averred that Zhu Xi's core thinking, traced back to and anchored on the *Doctrine of the Mean* (Zhongyong), was fundamentally spiritual in nature, rather than coolly philosophical and speculative. The notion of the "mean" (*zhong*), the beatific and supremely tranquil state of emotional equilibrium and harmony, in fact referred to the moral mind-heart of the Way, which was transmitted by the sages and to be recovered and nurtured by the receivers in a constant state of reverence through self-cultivation. The spiritual message of this profound center of being was transmitted as though it were a secret, in that sense that it required and demanded the discovery by an individual as the initiated and sagacious receptor of the truth. Again, Ching discerned a protuberant mystique in this spiritual pursuit of the ultimate and the universal, and thus described it in terms of mysticism, the experience of being at one with the entirety of life and the universe (Ching 2000, viii-ix, 210-211).

Hence, Ching's reading of Chinese thought was ontological in nature and substance, insofar as she aimed at exposing the nature of reality by probing and decoding the Chinese texts, especially the classics, which she took to be the enshrinement of the sage-king paradigm. Just as she described traditional Chinese exegesis as moral hermeneutics, so we may characterize her own effort of reading in similar terms, because she shared the same goal with her traditional counterparts – the extraction and highlighting of moral principles from a corpus of texts in order to stimulate thought and induce insight. In fact, her endeavor was the dissemination of moral philosophy; it was, in her words, the conscious "transmission of faith and dynamic understanding in the message of the ancient sages, to be discovered anew by every generation" (Ching 1997, 156).

Within this ontological and moral hermeneutic framework, Ching painstakingly unpacked the architectonics of Chinese thought by integrating what might otherwise be a string of disparate discourses on individual concepts into a coherent portrayal, and she did so without swamping the multivocal and multivalent ideas so as to attain a predetermined unanimity. For instance, in the book, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi*, each individual chapter addresses an aspect of his thinking, beginning with an exploration of the central cosmological concept of the Great Ultimate (*taiji*) in relation to the metaphysical notions of principle (*li*) and material force (*qi*), and ending with a reflection

on the contemporary relevance of Zhu's philosophy. Along the way, Ching examined Zhu's multifaceted concerns, ranging from the spirits and ghosts, through rituals and human nature, to personal cultivation. Moreover, she not only placed Zhu in broad intellectual contexts by revealing the sources of his ideas and describing his critical confrontation and interaction with Daoism and Buddhism, but she also situated him in the community of interpreters, including his critics past and present, from Lu Xiangshan to the Marxian detractors. In the book *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, while explicating the enduring paradigm of the charismatic sage-king premised on the metaphysical assumption that heaven and humanity were ultimately one (*tianren heyi*), which she took to be the primary exemplar and indeed, encapsulation of Chinese wisdom, she traversed some four thousand years of history, offering us illustrations, from the shamanistic rulers of the Shang, through the moral sovereign in the figure of the *junzi*, to the classics as the textual embodiment of moral-political power. Throughout the book, Ching orchestrated the many variations, as it were, of the ideal of the sage-king without losing control over the main theme, that is, mystical charisma – the integration of the human with the divine – which was the underpinning of kingly authority.

Ching's central task was to bring into sharp relief the Chinese "religious thinking," as found in Zhu Xi's thought and in the many manifestations of the ideal of the sage-king. What drove many of Ching's works was her thesis that the principal messages of Chinese thought were religious in nature. She admitted that in the Chinese lexicon, there was no equivalent term, before the late nineteenth century, for the word "religion" that derives from the Latin *religio*, which connotes a bond between the human and the divine. But that does not mean that the Chinese world of thought was devoid of the sensibility and yearning for the transcendent, even though there might not be the appeal to the radically other and yet personal God whom we see in the Abrahamic and other traditions. In fact, Ching asserted that in the Chinese traditions, we can find what is "functionally equivalent" to religion or religions in the West. However, Ching, in so arguing the presence of the transcendent in China, was not seeking mechanistic similarities between the Chinese way of thinking about the "divine" and the western counterpart, thereby giving the former legitimacy. Rather, she affirmed their differences, the sensitive appreciation of which broadens our understanding of what we may generically call the

religious phenomenon. In other words, the suggestive question she posed was this: might we not all learn something valuable from the Chinese world view about the ultimate, absolute and transcendent?⁸

As pointed out, it was Ching's central contention that Chinese religiosity was inherently mystical, because a person's moral self-cultivation – the realization and fulfillment of one's humanity through the exercising of sincerity or reverence (*cheng*) – culminated in the direct, unmediated consciousness of and communication with the ultimate reality: the supreme Dao, the profound Principle, or the Great Ultimate. In Ching's interpretation, Zhu Xi was not as much the "rationalist" distinguished by his dispassionate philosophizing and theorizing of extending knowledge through investigating things (*gewu zhizhi*) as a mystic in constant search of spiritual uplift and profundity, although it must be pointed out that this mysticism entailed no otherworldliness or eremitism that spurned worldly and human affairs. In Zhu's religio-philosophical universe, transcendence and immanence interpenetrated as Zhu saw all things as manifestations of a greater transcendent reality. So it was also the case with the sagely rulers, monarchs and uncrowned kings, who apprehended the ultimate and absolute as they fulfilled and realized their humanity. Human flourishing was at once the realization of one's nature and apprehension of the divine and the beyond – the unity and harmony of *tian* and *ren*.

In so conceiving the religious and the mystical, despite the fact that these concepts are laden with the barnacles of western traditions, Ching treated them with reference to the Confucian quest for perfectibility through moral self-cultivation and intellectual pursuits, and the respect for the myriad things and fellow-humans in the cosmic community. Thus, it was Ching's belief that in Confucian religiosity, we may find the sort of wisdom that would help combat the deleterious woes that have befallen our present world: myopic thinking about immediate gains, individualistic self-absorption, technocratic triumphalism, litigious obsession with rights, and so on. In *The Religious World of Chu Hsi*, Ching ascertained the relevance of Zhu in today's world first by acknowledging the failings of his ideas, principally the tendency toward gender inequality and the naiveté of placing his hopes on a sage-ruler. Certainly, if Zhu's philosophy and messages were to be transplanted onto contemporary soil and grow, the issues of women and the masses in the social and

political processes must be addressed. Nonetheless, as we today incessantly talk about the global world as the most appropriate arena where human amelioration is achieved, we should realize that Zhu had already proposed such a commonweal, a universal tradition for all-under-heaven. His mission was always that of "saving the world," but it was a mission that began with the spiritual self-cultivation. As individuals were fulfilled and extended their hands to others by sharing their discovery of the heavenly principle and the moral Way, larger social and political fulfillment could be attained. If the Confucian enterprise is relevant today, it is because it helps "people live in peace and harmony with no complaints and ensuring that the myriad things of the universe are respected, as fellow travelers in this life, and as beloved brother and sisters in our large cosmic family, under the guidance of the great parental symbols of *Ch'ien* and *K'un*," to quote Ching's earnest words (2000, 229).

Not only is Ching's endorsement of the Confucian anthropocosmic moral philosophy timely, but there is also something highly congenial and ingenious in her conception of religiosity, that is, her dislodging of the idea of faith in favor of the notion of wisdom, which I believe, is much more in tune with the sensibilities of postmodernity, if postmodernity means the repudiation of a master meta-narrative that legitimizes hegemonic structures and thereby marginalizes other experiences, allowing space for the diversity of values and beliefs. If the religious quest is the quest for wisdom, "*sapientia*, to know with insight and to act accordingly" (Ching 1997, x) then what counts is not some universal creedal authority that purports to offer a comprehensive singular rule by which we play, but rather the very act of living and acting wisely according to what we know, which, in the last analysis, is what imbues the Chinese religio-philosophical teachings with their intelligibility, credibility and authority. Needless to say, to use wisdom as the pivotal and overarching concept to characterize and define Chinese religio-philosophy does leave something to be desired. On the one hand, although wisdom, broadly conceived, points to intellectual acumen and discursive astuteness, ultimately, what counts in wisdom is the appropriation of the means and ends of practical living, as opposed to the dissection of disembodied facts and the plumbing of abstract theories. The Socratic and Platonic integration of virtue and knowledge as the result of deep reflectiveness and sound judgment would have been heartily endorsed by Confucius, Mencius, Zhu

Xi and Wang Yangming. But on the other hand, wisdom as a philosophical or religious goal is notoriously imprecise. When one wisely conducts one's life, does one pursue a life devoted to happiness, as the Epicureans and Mill argued; dedicated to self-abnegating love, as the Christian saints urged; or propelled by supra-human power, as Nietzsche insisted? Moreover, wisdom does seem to mitigate the ontological dimensions of the Chinese notion of *tianren heyi* (oneness of heaven and humanity), and for that matter, Zhu Xi's notion of *gewu zhizhi* (investigating things to exhaust knowledge to the utmost), and especially Wang Yangming's central tenet of *liangzhi* (innate knowledge of the good), wherein the human and the cosmic cohere, the microcosm and macrocosm correspond, to use Ching's own words (1997, xi; see also 1976, 136-139). It also waters down the prophetic and messianic quality, that is, the mystique, which Ching attributed to the sage-rulers. Nonetheless, in telling the Chinese tale as the flowering of wisdom, Ching, in fact and in effect, was offering us a plurality of stories from a diversity of viewpoints, loosely subsumed under a commodious conception of religion, a narrative well suited to the temper of postmodernity, as I see it.

To sum up, Julia Ching reminded us that the problems which Chinese religio-philosophy addressed, while often conceived and couched in terms of the fulfillment of the self, always and ultimately presumed the unmitigated presence and existence of the Other – not the culturally-determined, culturally-alien and culturally-objectified Other vis-à-vis the hegemonic and solipsistic self that is being bandied in cultural studies these days, but the *Other* to whom one must relate in a vast field of entangling human relations; to whom one is socially obligated; and for whom one is morally responsible. She also reminded us that while Confucian thought notably taught a practical life of conscience on the socio-political level of ethics and virtues, it unmistakably tendered the spiritual resources and means for the leading of an interior life of prayer and meditation that was the expression of the essence of its religious mystique. In this nexus of the self, the other and the beyond, the sages, the Zhu Xis and the Wang Yangmings, with their intellectual intensity as scholars and their emotional élan as social reformers, sought the transcendent through the grits and grinds of diurnal human living. Julia Ching urged us to follow their example, and we had better comply, if, in this post 9-11 world, we were to hold the shape of the Apollonian

monuments of humanity against its ever-minatory Dionysian impulses.

NOTES

1. On the similarities between Zhu Xi's methods of reading and the hermeneutic philosophies of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, see Jonathan Herman (2000, 215-225). On Zhu Xi's hermeneutics, see Gardner 1990, 42-54, 79-80. On some of the main characteristics and assumptions of Chinese hermeneutics, see Gardner 1998, 397-422.

2. On the epistemological implications of the Neo-Confucian holistic philosophy of cosmic oneness, see Gardner 1991, 574-603.

3. See for instance, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Ricoeur, 1974), and *Hermeneutics of the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Ricoeur, 1981). On ideology, see his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (Ricoeur 1986).

4. For a discussion on Foucault's interpretation on this question in relation to Zhu Xi's hermeneutics, see Levey 2000, 245-246.

5. See for instance, Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (Foucault 1977), Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science," (Derrida 1970), Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text* (Barthes 1977).

6. For some of the main tenets of German hermeneutic thinking, as opposed to those in the French counterpart, see Scott 1987, 8-13.

7. On Gadamer's hermeneutic procedures, see Tracy 1981, 118-122.

8. For a more systematic discussion on this question, see her *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (1977, 112-150).

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CHAPTER IX

WISDOM IN POETRY: ON THE NEWLY DISCOVERED *CONFUCIUS ON THE BOOK OF ODES*

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NEWLY DISCOVERED BAMBOO SLIPS OF CONFUCIUS ON THE *ODES*

The recently discovered bamboo slips of *Konzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on the Book of Odes*) in China add much to our knowledge of Confucius's contribution to the teaching of poetry. Though in several places in the *Analects* where Confucius referred explicitly to the *Book of Odes* we could find some important message about Confucius' understanding of poetry and his interpretation of poems,¹ problems such as how Confucius taught poetry to his students and how his teaching was different from traditional views attributed to him...etc., were not very clear there. Now these newly discovered texts help us to clarify and solve some historically debated problems. In this paper, I'll focus on the element of wisdom that seems very essential in Confucius' teaching and in his comments on poems. We can find Confucius' poetic wisdom in his comments on different kinds of poetry and individual odes, in the way he has organized his teaching on *the Book of Odes*, especially in his vision of affectivity as primordial mode of human existence and the function of poetry in both self-cultivation and public life.

These bamboo slips, probably stolen or discovered by private initiative from the area of tombs in Jinmen City, Hubei Province, China, where the *Jinmen Bamboo Slips* were discovered in 1993, were found a bit later in Hong Kong antiquity market in the spring of 1994. They were then bought back, conserved and edited by the Shanghai Museum, China. The first volume of a series of books entitled *Shanghai Museum's Chu Bamboo Books of the Warring States* was published in November, 2001. There we find three pieces of works, now named respectively the *Konzi Shilun* 孔子詩論 (*Confucius on the Book of Odes*), the *Ziyi* 緇衣 (*Colorful Clothes*) and the *Xinqin Lun* 性情論 (*On Human Nature*

and Human Affectivity). The first part now entitled *Konzi Shilun* consists of 29 Bamboo sticks, transcribed by scholars into 29 fragments. This is the first time we have so many fragments of Confucius' teaching on the *Book of Odes* among recent archeological findings.

Before Confucius came into historical scene, there had been in ancient China collections of Odes by *shi* 師 (master), musical masters and professional collectors in each city-state, which then went through the process of royal selection by *tai shi* 太師 (Great Master), Zhou's musical officers, for the purpose of royal files and public education. These fragments now entitled *Konzi Shilun* could be read as a syllabus recording Confucius' teaching on the *Book of Odes*. They constitute in fact the first treatise we know till now on the *Book of Odes* for the purpose of private education launched by Confucius himself.

These fragments confirm not only that Confucius taught and gave comments to the *Book of Odes*, but also that his teaching on the *Book of Odes* was in fact very different from Han scholars', especially that of Mao's commentaries on the *Book of Odes* which had constituted its traditional version. The conventional *Book of Odes* follows the order of *Guofeng* 國風, *Xiaoya* 小雅, *Daya* 大雅, and *Songs* 頌, whereas in these newly discovered fragments, Confucius' comments follow the order of *Songs* 頌, *Daxia* 大夏 (instead of *Daya* 大雅), *Xiaoxia* 小夏 (instead of *Xiaoya*) and *Bangfeng* 邦風 (instead of *Guofen*). Also, in these fragments, we find different titles for the same odes in Mao's version, for example, *Shiyue* 十月 for *Shiyue Zhi Jiao* 十月之交, *Suifu* 諱父 for *Qifu* 祈父, *Tang Zhi Sui* 湯之水 for *Yang Zhi Sui* 揚之水, *Bei Baizhou* 北白舟 for *Bozhou* 柏舟 ...etc., and also some new titles never appeared before in Mao's version, such as *Kosi* 可斯, *Zhongshi* 中氏, *Lüer* 律而, *Heshui* 河水 ...etc., altogether at least 7 new titles commented by Confucius in the fragments were not included in traditional Mao's collection. This might mean that Confucius used a collection of odes if not more complete, at least somehow different from today's *Book of Odes*.

According to Mao's commentary, most poems in *Daya*, *Xiaoya* and *Guofeng* were either for praising or for satiric critique of political leaders of the time. More than half of the *Guofeng* poems were supposed by Mao 's commentary to be composed for these political purposes. According to his small preface to the *Guofeng*, about 70 pieces were satiric poems, whereas in *Xiaoya* there were 35 satiric poems, 5 praising King Xuan, 5 satirizing

King Xuan, and more than 30 satirizing King Yu. In the *Daya*, 5 were supposed to be praising King Xuan, 5 to satirize King Li, another 2 to satirize King Yu. In short, most of the Odes contained in the *Daya*, the *Xiaoya* and the *Guofeng* were supposed by Mao's commentary to be satirical criticism of Kings Xuan, Li and Yu.

But, when we come to the newly discovered fragments of Confucius on the *Book of Odes*, this is not the case. In these fragments, except in the case of *Jie Nan San* and *Yu Wu Zheng*, we don't find any interpretation of verses as satirical criticism of bad kings. In this sense, the *Book of Odes* were not necessarily envisaged as poetic expression of political criticism or flattery praises, though they might sometimes do have such a function. Their function of expressing human feeling and affectivity was for sure in priority, it was then that a poem could have in addition political and pragmatic function.

CONFUCIUS' METHOD OF TEACHING POETRY

The way by which Confucius commented on the *Odes*, as shown in the bamboo slips, seemed to be very systematic and pedagogical, which constituted a very intelligent way of teaching poetry on his part. We find some bamboo slips in which Confucius characterized poetry in general and the relation of poetry with other cultural activities such as music and literature. Then we find some bamboo slips in which he proceeded to discuss general characteristics of those major types of poems such as *Guofeng*, *Xiaoxia*, the *Daxia* and *Songs*. These comments might be considered as sort of preface or introduction to poetry in general and its major types. Then we find some bamboo slips in which Confucius commented on each individual poem in giving their wholesome meaning as well as featuring some most remarkable key verses in it. We can suppose then the whole text of Confucius on the *Book of Odes* was structured in the following order: General introduction to poetry, classification of poems and their main characteristics, summary of and comments on individual poems and the key verse in each poem. This gives us an impression of a very systematically organized syllabus of Confucius' teaching on the *Book of Odes*. Let me explain each of them in the following order.

First, concerning the nature of poetry in general, Confucius said in fragment 1, "Poetry could not be without earnest thoughts; music could not be without feeling; literature cannot be

without good wording.” (Confucius 2001:123) These words of Confucius related poetry to music and literature, basing upon the fact that in ancient China odes were sung and performed with music and elegant wording. In the *Zhuo's Commentary on the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, for example, the narrative of Jizha's reviewing Zhou's music during his diplomatic visit to the State of Lu, happened in the 29th year of Duke Xiang (544BCE), gave us a typical textual evidence that odes were performed at that time with music. (Legge 1994:545-551) In fragment 2 of the bamboo slips, Confucius said that, “...The music itself is easy and slow. Its song is accompanied harmoniously by *xun* and *ci*. Its thought is deep and far-reaching. The odes in the *Daxia* are full of praises for his virtues.” (Confucius 2001:127) This comment of Confucius also evidenced the fact that poetry was at that time performed with music. If poetry was related essentially to music, then its essential function of expressing human earnest thoughts were deeply related to human affectivity or human feeling. This will bring us to Confucius vision on affectivity as mode of human existence, quite different from traditional emphasis on his ethical and political pragmatism. We will come back to this part of Confucian wisdom after we discuss his visions on different types of poems and individual pieces of poetry.

After the characterization of poetry in general and its relation with music and literature, Confucius proceeded to give comments on different grand types of odes such as *Songs*, *Daxia*, *Xiaoxia* and *Bangfeng*. This order, very clear in the fragments, is in fact in reverse to the one presented in Mao's version.

The *Songs*, first commented by Confucius, were generally performed in ancient China together with music either in the temple or in the royal court, mostly for the purpose of praising the present king or the founding kings' benevolent virtues. In the fragments where Confucius mentioned the *Songs*, he seemed to emphasize more those kings who had achieved great merit to the country, especially King Wen. In fragment 2 of the bamboo slips, we read, “...is it, thereby King Wen received the mandate. This *Song* sings his merit of conquer, which is often spoken of by his offspring. The music itself is easy and slow. Its song is accompanied harmoniously by *xun* and *ci*. Its thought is deep and far-reaching. The odes in the *Daxia* are full of praises for his virtues, often spoken of...” (Confucius 2001: 127). In fragment 5, we read, “What to do with those who have great merits? To praise

them in the sacrificial *Songs*. The verses of the *Qingmiao* praise how supremely has been the merit of King [Wen]" (Ibid.: 131).

As shown in fragment 2, Confucius' comment of the *Songs* was followed by that of the *Daxia*. The newly discovered texts seem to confirm the traditional opinion that *Daya* poems were composed mostly for the praise of virtues of Zhou's founding Kings, especially King Wen. For example, fragment 2 says, "... Thereby King Wen received the mandate. This Song sings his merit of conquer, which is often spoken of by his offspring. ...The odes in the *Daxia* (*Daya*) are full of praises for his virtues, often spoken of by..."(Ibid.:127-128). Fragment 7 also belongs to the *Daxia*. It reads,

What does it mean by saying that "[God said to King Wen:] 'I think cherishingly of your bright virtue.'" It is to say King Wen's sincerity. "The mandate is from Heaven. Giving the throne to King Wen." It is a mandate by sincerity. Trustfully it is. That's why Confucius says, "It is a Heavenly Mandate. Is it by his own multiple talents that King Wen gets it? It is his mandate." (Ibid.:134)

These comments on *Daxia* is followed by those on *Xiaoxia*, constituted of poems composed by elites or officials of each country. There, the fragment on which Confucius gave his comment seemed to emphasize the expression of common people's and the king's subjects' suffering, their worries and complaints in difficult times. Confucius said in fragment 3, "[The odes of *Xiaoxia*] express people's worries and complaints in difficult times, lamenting that their rulers are declining and being deprived of virtue." (Ibid.:128-129) These words of Confucius gave us a general characterization of the *Xiaoxia*. Then, in the fragments 8 and 9, we are able to read Confucius' comments on individual poems contained in the *Xiaoxia*:

The *Shiyue* is good at describing slanderous situations. The *Yu Wu Zheng* and the *Ji Nan San* are all expressing the decline of their Lord, and kings and dukes feel ashamed. There are a lot of doubts in the *Shaomin*, saying that one's willing is not pleased. The *Xiao Wan* gives no hateful words,

though there seems to be no calm conscience either. The *Xiao Bian* and the *Qiaoyan* all talk about the harm done by those who slander. As to the *Famu*... (Ibid.:135-136)

Most precious is that he blames his own self. The *Tianbao* says that he owns his happiness forever. Even when the food offered is tiny, he still keeps on his virtue like in the old days. The *Qifu* also blames with reason. The *Huangming* shows that the author was then stuck in difficulty and desired to return to the old days. Most people would be shamed against its anger. The *Jin Jin Ze Er* talks about the enrichment made by talented people, whereas the *San San Ze Yu*... (Ibid.:137)

Compared with *Xiaoxia* which was constituted of poems composed by the elites or officials of each country, *Bangfeng* was constituted rather of popular songs of each individual state. In the newly discovered fragments, we find most of Confucius comments on the *Book of Odes* is on the *Bangfeng*, or popular songs of different states. The later used term “*Guofeng*” was named as *Bangfeng* in Confucius time, of which the word “*bang*” was later changed to “*guo*” in Mao’s version in order to avoid breaking taboo against Liu Bang, name of the first emperor of Han Dynasty. The term “*feng*” could mean transformation by way of education, the custom, the ethos of people and the popular songs, including love songs, of the 13 states existing in the time of Spring and Autumn without counting the *Zhounan* and the *Zhaonan*. This could be seen especially in the narrative of Zizha’s review of Zhou Music by which Zhizha understood well the ethos of people and the virtues of political leaders of each country well filed and performed in the court of Lu state. The theory goes that *Bangfeng* recorded and expressed first of all the ethos of people in each state, had it or not the educational function of transforming its people or the political function of criticizing or satirizing its political leaders, as the Han scholars would emphasize. In the bamboo slips, Confucius says, in fragments 3 and 4,

The Odes of *Bangfeng* (*Guofeng*) contain a lot of things. They look generally into the customs of people by abundantly collecting materials from

different countries. Its wording is elegant and its voice kind. (Ibid.:128-129)

Odes are like open doors, given to the lower people for expressing themselves. What could it be their intentions? It is to express in the *Bangfeng* (*Guofeng*). When people are exhausted and tired, especially when the upper elites and the lower people aren't in harmony, what could it be their intentions? (Ibid.:130)

As we can see from the fragments quoted above and in other unquoted comments of Confucius on individual poem, Confucius' method of interpreting poems goes much likely in this way: he would first summarize his characterization of each poem together with other poems in the same group he was commenting before he went into the detail of each poem. He used the method of "key verse" by picking up the most interesting verse in each poem to exemplify his judgment on the poem or on the group of poems in question. In his choice of key verse and his appropriation of meaning of each poem, there was manifested a kind of poetic phronesis or poetic wisdom as an art of expressive judgment.

AFFECTIVITY AND THE CULTIVATION OF FEELING

The *Book of Odes*, like the *Song of Songs* in the *Old Testaments*, expresses and thereby interprets through poetic language human affectivity as the original mode of human existence. Confucius was very clear about this point when, combining poetry, music and literature, he said in the fragment 1 that "Poetry could not be without willing; music could not be without feeling; literature could not be without wording." This line of thought should have been followed by Zisi, the grand son of Confucius, and become a legacy in the so-called Zisi-Mencius school. That's why in some of the Confucian texts of the *Guodian Bamboo Slips* now attributed to the so-called "Zisi-Mencius school", we read, in the text entitled *Xing Zhi Ming Chu* (Human Nature comes out from Mandate), that,

Human nature comes out from mandate,
Mandate descends from Heaven,
Dao begins with human feeling,

Human feeling is born from human nature,
 Those who begin with human feeling,
 Will end up with righteousness.” (Jinmen Museum: 179)

We should notice that human feeling or affectivity is here very much emphasized, even to the point of relating human feeling to the Dao and human nature, in saying that “Dao begins with human feeling”, and that “Human feeling is born from human nature”. Especially it puts emphasis on the role of feeling in human self-cultivation and ethical behaviour. “Those who begins from human feeling will end up with righteousness.” Therefore somehow it bases the unfolding of human nature and the fulfilment of human existence on human affectivity.

Mao’s commentary, though in emphasizing a bit too much the political function of poetry in praising or satirizing former kings, still followed Confucius’ idea of affectivity and saw it as essential to poetry in its *Great Preface* to the *Book of Odes*. Mao’s *Great Preface* said, “Poetry is the product of earnest thought. Thought cherished in the mind becomes earnest. Exhibited in words, it becomes poetry. The feelings move inwardly, and are embedded in words. When words are insufficient for them, recourse is had to sighs and exclamations. When sighs and exclamations are insufficient, recourse is had to prolonged utterances of song. When those prolonged utterances of song are insufficient for them, unconsciously the hands begin to move and the feet to dance.” (Legge IV 34))

James Legge, when commenting on the *Book of Odes*, followed this line of thought, though in tracing back only to Mao’s *Great Preface* by ignorance of Confucius’ own teaching on poetry, and said that, “By poetry, according to the *Great Preface* and the views generally of Chinese scholars, is denoted the expression, in rhymed words, of thought impregnated with feeling; which so far as it goes, is a good account of the species of composition.” (Legge 4, 1)

A careful reading of the *Book of Odes* shows that affective relation between man and woman, subjects and kings, human beings and Heaven, sometimes with love, sometime with joy, sometime with anxiety, sometime with bitterness, sometimes even with hateful blame, depending on the situation they were affected and the way they were treated, were expressed through poetic language. For example, affective relation between man and woman, as in the case of the *Guanju* (*Cry of Ospreys*),² or

affective relation with parents and ancestors, such as in the *Xiaowan*,³ or affective relation between subjects and his superiors and king, as in the case of *Qifu*, where we read a deep complaint to the minister of war.⁴ The relation between subjects and king was much better, in the founding period of Zhou dynasty, as exemplified by those poems concerning King Wen.⁵ Because of his virtues, King Wen was assured of his Mandate of Heaven as justification of the legitimacy of his political leadership. The Mandate of Heaven was to bestow upon those who had virtues, like King Wen. This presupposed an affective relation between humankind and Heaven, the personal God on High, to whom there was a strong belief in the period of time from Shang Dynasty to Zhou Dynasty.

Confucius' comment of the function of poetry seems to have well grasped this web of existence constituted of affective relations as we can find in the *Book of Odes*. It evokes in us an image of a great thinker, not that of a stringent political and ethical philosopher, but first of all a human person in whom we could recognize an authenticity of existence, the primacy of affectivity over discourse, and the primacy of existence over thinking.

Confucius emphasizes the cultivation of human affectivity to the point of thinking innocently over those poems expressing passionate emotions and sexual insinuations. In fact, there are many such kind of emotions, of joy, of anger, of sadness, of blaming, of hate, of lust...etc. Some poems might appear to be sexually indecent, such was the case in the poems of the *Zhengfeng* and the *Weifeng*, yet Confucius would say about them that, "All three hundred odes can be covered by one of their sentences, and that is, "Have no depraved thoughts." (*Analects*, 2.2 Chan: 22)

In the fragments of Confucius on the *Book of Odes*, Confucius seems to be very open to human feelings, especially to the feeling of love such as expressed in the *Cry of Ospreys*. Concerning this, he makes it clear in his summary characterization of the *Cry of Osprey* as "joyful" in fragment 10, saying that, "The *Guanju* sings of joyfulness." Then he proceeds to say that, "The *Gueichao* sings of marriage. The *Gantang* sings of praise. The *Lu Yi* sings of thinking. The *Yanyan* sings of love. Why mention propriety? All for the purpose of tracing back to its origin. The *Guanju* understands li by way of beauty." (Confucius 2001: 139) Again, in the fragment 11, Confucius says, "...it's about love. The *Guanju* sings of joyfulness and is enriched by the author's

thinking. The *Qioumu* sings of timeliness because of the author's happiness. The wisdom in the *Hanguang* is an unattainable wisdom. The marriage in the *Gueichao* is paired with..." (Confucius 2001: 141) Now it seems clear that, Confucius, all in encouraging the expression of human feeling and the joyfulness of love, would put them back into the ethical relationship or the cultivation of feeling by the *li*, understood as the ritual and way of behavior leading to harmonious relation with a sense of beauty. We can see this in fragment 12 where Confucius says that, "The happiness [of Man and woman], should be traced back and integrated in *li*, that's why it could be joyful. The *Qioumu* sings of happiness realized by *junji*, not..." (Confucius 2001:142)

Confucius allows human feeling to express itself, and he sees this as a basic function of poetry. This is also corroborated by the *Analects*, where Confucius says, "My young friends, why do you not study the *Odes*? The *Odes* can arouse your feelings, broaden your observations, enlarge your fellowship, and express your grievances. They help you in your immediate service to your parents and in your more remote service to your rulers. They widen your acquaintance with the names of birds, animals and plants." (*Analects*:17.9. Chan 47 with my modification) Confucius seems to take middle way as the principle of cultivating one's affectivity, as for example in the case of love songs such as the *Cry of Osprey*, Confucius says, "The *Cry of Osprey* is pleasing without being excessive, is mournful without being injurious." (*Analects* 3:20 Ames and Rosemont: 86) The principle of middle way allows human feelings to express themselves without becoming excessive all in realizing harmony with a sense of beauty. In short, if poetry expresses human affectivity in its authenticity, then ethics cultivates human affectivity by referring it to the measure of *li* and to the principle of middle way.

THE FUNCTION OF JUDGMENT IN APPROPRIATING THE MEANING OF POEMS

Confucius shows his wisdom in appropriating the meaning of a poem and in his judgment, which might be seen as verbal and decisional concretization of pragmatic wisdom. This is what is meant by "appropriation of meaning by cutting or selecting text" (*duanzhan quyì* 斷章取義), or, to say it short, "featuring key verses", is in fact a kind of poetic wisdom implying wise judgment in the process of textual selection and interpretation. In the

bamboo slips of *Confucius on the Book of Odes*, we find Confucius commenting on poems by highlighting a certain key verse to represent the whole poem. For example, fragment 6 reads,

[The *Qingmiao* says,] “Great is the number of the officers, assiduous followers of the virtue of King Wen.” I pay my homage to this. The *Liewen* says, “What is most powerful is being the Man.” “What is most distinguished is being virtuous.” “Ah, the former kings are not forgotten.” I am delighted by all these. [The *Haotian You Chengming* says,] “The Heaven made its determinate mandate, which our two sovereigns received.” They are indeed highly honored and powerful. The Songs... (Confucius 2001:133)

Here Confucius puts together a group of key verses of different poems in the *Songs* to emphasize the idea that the moral admirability and the ethical power of the person of King Wen consist in his virtues, seen as the surest assurance of the Mandate of Heaven bestowed on him. The theme of Mandate of Heaven in the case of King Wen seems to be very much cherished by Confucius. We read for example in fragments 7 and 22, that,

What does it mean by saying that “[God said to King Wen:] ‘I think cherishingly of your bright virtue.’”? It is to say King Wen’s sincerity. “The mandate is from Heaven, giving the throne to King Wen.” It is a mandate by sincerity. Trustfully it is. That’s why Confucius says, “It is a Heavenly Mandate. Is it by his own multiple talents that King Wen gets it? It is his mandate.” (Confucius:134)

When the *Wanqiu* said, “Full of kindly affection, yet without anything to look up to.” I say it is good. When the *Yijie* said that “All four arrows again and again return to the same place. One is able to withstand rebellion.” I like it. When the *Sjiou* said that “His deportment is uniformly coherent, his heart being tight to what is right.” I do believe it. When the *Wen Wang* said that,

“King Wen is on high. Oh, bright is he in Heaven.” I say it is excellent.” (Confucius: 151)

The hermeneutic method of “featuring key verses” presupposes a certain common familiarity with the odes and a common measure of understanding them. It’s enough to pick up one verse of a poem, or sometimes just the title of that poem, to convey the affective and intellectual thoughts of the user of poems. In ancient China, this collective familiarity with a more or less common collection of poems was produced by the fact that there were collectors of poems on the level of each city-state and royal selectors of poems on the level of Zhou court. There were also schools to learn them, which, on the level of Zhou court, was name “Piyong” (辟雍), and, on the level of each city-state, “Pangong” (泮宮). In these schools, elites could learn from the collections of poems both central and local that might serve as their common reference. They had the possibility to learn poems from different states so as to understand the ethos of their people and the virtues of their political leaders. Sometime their appropriation of meaning of words in a particular poem might be different from its original meaning. In the case of Confucius, this was especially the case when he quoted a poem to express his assessment of a person or an event. We should say that Confucius, when quoting from the *Book of Documents*, attached himself more often to the original wording and meaning in it; whereas, when quoting the *Book of Odes*, he would differ quite often from their original meaning. This was probably because of the fact that what he quoted from the *Book of Documents* concerned history, and history was supposed to be faithful to what happened; whereas the *Book of Odes* concerned human intentions and affectivity, which would suffer from changes in space and time and were susceptible of much freer interpretations. The special character of poetry allowed him such a flexibility in appropriating meanings by selecting the verses, which showed a creative interpretation of his own. For example, in the *Analects*, we read,

Tzu-chang [Zizhang] asked about the exaltation of virtue and the resolution of perplexities. The Master said, “Make it your guiding principle to do your best to others and to be trustworthy in what you say, and move yourself to where rightness is, then you will be exalting virtue. When you love a

man you want him to live and when you hate him you want him to die. If, wanting him to live, you also want him to die, is this not being perplexed. [The Odes says] “If you did not do so for the sake of riches, You must have done so for the sake of **difference**.” (*Analects*. 12.10, Lau: 113)⁶

Here Confucius quoted from the verse 3 of the *Woxing Zhi Yie* in the *Xiaoya*. The original verse sang about someone who changed his mind after a marriage was made, though not because the new wife was richer, but at least because of the fact that she was different. Confucius used here the term “difference” to explain the origin of doubt in respect to virtue, that is, if one changed one’s mind because of difference, one would be in quandary. Confucius re-contextualized the verse by changing from a case of marriage to that of virtue. We have to keep in mind that here marriage relation served as a metaphor to virtue, in the sense that, just like one should not change one’s mind in marriage because of the new wife’s being rich or being different; in the case of virtue, one should not change one’s respect for virtue because of difference of occasions.

In fact, Confucius’ saying that, “All three hundred odes can be covered by one of their sentences, and that is, ‘Have no depraved thoughts’”, was itself an exemplary case in which Confucius appropriated meaning of poems by creative selection and interpretation. Originally the verse, “Have no depraved thoughts” came from the poem entitled “*Stallions*” in the *Lu Songs*, sung when someone was pasturing horses,⁷ where the term “si” was merely an auxiliary term, and the whole verse would say something like, “Ah, don’t go astray.” Yet Confucius used the term “si” to denote “thought” and read the whole verse as “thought without depravity”.

Now, what were the hermeneutic criteria by which users of poems in ancient China could achieve mutual understanding? Here we should point out one that says the meaning of poem should be “like” (lei 類), which means both “similarity” and “befittingness”. On the one hand, the true intention of the user of poems should be similar to the literal, figural or imaginable meaning of words, verses or odes used in the situation. On the other hand, the poems used should be befitting to the occasion and similar to other users in purpose. Similarity of one’s intention to one’s wording means sincerity. Similarity of purpose of different

users of poems means friendship or alliance for common purpose. Especially in diplomatic occasions, the use of poem contrary to the principle of “lei” might create conflict or even lead to war among states. For example, according to *Zhuo’s Commentary on the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, in the 16th year of Duke Xiang (557BCE), during the banquet of Marquis of Jin with other princes at Wen, the Marquis of Jin said that “The poems sung in the banquet must be similar and befitting the occasion, now the poem sung by Gao Hou from Qi State is not so.” Thereafter a war was launched against Qi. (Legge V: 472) That the misuse of poem provoked a war, this was the most serious consequence of poetry ever happened in the history of international affairs.

We should say that cutting verse to appropriate meaning and the criteria of similarity and befittingness concerned mostly the users of poems, yet till the time of Confucius the hermeneutic criterion of the readers or listeners of poems was left untouched. It was much later, in the time of Warring State, that Mencius proposed to “trace the expressed intention by understanding” (yiyi nizhi 以意逆志). We read in the upper chapter of *Wanzhang* 萬章 that, “Therefore he who interprets *the Odes*, should not be stuck by words in detriment of a sentence, and he should not be stuck by sentence in detriment of earnest thoughts. If one can trace back to the earnest thought by understanding, he then is said to have caught its meaning.”⁸ Using one’s understanding to trace back to the original and earnest intent of the poems would mean, on the level of poetic hermeneutics, something similar to what Wilhelm Dilthey says about the function of understanding. For Dilthey, human life is teleological in the sense that it tends to the creation of meaning by expressing its creativity in words, deeds and works. Which, in their turn, could be understood by enacting this process of creative expression in a sympathetic understanding. If the process of creativity shows itself in going from the dynamism of life to meaningful expression in words, deeds and works, then the process of understanding should go inversely by tracing back from the expressed words and deeds to the dynamic life process via the intelligible structure of words and deeds in question. When added to Confucius’ “hermeneutics of user of poem”, Mencius’ “hermeneutics of readers of poems” could be seen as having completed the Confucian hermeneutics of poetry. But, unlike Daoist hermeneutic, they focus more on human subjectivity rather than on the possibilities of existence revealing themselves through the dynamism of text in its own context.

USE OF POETRY IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Wisdom as prudence in judgment can be shown not only in the appropriation of meaning of poems, but also in the public use of poems. When using poems in public occasion, especially in diplomatic event, one should be wise to quote the right poem and the right verse for the occasion, which, as we have mentioned, was a common practice in ancient China. In some sense, Confucius' teaching of poetry was necessitated by his ambition to train disciples capable of taking position in public life, becoming officers or diplomats, for which purpose they should be well versed in the *Odes*.

Here the necessity to have a common reference so as to facilitate common understanding and avoid alienated or even conflictual situations seems to exclude the possibility that Confucius might have edited an original collection of poems of his own for teaching. Though he might have a better and more systematic method of teaching poetry, it seems to the disadvantage of his disciples had he had different collection of poems than the commonly used one. In the *Zuo's Commentary of the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, where poems were mentioned to have performed 73 times, only in 2 performances were the quoted poems unrecognized because of the ignorance of the person in question. This shows that there was a very high consensus about poems to learn and there was no need for Confucius to break this consensus by producing a very different collection of poems for his own teaching. On the other hand, according to the *Analects*, Confucius might have reorganized the order and the musical tuning of those collected poems. We read in the *Analects* that,

The Master said, "It was after my return from Wei to Lu that music was put right, with the ya and the sung being assigned their proper places." (Lau 1983:81)

Confucius teaching of the poem was for the purpose of his disciples' self-cultivation and their future public service. Confucius says in the *Analects* that, "Unless you study the *Odes*, you will be ill-equipped to speak." (Lau: 167) "If people can recite all of the three hundred *Odes*, and yet... when sent to foreign states, are unable to quote them properly in particular situation, then what use are the *Odes* for him, however many he has

learnt?”⁹ All these were about the public use, especially the diplomatic use, of the *Odes*. As proved historically by *Zhuo's Commentary on the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, the diplomatic use of the *Odes* was a very common practice in ancient China during the period of Spring and Autumn, especially during the period from 637BC to 505BC. In this period of time the intellectuals, officials and diplomats learnt poems by heart as part of their intellectual and professional formation. They used, quoted and performed poems to express their intents, as a rhetoric device and a token of culture. “Perform odes to express one’s intent” (*fushi yanzhi*) became a diplomatic practice by which one used or quoted poems to express one’s own wish, one’s worry and one’s solicitation, and one’s interlocutor or entertainer would also respond by quoting relevant verses.

For example, in the 23rd year of Duke Xi (637BCE), Jin prince Chong Er in his exile visited Qin State. Chong Er sang the *Hesui* (River Water),¹⁰ the Earl Mu of Qin responded with the *Liuyue*, singing of King Xuan of Zhou’s order to Yin Jifu to conquer the Yanyun and one could read there a verse like “The King had ordered the expedition, to help the son of Heaven.” Chong Er, advised by Zhao Shuai, bowed to express his gratitude to Earl Mu of Qin, in acknowledgement of his encouraging him to retake the control of his own country and become a great assisting Earl to Zhou King.

It would be a shameful matter if a diplomat sent to another state did not understand the words and intents of the poem sung to him. For example, in the 12th year of Duke Zhao (530BCE), Song state sent Huading for a diplomatic mission to Lu, where Duke Zhao of Lu entertained him with a banquet and the *Miaoxiao* was played for him, which sang the delight of seeing the diplomat. The four verses sang respectively the happiness of seeing the noble man with delightful words in banquet, with appreciation of favor and brightness, with joyfulness in being virtuous and with the shared happiness in their getting together. Unfortunately, Huanding did not understand these verses and made no response to them. For that reason prince Zhao got angry and said, “He is sure to be driven into exile. He cherished not that “We feast and talk”; he declared not his sense of that “They favors me, they brighten me;” He understood not that “Excellent virtues;” He accepts not that “Common happiness”; how should he continue to be **in that position** in Song?”¹¹ This is one of the two examples of poems

sung yet not understood in the 73 performance of poems mentioned in the *Zhuo's Commentary*.

WISDOM IN THE POEMS

To be wise or not is also an important criterion by which Confucius has judged poems. As can be seen in the newly discovered Bamboo slips, Confucius characterizes a poem as wise or not in the fragments 10, 11, 13, 27, 28, 29. So it seems that Confucius uses the term “wise” or “wisdom” quite frequently in his characterization of poems. If wisdom concerns judgment, then cautions should be paid as to cases in which judgment could be distorted in both ethical and political matters. This is generally called a case of slander, a kind of malicious statement, or utterance of defamatorily statements injurious to the well-being of a person. If wisdom concerns judgment that reveals truth, then slander is a dissimulation of truth that causes injury to one’s well-being or fame. Slander is generally used, in private as well as in public situation, as tactics to gain worldly advantage by irresponsibly uttering statements that dissimulates truth and thereby causes injury to one’s opponents in a competitive or conflictual situation. In the newly discovered fragments of Confucius on the *Odes*, Confucius has very wisely picked up certain poems complaining about slanders and wooed for justice. For example, Fragment 8 reads,

The Shiyue is good at describing slanderous situations. The Yu Wuzheng and the Ji Nansan are all expressing the decline of their Lord, and kings and dukes feel ashamed. There are a lot of doubts in the Saomin, saying that one’s willing is not pleased. The Xiaowan gives no hateful words, though there seems to be no calm conscience either. The Xiaobian and the Qiaoyan all talk about the harm done by those who slander.
(Confucius 2001: 135-136)

It is evident then poems related to slanders imply always certain painful complaint. Negatively speaking, in some cases, what Confucius means by wisdom seems to be related to slanderous

situations. For example, in fragment 28, Confucius says, "...The *Zhangyou Qi* is with great caution and secrecy and yet knowing nothing about what to say. The *Qingying* is wise." (Confucius 2001: 158) In the *Book of Odes*, the poem *Qingying* expresses an anxious complaint against slanders separating someone from his king, using the buzzing of blue flies as metaphor of slanderous speeches. We read the following two verses of the *Qingying*,

They buzz about, the blue flies,
Lighting on the fences.
O happy and courteous sovereign,
Do not believe slanderous speeches
They buzz about, the blue flies,
Lighting on the jujube trees.
The slanderous observe no limits,
And throw the whole kingdom into confusion. (Legge,
1994 *The She King*: 394-395)

As shown by the *Zuo's Commentary of the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, this poem was also used by chieftains of barbarian tribes to complain about slanders during diplomatic ritual of alliance. Since quoting and performing poems in the social, political or diplomatic occasions constituted a common practice among the nobles, it belonged to a part of the know-how of noble class, especially related to the *li* or rituals. Even the chieftains of barbarian tribes were familiar with it when they found themselves in diplomatic relation with the Han. For example, according to the *Zuo's Commentary of the Annals of Spring and Autumn*, in the 14th year of Duke Xiang (559BCE), it was mentioned that Shi Wan blamed the barbarian chief Ju Zhi for his un-loyalty to Jin, and refused him to participate in the morning Court meeting. Chief Rong refuted this blaming by saying that Jin was too unfair towards the barbarian tribes, and then he recited the *Qingying* before he retreated from the court.

Wisdom is in contrast position to slander; yet both are related to proper use or not of language. Confucius knows how wording as a vehicle revealing truth is difficult. The learning of poems will equip one well in what to say properly, whereas without learning poems, one would be ill-equipped with skill in speaking. This seems to be very much put emphasis on by Confucius in the newly discovered Bamboo Slips, for example, in fragment 25, he says that, "The *Dangdang* talks about the common

people. The *Youtu* expresses being in wrong time. The last chapter of the *Datian* knows what to say and behaves courteously.” In fragment 29, he says that, “In the *Juan Er* we find no wise man. The *Seqin* talks about quietude. The *Luer* talks about noble knights. The *Jiaofang* talks about woman. The *Hesui* talks about wisdom.” Because of the fact that the *Hesui* is lost since long we do not have the textual basis to judge what Confucius has in mind when he says that the *Hesui* is wise. Yet for sure we can always say that wisdom on this level concerns always truth as revealed or distorted by language.

OPENNESS TO THE UNKNOWN: UNENDING QUEST OF WISDOM

In conclusion, we may say that the newly discovered bamboo slips of *Confucius on the Book of Odes* convey to us Confucius’ wisdom in his systematic teaching of poetry, in his seeing affectivity as original mode of human existence, which, all in expressing itself spontaneously, should be cultivated by *li* leading to a virtuous life of harmony imbued with sense of beauty. His poetic wisdom of appropriating meaning of poetry realizes itself in a creative interpretation and sound judgment of the poem’s relevance to self-cultivation and public occasion. Still, it seems that wisdom is not totally exhausted in the cultivated expression of human affectivity and sound judgment, in keeping oneself to words that reveal truth and avoiding prudently words distorting truth. Wisdom seems to be more than all these. It seems to be open to the unfathomable, the hidden and the unknown. In fragment 10, Confucius first characterizes a poem as wise in saying that the *Hanguan* sings of wisdom. (Confucius 2001:139) Following this, in fragment 11, he continues to say that “the wisdom in the *Hanguan* is unattainable”(Confucius 2001: 141) Then in fragment 13, he says that “The *Hanguan* sings for wisdom which is uneasy to attain. Wisdom, though unattainable, is it not eternal?” (Confucius 2001:142)

When we come to the traditional version of *Hanguan* in the *Book of Odes*, it sings in fact of some unapproachable beautiful lady(ies) in making comparison to the uncrossable river Han. It reads,

In the South rise the trees without branches,
Affording no shelter.

By the Han River are girls rambling about,
 But it is vain to solicit them.
 The breath of the Han,
 Can not be dived across;
 The length of the Jiang,
 Can not be navigated with a raft.

Many are the bundles of firewood;
 I would cut down the thorns [to form more]
 Those girls that are going to their future home,--
 I would feed their horses.
 The breath of the Han,
 Can not be dived across;
 The length of the Jiang,
 Can not be navigated with a raft. (Legge 1994: *The She King*: 15-16)

In Mao's Commentary, the praise of ladies in this poem is said to be used as metaphor to praise King Wen, under whose reign the dissolute manners of people, especially women, in the region south from Zhou, had undergone great transformation.¹² But, contrary to Mao's commentary, the song could be read also simply as a love song, without any ethical and political insinuation. Nevertheless, Confucius would interpret it as singing the unattainability of wisdom. This is another case of Confucius appropriating meaning by creative interpretation, using Han River's uncrossability to express metaphorically the sense of unattainability of the lady, and using the unattainability of the lady to say the unattainability of wisdom. The eternal wisdom is therefore comparable to some lady beautiful, attractive yet unattainable. On this point it is quite similar to what the *Book of Wisdom* says, "Wisdom I loved and searched for from my youth; I resolved to have her as my bride. I felt in love with her beauty." (*The New Jerusalem Bible* 1998:792)

The more the eternal wisdom is attractive, the more it is unattainable. Wisdom therefore possesses certain unfathomability. Confucian poetic wisdom is very humanistic in the sense that it puts emphasis on human affectivity and its appropriate expression through self-cultivation and public ritual, and yet he still opens himself to the hidden and the unfathomable dimension of existence. Wisdom is still to be sought in a process of unending quest.

NOTES

1. See for example, *the Analects*, 2.2, 7.18, 8.8, 9.15, 13.5, 16.13, 17.9, 17.10, ...etc., in which Confucius talked about either the *Book of Odes* in general or various individual odes.

2. For example, in the *Guanju* we read, “Kwan-kwan go the ospreys, on the islet in the river. The modest, retiring, virtuous young lady; after whom a young gentleman loves to look for mate.”(Legge IV, 1. with my modification)

3. We read, in the *Xiaowan*, “Small is the cooing dove, but it flies aloft up to Heaven. My heart is wounded with sorrow, and I think of our forefathers. When the dawn is breaking. And I cannot sleep, the thoughts in my breast are of my own parents.” (Legge. IV: 333-334)

4. We read, in the *Qifu*, “Minister of War, We are the claws and teeth of the king. Why have you rolled us into this sorrow? So that we have no abiding place? Minister of War, We are the taloned soldiers of the king. Why have you rolled us into this sorrow? So that there is no end [of our toils]? Minister of War, we have indeed acted without discrimination. Why have you rolled us into this sorrow? So that our mothers have to do all the labor of cooking?” (Legge IV: 298-299)

5. For example, we read, in the *Wei Tian Zhi Ming* (The Mandate of Heaven): “How solemn and unceasing! Oh, how illustrious was the purity of King Wen’s virtue! With blessings he overwhelms us. We all receive the blessings. They are a great favour from our King Wen. May his remote descendents hold fast to them.”(LeggeIV:570-571. with my modifications).

6. My correction in bald of D.C. Lau translation “novelty” into “difference”, this being more faithful to the term “yi”(異) in the Chinese text.

7. The *Stallions* reads, “Fat and large are the stallions, on the plains of the far-distant borders. Of those stallions, fat and large, some are cream-coloured; some, red and white; some, with white hairy legs; some, with fish eyes; All, stout carriage horses, Ah, how they are without depravity; He thinks of his horses, and thus serviceable are they.” (Legge IV: 613)

8. *The Mencius*, 5A: 4. My translation.

9. Confucius, *The Analects*13.5, my own translation.

10. The *Hesui* is lost now that we find only its title here in this text. However, it is possible that “Hesui” might be another

title of the *Miensui*, in which it is sung, "In large volume, those flowing waters go to the court of the sea. Rapid is that flying flacon, now soaring, now resting. Alas! Among my brethren, my countrymen, my friends, no one is willing to think of the prevailing disorder. But who has not parents to suffer from it? The *She King*, translated by James Legge, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1994, p. 295.

11. The *Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, translated by James Legge, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1994, p.639. Bold my correction.

12. There are different lines of interpretation about this. Ouyang Xiu and Zhu Xi followed Mao's line of interpretation. Ouyang Xiu said that, "He would be take it as a joy if he could drive car for him." Zhu Xi would say that, "Though he intends to please the lord by serving him in feeding his horses, yet the metaphor of the breadth of Jiang River shows that the Lord is so unapproachable." On the other hand, Fang Ruenyu would interpret it as love songs of woodcutters and fishermen. For Su Xuelin, this song might be a love poem of a slave to his lady who is about to marry. She takes it as a proof that it is a slave who would cut woods and feed horses for the lady.

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GLOSSARY

- Bangfeng* 邦風
Bei Baizhou 北白舟
Bozhou 柏舟
Daxia 大夏
Daya 大雅
duanzhan quyì 斷章取義
Guofeng 國風
Heshui 河水
Jizha 季札
Konzi Shilun 孔子詩論
Kosi 可斯
lei 類
Lüer 律而
pangong 泮宮
piyong 辟廱
Qifu 祈父
Shiyue Zhi Jiao 十月之交
Shiyue 十月
shi 師
Songs 頌
Suifu 諱父
tai shi 太師
Tang Zhi Sui 湯之水
Wanzhang 萬章
Xiaoxia 小夏
Xiaoya 小雅
Xinqin Lun 性情論
Yang Zhi Sui 揚之水
yiyi nizhi 以意逆志
Zhongshi 中氏
Ziyi 緇衣
Zizhang 子張

CHAPTER X

WHAT ARE THE “FOUR ROOTS OF CAPACITY AND NATURE”?

ALAN K.L. CHAN

During the third century C.E., a debate on the relationship between “capacity” (*cai* 才) and “nature” (*xing* 性) captured the imagination of the Chinese elite. Historical sources relate that four views were put forward on the subject, which continued to dominate the intellectual scene during the fourth and fifth centuries. Yin Hao 殷浩 (306–356), a major statesman and leader of the literati, for example, was known especially for his expertise on the four views of “capacity and nature” (*caixing*) (*Shishuo xinyu* 1992, 4.34; cf. Mather 1976, 110).¹ Writing in the fifth century, Wang Sengqian 王僧虔 (426–485) observed that *caixing* was basic to the repertoire of every learned speaker in philosophical debates; that is to say, no intellectual worthy of the name could afford not to know or be able to say something about it.² There is little question that the debate on *caixing* occupied a privileged position in early medieval Chinese philosophy. It is not entirely clear, however, what the arguments were.

According to Liu Jun 劉峻 (462–521), commenting on a passage in the fifth-century compilation of notable sayings and events in the world of the elite, *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, the four views on *caixing* are (1) that they are “identical” (*tong* 同); (2) that they are “different” (*yi* 異); (3) that they “coincide” (*he* 合); and (4) that they “diverge” (*li* 離) from each other. Fu Gu 傅嘏 (209–255) is credited with the first view and is often depicted as the key figure in this debate. Li Feng 李豐 (d. 254) counters that capacity and nature are different. Zhong Hui 鍾會 (225–264) and Wang Guang 王廣 (d. 251) complete the team by arguing for the third and fourth view, respectively. Zhong Hui is said to have composed a treatise entitled “On the Four Views of the Fundamental Relationship between Capacity and Nature,” or more literally “On the Four Roots of Capacity and Nature” (*Caixing siben lun* 才性四本論). Often referred to simply as the *Siben lun* in later Chinese sources, Zhong Hui’s work is no longer extant (*Shishuo xinyu*, 4.5; cf. Mather 1976, 94–95).³ This paper attempts to reconstruct the four arguments on capacity and nature. To situate the *caixing*

debate in its proper context, and to better illustrate the need for a fresh interpretation of the debate, I will begin by introducing the four proponents. Besides "who," the question "when" also merits attention.

POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY IN THIRD-CENTURY CHINA

Fu Gu entered politics during the early years of the Wei dynasty (220–265) as an officer under Chen Qun 陳群 (d. 236), who was Minister of Works (*sikong* 司空) at the court of Emperor Ming (Cao Rui 曹叡 r. 227–239). At the start of the Zhengshi reign (240–249), Fu Gu was appointed Palace Attendant (*huangmen shilang* 黃門侍郎), which was a much sought-after position for aspiring junior officers because of the access to the centre of political power and the training for higher office that it affords. During the Zhengshi reign, as is well known, with a young emperor (Cao Fang 曹芳, r. 240–254) on the throne, Wei politics was dominated by Cao Shuang 曹爽 (d. 249), supreme commander and regent. Cao Shuang's archrival was Sima Yi 司馬懿 (179–251), who had to feign illness to avoid a direct confrontation.⁴ In the first month of 249, however, Sima Yi successfully staged a political takeover while Cao Shuang was away from the palace accompanying the Wei emperor on a visit to the imperial cemetery, which resulted in the death of Cao Shuang and his followers. The Sima family, led in succession by Sima Yi's two sons Sima Shi 司馬師 (208–255) and Sima Zhao 司馬昭 (211–265), then controlled the Wei government. Opposition remained and threatened to destabilize the Sima government, until Sima Yi's grandson, Sima Yan 司馬炎 (236–290) ended the rule of Wei and established the Jin dynasty in 265. All four proponents of the *caixing* debate were caught up in this struggle, at a time when in the words of a later historian "few intellectuals of note came through intact."⁵

Fu Gu suffered a political setback during the Zhengshi reign. At the time, He Yan 何晏 (d. 249) was among the most powerful within the Cao Shuang faction, celebrated as a gifted intellectual and holding the influential post of Personnel Secretary (*libu shangshu* 吏部尚書) in charge of civil appointments. Fu Gu warned Cao Shuang's younger brother, Cao Xi 曹羲 that He Yan

was driven by self-interest and should not be trusted with the responsibility of government. He Yan retaliated by removing Fu Gu from office. Fu Gu's political future looked bleak, but he found a patron in Sima Yi, who took him into his staff. He Yan was executed after Sima Yi took control in 249, after which Fu Gu became a major policy maker in the Sima administration.⁶

Li Feng was the oldest of the four debaters. He was Palace Attendant during the Taihe 太和 reign (227–232) of Emperor Ming and rose to become Deputy Secretary (*shangshu puye* 尚書僕射) during the Zhengshi period. Related to the imperial family by marriage, Li Feng was ambitious and tried to stay clear of the conflict between Cao Shuang and Sima Yi by appearing to lean towards one and then the other. Although he was not purged in the coup of 249, his earlier “fence-sitting” did not go unnoticed and spelled a de facto end to his political career. In 252, he was appointed Director of the Central Secretariat (*zhongshu ling* 中書令), a post he accepted even though he realized that it was not a “distinguished” one for him. He plotted to unseat the Sima government and was killed as a result in the second month of 254.⁷

Zhong Hui was the youngest of the four. His father Zhong You 鍾繇 (d. 230) was a trusted lieutenant of Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) and a pillar in the early Wei government.⁸ During the Zhengshi era, Zhong Hui began his official career as an assistant in the palace library (*mishu lang* 秘書郎). Reputed for his wide learning and skill in disputation, he was soon promoted to become a secretary at the Central Secretariat (*zhongshu shilang* 中書侍郎). Zhong Hui was present with the Wei emperor and Cao Shuang at the imperial cemetery when the coup took place in 249, but he managed to keep out of harm's way despite his apparent association with the Cao faction.⁹ After 249 Zhong Hui was able to retain his post at the Central Secretariat and soon emerged as a key member of the Sima regime. He accompanied Sima Shi on his last military campaign; and when the latter died in 255, Zhong Hui helped to facilitate the transition of power from Sima Shi to Sima Zhao. Rising then from Palace Attendant to Metropolitan Commandant (*sili xiaowei* 司隸校尉) and in the winter of 262 to General of the Suppression of the West (*zhenxi jiangjun* 鎮西將軍), Zhong Hui grew from strength to strength in the political arena. In 263, in recognition of his role in the conquest of Shu, he was made Chief Minister of Culture and Instruction (*situ* 司徒), one of the “Three Excellencies” (*sangong*) of state. At the height

of his power, Zhong Hui "considered his own achievement and fame to be unsurpassed in the world and that he could no longer serve under anyone" (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 792. Calculating that he had control of a formidable army and that he could at least claim the land of Shu even should he fail to conquer the entire country, Zhong Hui decided to turn against Sima Zhao. He was killed by his own troops in the first month of 264.

Wang Guang was the son of Wang Ling 王凌, who wielded considerable influence during the early Wei as a military commander. Following in his father's footsteps, Wang Guang also made his mark as a military officer, rising to the rank of captain of the cavalry (*tunqi xiaowei* 屯騎校尉). Jiang Ji 蔣濟 (d. 249), who was then in charge of military appointments and highly regarded for his judgment of individual character, praised him highly (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 761, n. 7).¹⁰ However, Wang Ling plotted to enthrone another member of the Cao clan and thus to establish a rival regime against the Sima government after 249. Wang Ling committed suicide in the fifth month of 251 when his plot was uncovered, and Wang Guang, who was then in his forties was killed shortly after (*Sanguozhi*, 1982, 28: 757-761; see also 4:124; *Jinshu* 1974, 1:19; and *Shishuo xinyu* 1992, 19.9).¹¹

In an influential study, Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 argues that politics draws the dividing line in this debate (Chen 1974, 601-607).¹² Whereas Fu Gu and Zhong Hui (i.e., before his attempted revolt) sided with the Sima regime, both Li Feng and Wang Guang were struck down by it. Chen's interpretation will be examined more closely below. The importance of political differences in a turbulent period certainly cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, as the evidence will show, such differences may not be as clear-cut as they seem. Moreover, the *caixing* debate contributed significantly to the development of Chinese philosophy; the intellectual integrity and rigor of the four views on capacity and nature, apart from the political affiliation of their proponents, perhaps also should not be underestimated.

When did the debate take place? Given that Wang Guang died in 251, the four views on capacity and nature should have been established before that time. It is not necessary to assume that there was actually a debate in which all the four proponents were present. During the early Wei dynasty, as is well known, philosophical debates and criticism became a mainstay of elite culture. "Pure conversation" (*qingtan* 清談) – a structured form of

social gatherings in which the host and invited guests debated on specific philosophical topics – acquired a commanding presence on the intellectual stage.¹³ In this context, one might suppose that Fu Gu had made known his view on *caixing*. This attracted further discussion in other “pure conversation” sessions, including Li Feng’s counterview. Zhong Hui, according to the *Sanguozhi*, “collected and discussed” Fu Gu’s deliberation on the “identity and difference of capacity and nature” (*caixing tongyi* 才性同異).¹⁴ Zhong Hui’s own contribution, as I shall argue, attempts to mediate between the opposing views of Fu Gu and Li Feng. Wang Guang’s view, finally, is best seen as having been directed especially against Zhong Hui’s position.

This reconstruction thus places the *caixing* debate in the Zhengshi context. In 245, Zhong Hui was twenty and already a rising star in both the intellectual and political arenas. It seems likely that the four views were put forward in the order indicated above between 245 and 249. The *Siben lun* itself, however, could have been written slightly later. According to Wang Baoxuan, because Zhong Hui essentially sided with Fu Gu in this debate and since he did not become close to Fu Gu until after 249, the *Siben lun* should be dated to after the Zhengshi reign (Wang Baoxuan, 1987, 152–153).¹⁵ In a famous episode, the *Shishuo xinyu* relates that after Zhong Hui had finished his treatise on *caixing*, he wanted to show it to Ji Kang 嵇康 (223–262), whose opinion could sway the elite and whose friendship and approval Zhong seems particularly eager to obtain. However, fearing that Ji Kang might criticize his work, he “threw” it inside Ji’s house and ran away. Zhong’s work was thus certainly completed before Ji Kang’s death in 262 (*Shishuo xinyu*, 1992, 4.5).¹⁶ Judging from Zhong’s alleged action, it appears that he was then still relatively young and not fully secure in his political position. Although the evidence is inconclusive, I am inclined to date the work to before Wang Guang’s death in 251, when none of the four proponents would be regarded as a “traitor” to the state, or before Li Feng’s death in 254, after which Zhong Hui seems fully preoccupied with political developments.¹⁷

If the *caixing* debate had erupted during the Zhengshi reign, the relationship among the main proponents should be examined more closely. Fu Gu and Li Feng were evidently rivals. Indeed, Fu Gu did not disguise his dislike for Li Feng, describing the latter as “pretentious and false” (*shiwei* 飾偽).¹⁸ As mentioned,

Fu Gu also criticized He Yan. At that time, Zhong Hui and Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) were two of the most promising young talents among the cultural and political elite. The *Sanguozhi* reports that both enjoyed fame before they turned twenty (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 795). Wang Bi's biography further relates that the two were on good terms.¹⁹ Politically, Zhong Hui was not a protégé of He Yan, as Wang Bi was. Philosophically, however, Zhong Hui was drawn to He Yan's view that "sages do not have emotions" and is said to have developed it in his own thinking (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 795, n.1).²⁰ Thus, there is reason to believe that Zhong Hui would have been perceived as being close to the faction led by Cao Shuang and He Yan during the Zhengshi reign (see also Wang Baoxuan 1987, 148). If this were the case, it would be difficult to account for Zhong Hui's view on *caixing* as simply reflecting his association with Fu Gu and the Sima regime. Indeed, He Yan himself had spoken highly of Sima Shi (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 9: 293, n.1; and *Jinshu* 1974, 2: 25). It is also unclear whether Wang Guang had opposed Sima Yi. When told of his father's plan to challenge Sima Yi, Wang Guang reportedly advised against it, citing the shortcomings of Cao Shuang and He Yan. Thus, according to Wang Guang, although the coup of 249 cut down in one stroke "the number of noted intellectuals by half," Sima Yi had widespread support for his seizing political control.²¹ Wang Guang died because of his father's opposition to the Sima clan; his own political sentiments, however, might have been quite different. The four proponents of the *caixing* debate were major players in Wei politics and doubtless their views would reflect their political interests and philosophy. Nevertheless, family connections, interpersonal relations, political patronage, and intellectual conviction are complex and closely intertwined; it does not appear that factionalism alone can account for their views on *caixing*.

THE IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE OF CAIXING

What does it mean to say that capacity and nature are identical or the same? The concept of *xing* (nature), of course, has a long history in Chinese philosophy. From Mencius to Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100), the question of human nature has been approached particularly from a moral perspective. Is human nature, in some sense, "good" (*shan* 善)? During the early Wei, however, the question of *xing* was framed in terms of *cai*, which has an

added political focus and concerns especially the criteria for appointing officials. In a series of edicts, Cao Cao made clear that individuals who lack moral accomplishment but demonstrate leadership abilities should not be left out of office. Indeed, even “those who are not benevolent (*buren* 不仁) or are unfilial (*buxiao* 不孝) but who possess the skills of managing the country and deploying troops” should not be overlooked (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 1: 49, n.1; cf. *Sanguozhi* 1982, 1: 32, 44); these are discussed in Tang Changru (1978a, 303–304). This does not mean that Cao Cao was keen to bring immoral men into government; rather, he was concerned with revamping the system of official appointment, which at that time relied heavily on recommendations made on the basis of a candidate’s ethical reputation. Against this background, the *caixing* debate is thus often seen to revolve around the relationship between moral nature and ability, in the sense that whereas *xing* refers to virtuous nature or character (*dexing* 德性), *cai* refers to ability (*caineng* 才能) especially in terms of political acumen and performance.²² In this discussion, without undermining the political dimension of the debate, I suggest an alternative interpretation.

The debate addresses the “root” of *caixing*. The available evidence indicates that the debate is concerned with the *source* of both moral character and ability. How should capacity and nature be understood? Whether there is a moral dimension to human nature is an important issue, but since the Han dynasty, if not earlier, *xing* has been understood generally as what is inborn (*sheng* 生). He Yan, for example, affirms in his commentary to the *Lunyu* (5.13) that “nature is what human beings receive, which enables them to exist (性者人之所受以生者也)” (He 1963, 45). This is a general, “base-line” definition, which all four proponents of the *caixing* debate should be able to accept. It does not, however, specify the content of *xing*.

What is it, then, that human beings “receive” – i.e., at birth from heaven and ultimately, in the context of Daoist philosophy, from the Dao? One way of approaching the question is that what is inborn is one’s *cai*, which encompasses one’s physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, and spiritual endowments. In this view, both virtuous character and political ability fall under the rubric of *cai*. The word “*cai*” has been translated variously as capacity, ability or talent. To translate *cai* as “talent” seems to privilege the view that *cai* is inborn. “Ability,” in contrast, gives greater flexibility to

interpreting *cai* as the result of learning and effort. The suggestion here is that the *caixing* debate precisely hinges on this issue and for that reason *cai* is rendered "capacity," which is amenable to either interpretation. The relationship between moral character and political ability must still be explained, but it is predicated on a prior understanding of the basis of *cai* in its entirety.

In this context, Fu Gu's "identity" thesis may be understood. *Xing* as what is inborn may be interpreted in terms of a person's innate *cai*. This seems to be a longstanding view. The *Shuowen* lexicon defines *cai* as "plants and trees at their first stage of growth" (*Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 272). It is generally agreed also that the *Mencius* uses *cai* in this sense. "If a person becomes bad," *Mencius* argues, "that is not the fault of his *cai*" (*Mencius*, 6A:6). During the Han dynasty, Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201) clearly sees this as a reference to a person's inborn nature and thus uses the phrase *caixing* in his *Mencius* commentary to bring out the text's perceived meaning (see also *Mencius* 6A:7).²³ In Zhu Xi's commentary to this passage, *cai* is defined as "material or substance" (*caizhi* 材質): "If a person has such a *xing*, then he will have such a *cai*" (Zhu Xi 1973, 6.4a-4b).²⁴ According to Wang Chong, "In reality, human beings are endowed with a nature that is good or bad. This is like the capacity of human beings, which is high for some and low for others. High (inborn) capacity cannot be (made) low; low capacity cannot be (made) high" (Wang Chong (1983, 1:134). C.f. Forke (1962, 390) and Chan (1963, 295)). Although Wang Chong did not explicitly identify *cai* with *xing*, he would have little difficulty supporting Fu Gu's thesis.

Crucial to this argument is the idea that all phenomena are constituted by *qi*, the "vital energies" emanating from the Dao that generate, sustain, and renew the cosmos.²⁵ In the words of Ji Kang, "The original *qi*-energy (*yuanqi* 元氣) smelts and shapes; and the multitude of beings receive their endowments. Their endowments vary; thus their *caixing* may be dim or bright" (Ji 1962a, 249; cf. Herricks 1983, 127). Both *cai* and *xing*, in other words, are determined by a person's *qi*-endowment. More precisely, they are but different aspects of the same phenomenon. Whereas the concept of nature points to the inner substance, capacity reaches outward and translates into political ability as well as moral conduct. This view finds eloquent support in the "Treatise on Capacity and Nature" (*Caixing lun*) by another third-century scholar, Yuan Zhun 袁準.²⁶ "For all beings that exist between

heaven and earth,” according to Yuan, “some are fine and others are foul,” that is to say, of an excellent or poor quality.

Why is it that some things are fine? It is because they are born of pure *qi*-energies (*qingqi* 清氣). Why is it that some things are foul? It is because they are generated by turbid *qi*-energies (*zhuoqi* 濁氣). ... It is in the nature of wood to become bent or straight. That which is bent fits the (carpenter’s) curve and that which is straight fits the plumb line, which forms the material for the wheel and the straight rafter, respectively.²⁷ To become worthy (*xian* 賢) or unworthy (*buxiao* 不肖) is a matter of human nature. Those who are worthy serve as teachers; those who are unworthy serve as a resource (for one to draw lessons from) (this refers to the *Laozi*, chap. 27). Worthiness and unworthiness form the material, of which teachers and object-lessons are made, respectively. Thus, it is clear that *xing* speaks of an object’s substance (*zhi* 質), whereas *cai* names its function (*yong* 用).²⁸

This may be regarded as an elaboration of Fu Gu’s view. Yuan Zhun was associated with both Ji Kang and Ruan Ji, although it is not known whether he was close to Fu Gu also (*Shishuo xinyu* 1992, 4.67 and 6.2; cf. Mather, 1976, 127 and 180).²⁹ *Cai* evidently refers to one’s capacity in the broad sense and not just the ability to govern. The point of the argument, however, is not what *cai* refers to specifically but rather that capacity is inborn and defines *xing*. In this sense, *cai* and *xing* are “identical.” During the Jin dynasty, Ruan Yu 阮裕 finds Fu Gu’s view to be the strongest of the four (*Jinshu* 1974, 49: 1368).³⁰

Li Feng proposes that capacity and nature are different. In the light of Cao Cao’s famous edicts cited above, scholars of Wei-Jin thought generally see Li Feng as taking *xing* specifically in the sense of moral conduct or character and consequently that he is making a distinction between moral nature and the ability to govern. This would effectively render the debate a terminological one; that is to say, Fu Gu and Li Feng disagree because they take the terms *cai* and *xing* to mean different things. Whereas Fu Gu sees *cai* as the outward manifestation of *xing*, for Li Feng the two terms have a more precise and narrower meaning.³¹ But if Li Feng is simply arguing from definition, the assertion that capacity and nature are different seems arbitrary and does not quite engage Fu Gu’s thesis in meaningful debate. Further, if the argument is that those who are morally accomplished cannot be strong and effective political leaders, it would imply that *cai* is by definition

detrimental to morality. This seems unlikely, for few would dispute that "kingliness without," as the *Zhuangzi* phrases it (chapter 33), stems from a deeper "sageliness within," although what is *inner* need not be equated with what is *inborn*. More likely, Li Feng is saying that Fu Gu had misconstrued the relationship between capacity and nature, because whereas *xing* may be inborn, *cai* is shaped by learning. In other words, Li Feng is not saying that *xing* should be defined exclusively in moral terms; rather, he is primarily concerned with the implied neglect of learning and effort in Fu Gu's position.

To argue that capacity and nature are different is to suggest that any accomplishment, moral or political, is ultimately dependent on effort. Fu Gu is clearly committed to affirming that a person may be born good or bad, strong or weak, bright or dull, depending on his or her *qi*-endowment. Li Feng's counterview, however, seems to proceed on the premise that nature is "neutral" or unmarked, morally and in all other respects. What is endowed at birth is simply the biological apparatus or faculties to grow, to learn, and to interact with the external environment, but the person one becomes is a matter of learning and putting into practice the teachings of the sages. Yu Huan 魚豢, the noted third-century historian, provides a helpful analogy to explain the point: the effect of learning on a person is like adding color to a piece of plain silk (*su* 素); thus, even Confucius would not consider himself to have been "born with knowledge" (*Lunyu* 7.20, as cited in *Sanguozhi* 1982, 13: 422, n.3).

Li Feng may have derived his insight into capacity and nature from Lu Yu 盧毓 (d. 257), who was *libu shangshu* in 236 or 237. In the assessment of individuals and appointment of officials, Lu Yu "first considered their moral integrity (*xing-xing* 性行) before addressing their ability (*cai*)." When Li Feng, who was then junior to Lu, asked him why, Lu replied,

Cai is what enables one to do good. Thus, (a person of) great capacity (should) achieve great goodness, whereas (a person of) small capacity achieves goodness to a smaller degree. Now, if someone is said to have the capacity and yet he cannot do good, this means that his capacity does not fit its proper use (才所以為善也。故大才成大善，小才成小善。今稱之有才而不能為善，是才不中器也). Li Feng and others conceded that his argument was sound (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 22: 650-52).³²

This is a difficult passage. Indeed, whereas some scholars take it as indicative of Li Feng's position, others suggest that it is closer to Fu Gu's identity thesis (Wang Xiaoyi 1987, 98; Xu 1989, 54).³³ My view is that for Lu Yu, *cai* is decisive and encompasses both moral integrity and ability. When a person is "said" (*cheng* 稱) to have *cai*, he must be able to realize goodness in practice; if not, he really does not have *cai* – that is to say, there has been an error in assessing his capacity.³⁴ This does not exclude political achievement, but it does assign priority to moral excellence. In one sense, *cai* simply refers to a person's ability to produce results. If *cai* is divorced from moral integrity, it can do great harm to society. Thus, priority is given to moral effort, which serves to establish the proper meaning of *cai*.

However, Lu Yu's argument does not necessarily entail that *cai* is inborn. The greatest capacity by definition should yield the greatest good; but it is conceivable that *cai* could result from learning. The important point is to ensure that leadership ability is not divorced from moral integrity. At the political level, it is paramount that reputation is matched by performance, as Lu Yu emphasizes on another occasion in response to an edict by Emperor Ming. Because the system of performance appraisal was in disuse, appointment and promotion were made on the basis of subjective "praise or blame." There was thus a need, according to Lu, to institute proper evaluation of officials, to weed out the spurious from the "genuine" or deserving (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 22: 652). This made a favorable impression on the Emperor, who then called for a comprehensive review of the system of official appointment. Liu Shao 劉劭, who wrote on both music and law besides his famous typology of human ability, the *Renwu zhi*, submitted a report (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 21: 619).³⁵ Fu Gu criticized Liu Shao's work, and perhaps by implication Lu Yu's view also, arguing that Liu's approach confuses the "roots and branches" and that official appointments should not be concentrated at the Personnel Secretariat (*libu*) (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 21: 623).³⁶ I will come back to this point later; here, suffice it to say, if Lu Yu is suggesting that performance, be it political or moral, requires effort and training, he may have influenced Li Feng in developing the view that nature and capacity are different.

SELF-CULTIVATION, GREAT PEACE, AND THE NATURE OF THE SAGE

If Li Feng had offered a substantive critique of the identity of *caixing*, as opposed to an argument from definition, then Zhong Hui's position may be seen as an attempt to mediate between these two extremes. Zhong Hui was a prolific author. Besides the treatise on the "four roots of capacity and nature," Zhong Hui also wrote a *Laozi* commentary. Although the work has not survived, over twenty quotations have been preserved in various sources.³⁷ Judging from the surviving fragments of Zhong's commentary, it is clear that the concept of *qi* guides his interpretation of Daoist philosophy. For example, commenting on the penultimate line of *Laozi* chapter 12, "For this reason the sage is concerned with the belly and not the eyes," Zhong Hui writes:

The vital energy firms up within; thus it is said, "concerned with the belly." Externally, desires have been eliminated; thus, it is said, "not concerned with the eyes." (真氣內實，故曰為腹，嗜欲外除，故曰不為目) (Li 1996, 2.15a).³⁸

The concept of *qi* in Zhong Hui's philosophy relates directly to his understanding of the sage and the role of self-cultivation, which together enables a reconstruction of his argument in the *caixing* debate. As mentioned, Zhong Hui was attracted to He Yan's view that "sages do not have emotions" (*wuqing* 無情). "Fondness, anger, sorrow, and joy" are "impure" *qi*-agitations that disturb the heart-mind. The sage, in contrast, is absolutely pure in the sense that he embodies the finest *qi*-endowment of heaven and earth. As such, the sage cannot have emotions.

In this interpretation, the Dao informs all beings, provides them with a "share" of its potent energy, to borrow a term from Guo Xiang's 郭象 (d. 312) commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, which accounts for their lifespan, capacity, and all other aspects of their being (Tang 1983, 295). Sages are exceptional beings, whose *qi*-endowment is extraordinarily pure and abundant. Consequently, he is without self-interest, impervious to corrupting influences from without, perfectly capable in every way, and is thus able to realize the reign of "great peace," an ideal which became firmly

established since the Han dynasty and to which Wei intellectuals were particularly drawn in view of the political disorder that they faced. The sage, in other words, is utterly different from ordinary human beings. This is a basic difference in *qi*-constitution, which amounts to a difference in kind and not in degree. This means that one cannot learn to become a sage – “sageness” is inborn and not the result of learning and effort. The idea that “sages do not have emotions” also implies that the sage alone, by virtue of his blessed nature and capacity, can realize the reign of great peace. Despite the fact that Fu Gu and He Yan were bitter enemies in politics, philosophically the two seem to have shared a similar vision of the nature of the Daoist universe and the role of the sage.

There is evidence that Zhong Hui also subscribed to this cluster of ideas. Zhong Hui’s father, Zhong You had in fact argued that sages are necessary for the realization of great peace. Opposed to this was Sima Lang 司馬朗 (d. 217), elder brother of Sima Yi, who maintained that it is possible to attain great peace even without the intervention of sages. What is crucial is that we learn from the ancient sages. If able and worthy individuals such as Yi Yin 伊尹 of the Shang dynasty and Yan Yuan 顏淵, the exemplary disciple of Confucius, were entrusted with governing the country, and if their policies would continue for several generations, then great peace may be realized (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 15: 468, biography of Sima Lang).

The view of Sima Lang seems to suggest that the difference between a sage, especially in the person of Confucius, and “worthies” (*xian* 賢) such as Yan Yuan is a matter of degree. Furthermore, it suggests that we can learn from the sages and worthies. This signals a Confucian approach to government that privileges benevolence and education over punishment and law. Benevolent government requires men of integrity and talent to serve the public good. Education is necessary to transmit the teaching of the sages and to lay a strong moral foundation. Laws and punishment may be necessary, but they do not detract from the Confucian project of moral transformation. In the administration of justice, care and compassion are required. Step by step, with rulers and ministers serving as examples, the transformative power of Confucian virtues would instill benevolence and propriety in the hearts of the people or at least render them willing and obedient subjects. In this way, lasting order and peace may be secured. The *Sanguozhi* offers that Sima Lang governed with

generosity and beneficence – “he did not rely on the whip and the cane, but the people did not violate any prohibitions” (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 15: 467). Zhong You, in contrast, is known especially for his ability to bring the guilty to justice and for his proposal to bring back certain forms of corporal punishment.³⁹

“Family learning” (*jiaxue* 家學), as is well known, plays an important role in early Chinese intellectual history. Zhong Hui seems to have followed his father’s view that only sages could realize the reign of great peace. If one believes that sages are inborn, probably one would not say that even those who are not sages could realize the reign of great peace. The uniqueness of the sage would then be inconsequential. This is consistent with Zhong Hui’s agreement with He Yan that sages are blessed with an extraordinary *qi*-constitution and are therefore without affective *qi*-disturbances. Following the same logic, Zhong Hui also has no reason not to believe in the existence of Daoist “immortals” (*xian* 仙). Like sages, immortals are born with a *qi*-constitution so rich and refined that they defy the limitations of human finitude. Chapter 10 of the *Laozi* asks, “Can you keep the spirit and embrace the One without departing from them” (載營魄抱一能無離乎)? Zhong Hui comments:

Zai is an exclamation particle. To manage and protect is what is meant by *ying*; form and *qi* constitute *po*. This means that the soul manages and protects its form and *qi*, so as to enable it to last long. (載，辭也。經護為營，形氣為魄，謂魂魄經護其形氣，使之長存也) (Quoted in *Wenxuan* 1997, 24.20b, 1147; cf. 60.20b, 2600 and 30.9a, 1399-1400).⁴⁰

Although sage nature is inborn, self-cultivation in the sense of careful tending of one’s *qi*-energies remains important. Chapter 16 of the *Laozi* states, “Attain utmost emptiness; maintain complete tranquility (致虛極守靜篤).” According to Zhong Hui,

“Attain” means to reach; (that is to say) eliminate emotions and worries to reach the ultimate of emptiness. The mind is always quiet, so as to maintain complete tranquility (致，至也。除情

慮至虛極也。心常寂守靜篤也) (Quoted in Li 1996, 3.10a).

Unlike sages and immortals, ordinary human beings are not free from the affects of desire and emotions. Just as indulging in rich food and drink would weigh us down and make us dull, desires “pollute” our system. We cannot learn to become a sage, but it is necessary to pursue self-cultivation aimed at diminishing desire and it is possible to nourish and purify one’s *qi*-endowment by means of certain substances and practices. Perhaps Zhong Hui, like He Yan, found value in taking certain drugs.⁴¹ In any event, Zhong Hui seems to be suggesting that self-cultivation can remove obstacles to personal fulfillment, prevent corruption of one’s nature, ensure that one’s capacity is developed fully, and perhaps even enhance one’s capacity to some extent. In this regard, Zhong Hui seems to align himself with the view of Ji Kang.⁴²

Given Zhong Hui’s understanding of *qi* and the nature of the sage, it is not surprising that he sided principally with Fu Gu in the *caixing* debate. Yet, the identity thesis seems to assume that what is endowed is both necessary and sufficient. Although native endowment is necessary for realized capacity, to Zhong Hui, it is not sufficient. Thus, when capacity is said to “coincide” with nature, Zhong Hui is in effect proposing that what is endowed is potential, which must be carefully nurtured and brought to completion. For immortals and sages, who are different in kind because of their exceptional *qi*-endowment, what is inner in the sense of innate capacity naturally manifests itself completely in extraordinary achievements. For ordinary human beings, however, nature does not amount to actual ability but only furnishes certain dispositions or directions of development. To be sure, if the native endowment is of an extremely poor quality, there is not much that can be done. Nevertheless, the real challenge to the identity thesis is that an excellent endowment may go to waste because the person succumbs to desire and would not learn. The inner provides the necessary capital, but it requires careful management and external control to yield profits.

If Li Feng’s view can be seen as a direct critique of Fu Gu’s position, then Zhong Hui is offering a modified identity thesis that takes into account the place of learning and effort. Zhong’s point is clearly not that whereas *xing* denotes moral character, *cai* should be understood exclusively in terms of

political ability. Zhong Hui is not saying that moral character and political ability somehow exist in a "harmonious" relationship, evoking the distinction between "identity" (*tong*) and "harmony" (*he* 和) that one finds, for example, in the *Lunyu* (13.23) and the *Zuozhuan* ("Duke Zhao 20th year").⁴³ Rather, working with the same general definition of *xing* as what is inborn and *cai* as encompassing all forms of talent and ability, his point is that human nature is constituted by innate capacity, which would become realized if properly nourished. In this sense, *cai* and *xing* are correlated or "coincide" (*he* 合).

Human beings are born with different capacities. On account of their varying *qi*-endowments, individuals have different strengths. For example, to borrow from Ji Kang, a person may possess courage but not intelligence because the two are constituted by different *qi*-configurations.⁴⁴ Only the sage is perfect and complete in every way. Thus, in affirming the identity of *caixing*, Fu Gu is not arguing that all able men are by definition virtuous. Some extraordinary individuals may have been gifted with abundant talent to excel in both ethics and politics, but these are exceptions. In fact, a common argument during the early Wei was that whereas political and military expertise should be valued in times of disorder, men with moral integrity are needed to govern the country in times of peace.⁴⁵ This seems to drive a wedge between political ability and virtuous character. Is it not the case that powerful political leaders often have little regard for morality? Indeed, does one not have to be ruthless and hardhearted to achieve great things? To Li Feng and Lu Yu, this is precisely the problem with Fu Gu's thesis. It sanctions the decoupling of virtue from ability and legitimizes unscrupulous men to gain power by means of their unsavory talents, whereas in their view Confucian ritual learning would ensure that ability is always grounded in virtue. However, in defense of the identity thesis, Zhong Hui maintains that although *cai* may vary, they stem from the same innate source. How could a piece of rotten wood, as Confucius says (*Lunyu* 5.10), be carved? For most people, there is a limit to what effort and training can accomplish. Because *qi*-endowments differ, it is therefore essential that the right people are identified and appointed to the right office. Further, even should one have the "right stuff," it is insufficient; self-cultivation is required. Nevertheless, one must have some material to begin with

in order to achieve the desired result. Thus, it cannot be said that the latter has nothing to do with the former.

In this context, Wang Guang adds a fourth view, which is stronger than Li Feng's and appears to be directed especially against Zhong Hui's position. Inborn nature does not provide the necessary fertile ground for cultivation; rather, it needs to be rectified by learning. Human beings are naturally driven by desire and therefore must rely on rituals and instruction to become responsible individuals. In this sense, capacity and nature do not "coincide" but "diverge" from each other.

This may be compared with the view of Xiang Xiu 向秀 (*circa* 227–280), a close friend of Ji Kang. In his "Refutation of Ji Kang's Essay on Nourishing Life," Xiang Xiu makes the point that "cravings and desires such as to like honor and dislike disgrace and to like ease and dislike labor are all born of nature (*ziran* 自然)."⁴⁶ Indeed, it is in the nature of the "principle of heaven" (*tianli* 天理) that human beings seek to "give full rein to their *qi*-nature (*xingqi* 性氣)," that is to say, their natural inclinations (Dai Mingyang 1962, 167).⁴⁷ Indulging in desires would of course lead to harmful excesses, but to go to the other extreme to diminish desires by means of abstinence or ascetic practice would be equally misguided. To do so would be like "not eating for the rest of one's life because one saw someone choke on food" (Dai Mingyang 1962, 163; cf. Henricks 1983, 33). Rather, as the sages of old have long pointed out, the solution lies in giving due measure to one's desires by means of ritual norms and conduct (*li* 禮). Precisely because *xing* is constituted by *qi*-energies, it finds natural expression in emotions and desires – "If you are alive, then you have emotions" (*yousheng ze youqing* 有生則有情), as Xiang Xiu unequivocally puts it – which need to be put into order by morality (Dai Mingyan 1962, 162; cf. Henricks 1983, 32).⁴⁸ This contrasts sharply with He Yan's point that sages are without emotions or Wang Bi's alternative view that the sage, on account of his "spirit-like luminosity" (*shenming* 神明), is not "burdened" (*lei* 累) by the affective dimension of human nature (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 795, n.1).⁴⁹ As such, in Wang Guang's account, sagely attainments cannot be regarded as having been endowed by heaven or having their roots in nature; on the contrary, they represent an overcoming of *xing* and result directly from effort and learning.

CONCLUSION

The debate on capacity and nature centers on the metaphor of "roots and branches" (*benmo* 本末), which is more than a literary device used widely in Chinese philosophical writings. It guides thinking and practice in that it provides a hermeneutical framework in which complex ideas may be analyzed and their fundamental relationships understood. The branches are not necessarily unimportant or problematic, although some scholars have emphasized the need to "cultivate the roots and curb the branches" (*wuben yimo* 務本抑末).⁵⁰ Luxuriant growth may signify the well-being of the people; consider also, for example, penal laws – though they may be deemed secondary by some when compared with the core Confucian virtues of benevolence and ritual propriety, few would argue that they should be abolished altogether. Nonetheless, the point remains that the roots must be established firmly before the branches can grow; in contrast, if one cares only for the branches and neglects the roots, decay will set in without fail. This renders imperative a clear understanding of the "roots" in human flourishing.

In a political context, given the ideal of "great peace," what are the "roots" that must be nurtured and protected? During the early Wei, there is little disagreement that political reforms were needed urgently, as the newly established dynasty sought to rebuild the Chinese empire after the demise of the Han and in the face of external threat from rival regimes. The legal system was one major concern; reforming the system of official appointment was another.

Finding the right people to serve in public office is always difficult. What complicates matters is the virtual monopoly of official positions by the elite. Under the influence of Han Confucianism, as mentioned, often a good "name" (*ming* 名) or reputation especially in terms of filial conduct and moral integrity was sufficient in gaining political office. As Xiahou Xuan rhetorically asks, "If a person is known among his family and clan for his filial and moral conduct, is it possible that he would not make a loyal and conscientious official?" (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 9: 295). Yet, this obviously raises the question of whether "names" are matched in "actuality" (*shi* 實), which already attracted significant attention among Later Han philosophers. In the early Wei government, many were keenly concerned that reputation

often proves to be empty – indeed, like “cakes painted on the ground,” as Emperor Ming observed, which may be good to look at but cannot be eaten (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 22:651). This may sound harmless, but the problem is serious because positions of authority in government could easily be occupied by those without substance, with dire sociopolitical consequences.

Factional interests were no doubt at play, but for our purposes, there are no villains in the *caixing* debate.⁵¹ The four views of the roots of capacity and nature share the same concern with establishing a strong political system that would bring order and enrich the state. To achieve that, however, it is necessary to get to the bottom of things and understand the very source of morality and human ability.

If capacity and nature were identical or correlated, individuals with high inborn capacity and moral qualities should be appointed and promoted. Such “talents” would be identified readily by those who are expert in assessing *caixing*, given that a fine *qi*-endowment would show in their appearance, bearing, speech, and action.⁵² However, those who truly know men, perhaps like Jiang Ji, are rare. Also, during the Han-Wei transition, after long years of civil strife, a great number of people were displaced so that there was a real need to establish an effective mechanism to manage precious human resource. What, then, is the best way to recruit talent? As a matter of political practice, according to Fu Gu, outstanding individuals should be recommended to the central government through the elders of their village or native place, who would be in the best position to identify and recommend them, having had the opportunity to observe them closely and for a long period of time. During the early years of the Wei dynasty, Fu Gu’s benefactor, Chen Qun had tried to put in place a system of appointment based on recommendation and evaluation by local leaders and provincial assessors. By the time of Emperor Ming, however, with a stronger central government, the power of the Grand Secretariat, of which the Personnel Secretariat forms a part, had grown considerably. To Fu Gu, then, it is necessary to reaffirm the role of the local elite in the system of official appointment. The concentration of power at the Personnel Secretariat opens the door for manipulation and risks subverting the government’s effort in recruiting the right people and making full use of their capacity, which if not arrested

would strike at the roots of good governance (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 21: 623).⁵³

In practice, this probably tended to favor the elite, who supplied both the judges of character and the candidates for appointment. Bright prospects from distinguished families like Zhong Hui and Wang Bi would have been identified as promising "material" from young. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the basic insight that unless a sage arises to realize the perfect reign, the task of establishing order rests with a relatively small group of top talents endowed by heaven with a fine *caixing*. Because the common people are limited by their poor *qi*-constitution, strict laws may be needed to curb disorder. With the best people in power, one can be assured that punishment will be meted out fairly and that the interests of the people will be served. Again, possible political rivalries should be recognized, but the more fundamental point is that Fu Gu's view on *caixing* would commit him to certain positions regarding official appointment, law, and government at large.

If nature and capacity were different or divergent, in place of lineage – or "good genes," one might say – effort and performance would be the deciding factors. This would tend to widen the pool of candidates for official appointment. Examinations in specified Confucian subjects (*Lunyu* 11.3) should allow a more objective measure of ability. To ensure that officials perform, a rigorous system of appraisal at the central government should be established. In appointing officials, the danger of nepotism can hardly be overstated. Rather than hoping to find extraordinary talents, as Lu Yu argues, there is merit to appointing "ordinary scholars" (*changshi* 常士) who are "in awe of the teachings (of the sages) and look up to the good" (*weijiao mushan* 畏教慕善) (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 22: 651–652). Rather than placing one's hope for prosperity and peace on a small group of men, the key to recruiting the best people and thus creating a strong government lies in appointing deserving individuals with proven track records through due *process*.⁵⁴ This need not translate into a reliance on law, to which supporters of the identity thesis seem partial, in order to control the "branches." On the contrary, once it is clear that learning is decisive in forming character and ability, every effort should be made to implement Confucian education. People can learn to become worthy and able individuals; laws and punishment are inferior to ritual and moral self-cultivation in

realizing a regime of benevolence and peace. Once the proper values take roots and pervade society, even without the intervention of sages, great peace may be attained.

The debate on *caixing* thus proves to be more than a terminological quarrel. It is concerned with “names” and “actuality,” but it does not appear to be motivated by the kind of logical inquiry into the semantics of “identity” and “difference” characteristic of the “School of Names” (*mingjia* 名家) in early Chinese philosophy.⁵⁵ Rather, the debate probes the “roots” of capacity and nature in order to lay a solid foundation for political renewal. The four views engage one another in coming to terms with the basis of goodness and other forms of excellence. The debate on human nature forms a part of the received tradition in third-century China, and certainly traces of Mencius, Gaozi, Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, Yang Xiong, and Wang Chong can be detected in the discourse on *caixing*. Nevertheless, the wisdom of the past must be reinterpreted to suit the needs of a new era.

Although the political emphasis is clear, the *caixing* debate is also connected with the larger issues of ethics of cosmology, with self-realization and the ideal of the sage. Philosophers of the early Wei are consistent in their insight into the “roots and branches” of the “mysterious” Dao. To some, it is the primacy of the “One,” understood as “nonbeing” (*wu* 無), over the “many” (*you* 有) that must be recognized.⁵⁶ To others, however, *wu* and *you* are interdependent and the key to understanding the “roots and branches” is to be found in the relationship between the “inner” (*nei* 內) and the “outer” (*wai* 外).⁵⁷ Does it follow that a person’s capacity stems from within in the sense that it is inborn? Can a person learn to become a sage? Is it true that, in the words of Mencius, “the sage and I are the same in kind?” (*Mencius* 6A:7; cf. 4B:32).⁵⁸ What is the role of learning and effort in the quest for great peace? These questions go beyond the immediate concern with the selection and appointment of officials. More precisely, as Julia Ching pointed out, “wisdom” in Chinese tradition encompasses “an integrated whole”; while a strong “practical dimension” may feature in the foreground, it is embedded in a unified quest for meaning that harbors profound metaphysical and spiritual interests (Ching 1997, x). Although the debate on *caixing* does not invoke the language of “exalting being” (*chongyou* 崇有) or “valuing nonbeing” (*guiwu* 貴無) that marks the “learning of

the mysterious Dao" (*xuanxue*),⁵⁹ it forms an integral part of the unfolding of early medieval Chinese philosophy.

NOTES

1. All quotations from the *Shishuo xinyu* are taken from Yang Yong's edition and will be cited by their chapter and section numbers. The *Shishuo xinyu* attests to the importance of the *caixing* debate in a number of places; e.g., see 4.51, 4.60. Yin Hao's biography is found in *Jinshu* (*juan* 77, 2043–2048). All references to the standard or "dynastic" histories will be cited by their *juan* and page numbers.

2. In his *Jiezishu* (誠子書); see Wang Sengqian's biography in *Nan Qi shu* (1972, 33: 598–599). On Wang's work, see Yu Yingshi (1993).

3. Liu Jun, citing the *Weizhi* (Records of the Wei) here, indicates that Zhong Hui's work was widely "circulated" among the elite. However, it was no longer available by the time Liu wrote his commentary to the *Shishuo xinyu* in the early sixth century. Zhong Hui's biography is given in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 28: 784–795), from which we also learn that Zhong "at one time discussed the identity and difference of *caixing*" (795).

4. See *Sanguozhi* (1982, 4: 117–131), biography of Cao Fang, who ascended the throne when he was eight. See also *Sanguozhi* (1982, 9: 284), biography of Cao Shuang; and *Jinshu* (1974, 1: 16), biography of Sima Yi. In English, Rudolf Wagner, *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator*, and Alan K.L. Chan, *Two Visions of the Way* both contain a general discussion of the Zhengshi context.

5. *Jinshu* (1974, 49: 1360), biography of Ruan Ji (阮籍) (210–263). For translation of Chinese official titles, I follow, with modifications where appropriate, Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*.

6. See Fu Gu's biography in the *Sanguozhi* (1982, 21: 622–628). The name "Fu Gu" is probably pronounced "Fu Jia" in classical Chinese; see *Shuowen jiezi zhu* (1988, 88). *Jinshu* (1974, 39: 1150) reports that Xun Yi (荀顗) (d. 274) played a role in Fu Gu's rescue. Xun Yi was the brother-in-law of Chen Qun and the son of Xun Yu (荀彧), a major figure in early Wei politics and close friend of Zhong Hui's father. Xun Yi (荀顗), however, criticized Zhong Hui's interpretation of the *Yijing*; see *Sanguozhi*

(1982, 10: 319, n.2). Fu Gu was also a close friend of Xun Yi's brother, Xun Can (荀粲) and shared his critical assessment of He Yan with him; see *Sanguozhi* (2001, 21: 623–624, n.2) and *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 7.3).

7. *Sanguozhi* (1982, 9: 299–301), biography of Xiahou Xuan (夏侯玄), especially n.3, provides relevant details. Li Feng plotted with Xiahou Xuan against Sima Shi and was killed immediately. Zhong Hui's elder brother, Zhong Yu (鍾毓) (d. 263) was in charge of the trial of the others involved in this incident. See also *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 5.6) and commentary, and *Jinshu* (1992, 2: 27).

8. See Zhong You's biography in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 13: 391–399), as well as Xun Yu's biography in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 10: 307–319) and *Hou Hanshu* (1965, 70: 2280–2290). The name “Zhong You” may also be pronounced “Zhong Yao.” I follow the standard reading here, although the second reading seems to find support from the *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 25.2). Zhong You is also a noted calligrapher. See Howard L. Goodman, “The Calligrapher Chung Yu (ca. 163–230) and the Demographics of a Myth.”

9. Perhaps Zhong Hui did not tie his political fortunes entirely with the Cao faction. In 244, Zhong Yu had incurred the wrath of Cao Shuang when he criticized Cao's campaign against the kingdom of Shu (蜀). Subsequently, Zhong Yu was removed from the capital to serve as governor of the Wei commandery (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 13: 400; cf. *Sanguozhi* 1982, 9: 283). Zhong Hui's mother also had warned that Cao's hold on power might not last long (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 786, n.1). Nevertheless, as we shall see, Zhong Hui was evidently close to He Yan in intellectual terms during the Zhengshi era.

10. Jiang Ji is famous for his view that to “know a person” (*zhiren* 知人), one only needs to look into his eyes, a view which bears on the *caixing* debate. More will be said about this later; see n. 52 below.

11. Biography of Wang Ling. The commentary in the *Shishuo xinyu* mentions Wang Guang's participation in the *caixing* debate. Wang Guang was promoted to head one of the Grand Secretariats (*shangshu*) before he died.

12. Another important study that emphasizes the political background of the *caixing* debate is Tang Changru (唐長孺), “Wei Jin *caixing lun de zhengzhi yiyi*”. See also Hou Wailu (侯外

廬) et al., *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* (中國思想通史) (1980, 3: 51–59).

13. There is a large literature on *qingtan*. A good introduction is Tang Yiming (唐翼明), *Wei Jin qingtan* (魏晉清談). See also the insightful work of Wang Xiaoyi (1991). The classic work by Aoki Masaru (青木正兒) should also be mentioned. "Pure conversation" can hardly be understood without reference to the "learning of the mysterious (Dao)" (*xuanxue* 玄學), or "Neo-Daoism" as *xuanxue* has been described in some Western sources. *Xuanxue* was established as a branch of official learning during the fifth century, focusing on especially the *Yijing*, *Laozi*, and *Zhuangzi*, then collectively referred to as the "three treatises on the profound mystery" (*sanxuan* 三玄). It was then applied retrospectively to the thought of the early Wei period, which was seen to have initiated the movement and indeed represented the "golden age" of *xuanxue* philosophy. *Xuanxue* is not an "anti-Confucian" movement but rather a broad philosophical front that aims at recovering the truth of the Dao, which the sages of old, especially Confucius, had clearly discerned but which, allegedly, had been distorted by scholars during the Han dynasty. For present purposes, it is enough to point out that the *caixing* debate forms a main topic of early medieval Chinese intellectual discourse and contributes significantly to the development of *xuanxue* philosophy. On *xuanxue* and Wei-Jin thought, see Wang Baoxuan (王葆玄) (1987), Horiike Nobuo (堀池信夫) (1988); and Xu Kangsheng (許抗生), et al. (1989). Wang Baoxuan's work is perhaps the most substantial on the subject in recent years.

14. *Sanguozhi* (1982, 21: 627; and 628, n.1). Fu Gu recognized Zhong Hui's sharp mind and befriended him, but he also warned Zhong not to be proud, after the latter had gained the trust of Sima Zhao. Cf. n.3 above.

15. Wang suggests that the work was probably completed in 256, because in that year, according to the *Sanguozhi* (1982, 4: 134), Zhong summarized a discussion on the relative merits of certain ancient kings that transpired at a banquet hosted by the Wei emperor. Although there may be overlaps, the two topics seem nonetheless too different to be collapsed into one treatise on *caixing*. Because of Zhong Hui's friendship with Fu Gu, Liu Rulin (劉汝霖), in his classic *Han Jin xueshu bian nian* (漢晉學術編年), traces the *caixing* debate to 253. Wang Baoxuan (1987, 402–

403), speculates that it was Li Feng who started the debate on *caixing*, followed in turn by Fu Gu, Wang Guang, and finally Zhong Hui. No reason was given; perhaps Wang Baoxuan considered age to be a factor. Given the lack of historical evidence and on logical grounds as detailed in the discussion below, I believe that the sequence as reported in the commentary to the *Shishuo xinyu* should be accepted.

16. On another occasion, perhaps not long after 249, Zhong Hui was snubbed by Ji Kang (*Shishuo xinyu*, 1992, 24.3; cf. Mather 1976, 393). Later, Zhong Hui led the charge that resulted in the death of Ji Kang in 262. On this, see *Sanguozhi* (1982, 21: 606, n.1; and 28: 787); also see *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 6.2, commentary; and 24.3); and *Jinshu* (1972, 49: 1373). Despite Zhong Hui's later animosity towards Ji Kang, at first he was evidently drawn to Ji Kang as an intellectual. This may provide an important clue to a reconstruction of the *caixing* debate (see n.42 below). The name "Ji Kang" is pronounced "Xi Kang" in classical Chinese. Zhong Hui has also been accused of trying to bring harm to Ruan Ji (see *Jinshu* 1974, 49: 1360). According to Ōgami Masami (大上正美), Zhong Hui should be understood as a "tragic" figure (1988, 17-29).

17. Much confusion surrounds this point, because the *Shishuo xinyu* identifies the four proponents of the *caixing* debate also by their rank. This is partly why I have included an account of their political career here. Fu Gu is identified as "Grand Secretary" (*shangshu*), Li Feng as *zhongshu ling*, Zhong Hui as *shilang*, and Wang Guang as *tunqi xiaowei*. Given that Wang Guang died in 251 and that Li Feng did not become Director of the Central Secretariat until 252, the titles cited do not give any clear indication of the time of the debate or when the *Siben lun* was written. It is possible that whereas the four views were put forward before 251, Zhong Hui did not put brush to paper until after Li Feng became *zhongshu ling* in 252. The difficulty, however, is that Wang Guang was promoted to *shangshu* shortly before his death. Technically, he should have been identified by his last-held title. Perhaps Zhong Hui and later scholars remembered Wang Guang by the earlier title he had held when he first put forward his view on *caixing*. Given the lack of evidence, the matter cannot be resolved. Wang Xiaoyi (1996, 113) traces the *caixing* debate to the Zhengshi period. Zhu Xiaohai (朱曉海) (1980).

18, Fu Gu's criticism of Li Feng is recorded in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 21: 628, n.4), which also mentions that Fu Gu was on good terms with Zhong Yu, Zhong Hui's brother. Besides Xun Yi, Xun Can, and Zhong Yu, Fu Gu's close friends included Jiang Ji, Pei Hui (裴徽), Chen Tai (陳泰) and He Zeng (何曾). Pei Hui was a major figure among the early Wei elite, whose famous exchange with Wang Bi on Laozi and Confucius is well remembered in later sources. Chen Tai was the son of Chen Qun. He Zeng was the son of He Kui 何夔, whose advice to Cao Cao on appointment policy reflects the same position as Fu Gu's. The *Sanguozhi* (1982, 12: 381; 381–382, nn.1–2) shows the close connection between Fu Gu's family and He Kui's. The issue of official appointment will be discussed later.

19. Wang Bi's biography by He Shao 何劭 (d. ca. 300) is preserved in the commentary to Zhong Hui's; see *Sanguozhi* 28: 795–796n.1.

20. "He Yan maintained that the sage does not have (such basic emotions as) fondness, anger, sorrow, and joy. His views were extremely cogent, on which Zhong Hui and others elaborated." I will come back to this point in connection with Zhong Hui's view on *caixing*. Wang Bi, in contrast, disagree with He Yan on this, which goes to show that political alignment need not dictate philosophical direction.

21. Moreover, Sima Yi was able to appoint able and worthy individuals to office and had control of the military. Thus, Wang Guang concludes, it would be difficult to bring down the Sima government. See *Sanguozhi* 28: 759n.1, citing the *Han Jin chunqiu*; however, Pei Songzhi, the commentator of the *Sanguozhi*, doubted the veracity of this report. It is worth noting that Wang Guang married the daughter of Zhuge Dan (諸葛誕), who was close to Xiahou Xuan and other members of the Cao Shuang faction. Zhuge's biography is found in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 28: 769); see also *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 19.9). It may be mentioned also that Jiang Ji, who commended Wang Guang, was a central figure in the Sima Yi camp. See Jiang Ji's biography in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 14: 450–456); cf. *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 33.7, commentary).

22. This is highlighted in Chen Yinque's essay (1974, 605), and cited with approval in Yu Yingshi (余英時) (1984, 351). Tang Changru's view is more nuanced and applies this distinction to Li Feng's, Zhong Hui's, and Wang Guang's positions, as we shall see. Modern scholars generally either subscribe to this view

or concede that the arguments on *caixing* can no longer be reconstructed. For example, see He Qimin (1967, 67); Zhao Shulian (趙書廉) (1992, 234); Kong Fan (孔繁) (1995, 43); Zhou Shaoxian (周紹賢) and Liu Guijie (劉貴傑) (1996, 34); Xu Bin (徐斌) (2000, 109); and Gao Chenyang (高晨陽) (2000, 95). Cf. n.31 below.

23. Again, where Mencius speaks only of *cai*, Zhao Qi makes clear in his commentary that Mencius means *caixing*; as cited in Jiao Xun (焦循) (1966).

24. D.C. Lau translates *cai* as “native endowment” (1984, 229). Compare W.A.C.H. Dobson (1963, 113), who uses “natural endowment”; and James Legge (1970, 402), who uses “natural powers”. Kwong-loi Shun explains, “That is, *ts'ai* [*cai*] is an endowment that enables one to attain certain accomplishments” (Shun 1997, 219).

25. A good introduction to the concept of *qi* can be found in Benjamin Schwartz (1985, 179-184). Even in the *Mencius*, there is evidence that the concept of *qi* plays an important role; see Alan K.L. Chan (2002, 42-71). The concept of *qi* underlies Wang Chong’s philosophy. For this reason, he should appreciate Fu Gu’s position, despite the fact that in some instances Wang Chong seems to distinguish *xing* as moral conduct from *cai* understood especially in terms of intellectual ability. For example, Wang Chong writes, “Intelligence and foolishness in dealing with affairs, and purity and corruptness in conduct, these are (matters of) *xing* and *cai* (respectively)”; see *Lunheng* 3, “Minglu” 命祿 (Huang 1990, 1:19); cf. Forke (1962, 145). However, on the whole, it seems clear that Wang Chong is guided by the idea that both capacity and nature are determined by *qi*. Okamura Shigeru (岡村繁) has scrutinized Wang Chong’s view in some detail (1962, 29-42). This is essentially a critical review of Tang Changru’s essay on the political meaning of the *caixing* debate. See also Mou Zongsan (1993) for an extended discussion of Wang Chong’s philosophy of *qi* and its influence on Wei-Jin thought.

26. Yuan Zhun was the son of Yuan Huan 袁渙, who served under Cao Cao. A brief reference to Yuan Zhun is found in Yuan Huan’s biography in *Sanguozhi* 11: 335-36n.1. Yuan Zhun served under the early Jin regime; see *Jinshu* (1974, 83: 2170).

27. Ji Kang also writes, “When you see a straight piece of wood, you would definitely not make it into a wheel, nor would you make a piece of wood that is bent into a straight rafter. This is

because you would not want to waste their heaven-endowed capacity (*tiancai* 天才) but rather to enable them to realize what they have been endowed" (Ji 1962b, 124-125; cf. *Zhuangzi* 1968, 104). *Zhuangzi's* point, however, is that "as far as inborn nature is concerned ... the clay and the wood surely have no wish to be subjected to compass and square, curve and the plumb line" (*ibid.*).

28. Yuan's remarks on *caixing* are preserved in the *Yiwen leiju* (藝文類聚) (1995, *juan* 21, 1769). The concern with capacity and nature also figures prominently in the third-century work, *Renwu zhi* (人物志) by Liu Shao (劉劭) (Liu 1937). See the important study by Tang Yongtong (湯用彤) (1983, 196-213); see also Horiike (1988, 432-434).

29. *Sanguozhi* (1982, 11: 336) does report that Yuan Zhun's elder brother Yuan Kan 袁侃 was close to his fellow clansman Yuan Liang 袁亮, who abhorred He Yan.

30. Biography of Ruan Yu. The *Wenxin diaolong* (文心雕龍) (1983, 200-201). See also *Nan shi* (1975, 75: 1875, biography of Gu Huan 顧歡) for Gu's assessment of the debate toward the end of the fifth century.

31. As mentioned, this is the view of Tang Changru, (1978a, 300). The same view is presented in Yang yong (1992, 150) and Guo (1987, 36). Wang Baoxuan (1987, 392) offers that although the term *caixing* refers properly to "material" (*cailiao* 材料) and "quality" (*xingzhi* 性質), it refers by extension to "ability" (*caineng*) and "moral conduct" (*caoxing* 操行). Wang also makes use of the distinction between that which is above shape and form (*xing er shang*) and that which is within the realm of forms (*xing er xia*) to explain *xing* and *cai*, respectively, in this debate. This seems anachronistic; although the distinction has its roots in the *Yijing*, it did not gain philosophical currency until much later. Wang Xiaoyi (1987, 92-100) criticizes the political reading, but he also argues that *cai* means essentially political ability for Li Feng, Zhong Hui, and Wang Guang. The debate hinges on their different reading of *xing*, according to Wang Xiaoyi. Whereas for Fu Gu, *xing* means "material" or "original substance" (*zhi* 質 or *benzhi* 本質), in Li Feng's view *xing* refers to moral nature and conduct. To Zhong Hui, *xing* means "character" (*xingge* 性格); to Wang Guang, it means "disposition" (*qizhi* 氣質). It is unclear in what ways the last two views differ or how they are related to Fu

Gu's view. Zhu Xiaohai, "Caixing siben lun ceyi," generally takes *xing* to mean moral virtue (*de* 德).

32. Biography of Lu Yu. Lu Yu was the son of Lu Zhi (盧植), one of the most important Confucian scholars of the Later Han period. Lu Yu was replaced by He Yan as *libu shangshu* at the start of the Zhengshi reign; the *Sanguozhi* elsewhere relates that He Yan and his circle of friends had long thought ill of Lu and when they came into power, tried to remove him from office (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 9: 284, biography of Cao Shuang). After 249, Lu Yu resumed his post in charge of appointments; see *Jinshu* (1974, 2: 26).

33. For example, Wang Xiaoyi and Xu Kangsheng, et al., connect Lu Yu's view with Li Feng's. In contrast, Wang Baoxuan (1987, 409) and Zhu Xiaohai (1980, 208) both consider this to be representative of Fu Gu's thesis. None provides explicit justification. Tang Changru (1978a, 309) argues that Lu Yu's view reflects Zhong Hui's position.

34. The word *qi* (器) in the phrase *cai bu zhong qi* (才不中器) literally denotes a "vessel," but it is semantically linked to the idea of "function" (*yong*). The sentence suggests a contrast between reputation and actuality.

35. Biography of Liu Shao. This took place between 237 and 239.

36. See further discussion on the metaphor of "roots and branches" below.

37. I have discussed Zhong Hui's *Laozi* learning in a separate article, with a translation of the extant quotations from his commentary (Chan, *forthcoming*). The article explored Zhong Hui's contribution to the *caixing* debate, leaving aside much of the detail presented here.

38. For the *Laozi* original, see Wing-tsit Chan (1967). In comparison, the concept of *qi* plays little role in Wang Bi's *Laozi* commentary. Wang Bi is not necessarily denying the generative function and pervasive presence of *qi* in the Daoist world, but he is saying that the *Laozi* is concerned with a "higher" truth.

39. Zhong You was discerning in his judgment and meted out punishment proportionate to the crime (*mingcha dangfa* 明察當法) (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 13:407). This is said in contrast to Wang Lang (王朗), who emphasized caution in applying punishment, that heavy punishment should be avoided whenever doubt exists (*zuiyi congqing* 罪疑從輕). Zhong You was a strong proponent

for reinstating corporal punishment involving dismemberment and mutilation (*rouxing* 肉刑), which were abolished during the Former Han dynasty. In 216, Cao Cao set out to reform the justice system and asked Chen Qun to develop his father's (Chen Ji 陳紀) view on criminal punishment. Zhong You was then Commissioner of Justice (*dali* 大理) and proposed with Chen Qun to reintroduce the ancient practice of *rouxing* (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 13: 397–99; and 22: 634). Zhong Yu, Zhong You's eldest son, later occupied the same justice post that his father once held (albeit renamed *tingwei* 廷尉) and, as mentioned, was responsible for the prosecution of Li Feng in 254. The Zhong family came into prominence with Zhong Hao (鍾皓) (ca. 88–156) and was especially known for its expertise in law (*xinglü* 刑律) (*Hou Hanshu* 1965, 62: 2064; cf. *Sanguozhi* 1982, 13: 391–392, n.1). Incidentally, Chen Qun's grandfather, Chen Shi (陳寔), was a close friend of Zhong Hao (*Hou Hanshu* 1965, 62:2064; and 62: 2065–2069, biography of Chen Shi). Among those who argued for leniency as a guiding principle in the application of punishment, besides Sima Lang and Wang Lang, was Lu Yu (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 22: 650). Wang Guang's father, Wang Ling was a friend of Sima Lang from young (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 758).

40. Zhong Hui was also an accomplished poet. In a *fu* poem on the chrysanthemum (*Juhua fu* 菊花賦), he writes: "Thus, the chrysanthemum is of merit on five scores ... (if ingested) it flows within and renders the body light; it is the food of immortals" (Yan 1995, 1188).

41. The *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 2.14), reports, "He Yan once said, 'Whenever I take a five-mineral powder [*wushisan*], not only does it heal any illness I may have, but I am also aware of my spirit and intelligence becoming receptive and lucid"; (translated in Mather 1976, 36). The commentator Liu Jun adds, "Although the prescription ... originated during the Han period, its users were few ... It was ... He Yan who first discovered its divine properties, and from his time on it enjoyed a wide currency in the world." On the use of drugs by the literati during the Wei-Jin period, see the classic study by Lu Xun (魯迅) (1972, 77-93).

42. Ji Kang is explicit both in maintaining that immortals embody the finest *qi*-energies and in his emphasis on self-cultivation (Horiike, 1988, 503-524; Xu 1989, 194-233; Henricks 1983, 21-70; Holzman 1957, chap. 3). Perhaps this is one reason why Zhong Hui wanted to befriend Ji Kang and to show him his

work on *caixing*. In any case, it should not be assumed that because Zhong Hui opposed Ji Kang politically, the two therefore must have held rival philosophical views (Ôgami 2000, 24). Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that Zhong Hui considered Ji Kang to be a political foe during the Zhengshi period, or even during the Jiaping (嘉平) reign (249–254) that immediately followed, despite the fact that Ji Kang had refused his friendly overtures. In an earlier essay, under the influence of the widely-held political interpretation of the *caixing* debate, I made the same error in distancing Ji Kang from Fu Gu's and Zhong Hui's views on *caixing* because of his "anti-Sima" stance. This should be corrected (see "Xi Kang" 2003, 790). The article was completed in 1996, although it did not see print until recently. According to Holzman, the *caixing* debate arose several years after the death of Wang Bi. Whereas Fu Gu's and Zhong Hui's theses reflect the interests of those in power, Li Feng's and Wang Guang's allow greater room for personal development (8–9).

43. This would follow only if *xing* and *cai* are two distinct entities. That is to say, although moral character is different from the ability to manage the affairs of state, they complement each other and form a "harmonious" whole. In this way, Zhong Hui is seen to be modifying Li Feng's thesis. The argument here, however, is that for Zhong Hui nature is inborn and is characterized by capacity, understood as potential.

44. Ji Kang states, "Intelligence and courage are (constituted by) different *qi*; the two cannot produce each other" (see Ji 1962a, 249; cf. Henricks 1983, 127).

45. A clear example of this is found in *Sanguozhi* (1982, 22: 646, biography of Xu Xuan (徐宣) citing a recommendation by Huan Fan (桓範). As is well known, the distinction has been applied to Cao Cao – a "hero" in a time of chaos when the world cries out for a strong leader but whose disregard for virtue would make him a "villain" in a well-governed world (See *Hou Hanshu* 1965, 22: 2234; *Sanguozhi* 1982, 1: 2–3); and *Shishuo xinyu* (1982, 7.1); cf. Mather (1976, 196).

46. As translated in Henricks (1983, 32), modified (quotation from Dai Mingyang, 1962, 162).

47. Henricks (1983, 36) translates *xingqi* as "natures and moods."

48. This calls to mind, as Henricks points out, Xunzi's statement that "Beings that possess desires and those that do not

belong to two different categories – the categories of the living and the dead" (1983, 32, n.4). Cf. Knoblock (1994, 135), "On the Correct Use of Names". The *Xunzi* may be corrupt here, but it is clearly of the view that human beings are born with desires. In the same essay, as is well known, Xunzi defines *xing* as "that which a person is born with" and as characterized by emotions (cf. Knoblock 1994, 127).

49. Cf. n.20 above. For Wang Bi, the fact that sages are not enslaved by emotions and desires does not entail that they are a different kind of being. This implies that it is possible to become a sage.

50. This is the view of the Later Han scholar Wang Fu (王符) (d. 157). Wang Fu explains that "cultivating the roots and curbing the branches" is the key to proper governance and that creating wealth for the people and education are the "roots" and foundation of great peace (Wang 1985, *Qianfulun* 1.2, "Wuben" 務本, 14).

51. Chen (1974, 601-605) makes the point that Cao Cao, whose father was the adopted son of a eunuch and thus outside the circle of the Confucian cultural elite, saw the need and took steps to degrade the power of the elite families who dominated politics and perpetuated their dominance by monopolizing official appointments. However, by the Zhengshi period, the legitimacy of the Cao ruling house was no longer an issue, and the elite were not necessarily opposed to reform. The following remarks leave aside the more technical details of the early Wei system of appointing officials, in particular the so-called "nine grade" system, for which see especially Tang Changru (1978b, 85-126). See also Tang's "Dong-Han moqi de daxing mingshi" (1983, 25-52). The point to note is that the system was fluid during the early Wei.

52. If capacity is constituted by *qi*-energies, the "inner" naturally manifests itself in a person's appearance. This is analogous to the expression of emotions, which are also constituted by *qi*; thus, for example, anger, which is understood as a stirring and concentration of *qi*-movements, surges forth from within and can be seen in a person's face. In the same way, Jiang Ji, Fu Gu's close friend, argues that it is possible to "know a person" – i.e., to assess his capacity – especially by looking into his eyes. Indeed, when Zhong Hui was four, his father sent him to see Jiang Ji, who proclaimed that he was "extraordinary" (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 28: 784; and *Shishuo xinyu* 1992, 2.12). This may

have been said out of respect for Zhong You, but it is clear that the belief was widespread. The *Shishuo xinyu* (1992, 8.8) relates that according to Pei Kai 裴楷, looking at Zhong Hui is like viewing an “armory” – “one only sees spears and lances” (cf. Mather 1976, 212). A similar account is found in *Jinshu* (1974, 35: 1050). Pei Kai was the son of Pei Hui 裴徽, who as mentioned was also close to Fu Gu. Zhong Hui himself is recognized as an expert in identifying talent and assessing character. He recommended Pei Kai to office based on his assessment that Pei was “pure and penetrating” (*qingtong* 清通) (see *Shishuo xinyu* 1992, 8.5 and 8.6; cf. 1.17; *Sanguozhi* 1982, 23: 674, n.2; *Jinshu* 1974, 35: 1047). The idea that a person’s “inner” being can be judged by the “brightness” of his eyes has a long history – see, for example, *Mencius* (4A:15 and 7A:21).

53. This forms a part of Fu Gu’s criticism of Liu Shao introduced earlier. Fu Gu begins by saying that Liu Shao had devoted his effort to reconstructing the records of promotion and dismissal of officials in previous dynasties. This is a matter of measuring performance, which to Fu Gu is not as important as selecting the right talent for office. For Chen Qun’s role in establishing the “nine grade” system, see *Sanguozhi* 22: 635. Earlier, He Kui had similarly recommended to Cao Cao that local assessment should form the backbone of official appointment. To prevent abuse, He Kui adds, those who made false declarations should be punished (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 12: 381). According to Xiahou Xuan, although recommendations at the local level should be valued, the power to appoint officials rightly resides at the centre with the Grand Secretariat (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 9: 295).

54. This point is highlighted in an exchange between Jiang Ji and Wei Zhen 衛臻, who was at one time in charge of appointments during the reign of Emperor Ming. Jiang Ji asks: Why is it necessary to adhere unbendingly to the process of testing an individual before appointing him? If someone has talent, he should be recognized and appointed, as emperors of old have done. In reply, Wei Zhen charges that Jiang Ji was in effect promoting “unorthodox” or irregular appointment aimed at creating opportunities for perceived “extraordinary” men, which would lead to abuse and disorder (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 22: 648). Wei Zhen also remonstrates that officials should not be allowed to encroach on one another’s jurisdictions, which further brings out the emphasis on process. In contrast, in connection with Emperor

Ming’s edict to review the system of official appointment, Du Shu (杜恕) emphasizes the need to focus on people, as opposed to process (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 16: 500). Whether a person is capable or not, according to Du Shu, rests on his “original nature” (*benxing*) (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 16: 504). As the recluse Sun Deng (孫登) told Ji Kang, “As human beings are born, they are endowed with capacity”; as such, the important thing is to put a person’s *cai* to proper use (see *Jinshu* 1974, 94: 2426; cf. *Shishuo xinyu* 1992, 18.2; and *Sanguozhi* 1982, 21: 605–606, n.1). Du Shu’s family was close to Li Feng’s, although Du Shu’s father had found Li Feng to be lacking (*Sanguozhi* 1982, 16: 498, n.4). When young, Du Shu, Li Feng and Yuan Kan (see n.29 above) were good friends, but Li Feng later resented Du Shu (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 16: 498, n.1; 502, n.1; and 505). Du Shu’s memorials also underscore the importance of Confucian learning and criticize strongly the reliance on “Legalist” policies, which seem to distance him from those who emphasize the strict application of punishment. As mentioned, political philosophy and family connections are complex, crisscrossing at different points. Although I have given some attention to the relationships among the key figures involved in the *caixing* debate, it would be simplistic to assume that the views of early Wei scholars can be reduced to two opposing camps. Fu Gu and Lu Yu, for example, were united in their opposition to He Yan, but they disagree in their approach to *caixing*.

55. Hou Wailu et al. (1980, 50) emphasizes the influence of the early logicians such as Hui Shi and Gongsun Long on the development of Wei-Jin philosophy. This is developed further in Horiike (1988, , 429–433), although Horiike also recognizes the importance of political issues, especially those pertaining to law reform. Wang Baoxuan (1987, 406–408) makes a similar point. In this regard, the work by the Jin scholar Lu Sheng (魯勝) on the logical chapters of the *Mozi* is often cited as support for the influence of the School of Names on Wei-Jin thought (see *Jinshu* 1974, 94: 2433–2434). The debate on *caixing* displays logical rigor and consistency, but on the whole I think Tang Yongtong is right that the concern with names during the Wei-Jin period is different from that of the early logicians (see Tang 1983, 202). The *caixing* debate seems to be motivated by a wider interest in “wisdom,” by a unified concern to realize “great peace.”

56. This is, of course, represented by Wang Bi, for whom the concept of “nonbeing” captures the “roots” in both ethics and ontology. The “branches” may reflect the luxuriant flourishing of the Dao, but they can also represent superficiality and alienation from the Dao. This ambiguity is carried over into Wang Bi’s political philosophy (see Chan 1991, 77–80; and Wang Xiaoyi (1987, 265–274). On *benmo* as a guiding theme in Wang Bi’s philosophy, see also Yu (1991, 159–162).

57. In Zhong Hui’s *Laozi* commentary, the relationship between “being” and “nonbeing” is subsumed under the relationship between the “outer” and the “inner.” This gives a different reading of the *benmo* relationship. Unlike Wang Bi, who assumes that the roots are always more important than the branches, Zhong Hui tries to balance the inner and the outer.

58. To be sure, Mencius’ point is that all men can become a sage like Yao and Shun; see, for example, *Mencius* 6B:2. By the early Wei period, some might consider Confucius, the ideal sage, to be so exalted as to preclude anyone else from being able to match his accomplishments.

59. As is well known, Pei Wei (裴頠) (Pei Hui’s grand-nephew) is reported to have written two treatises entitled *Chongyou* and *Guiwu* (see *Sanguozhi* 1982, 23: 673, n.2). Whereas the “valuing nonbeing” position is associated principally with He Yan and Wang Bi, the opposite view is represented by Guo Xiang (郭象) and Pei Wei.

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GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

- benmo* 本末
cai 才
 Cao Cao 曹操
 Cao Rui 曹叡
 Cao Shuang 曹爽
caixing 才性
Caixing lun 才性論
Caixing siben lun 才性四本論
 Chen Qun 陳群
chongyou 崇有
 Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒
 Fu Gu 傅縲
guiwu 貴無
 Guo Xiang 郭象

He Yan 何晏
jiaxue 家學
 Ji Kang 嵇康
 Jiang Ji 蔣濟
 Laozi 老子
li 禮
libu shangshu 吏部尚書
 Li Feng 李豐
 Liu Jun 劉峻
 Liu Shao 劉劭
 Lu Yu 盧毓
Lunyu 論語
ming 名
mingjia 名家
qi 氣
qingtan 清談
 Ruan Ji 阮籍
 Ruan Yu 阮裕
shi 實
Shishuo xinyu 世說新語
 Sima Lang 司馬朗
 Sima Yi 司馬懿
 Sima Shi 司馬師
 Sima Zhao 司馬昭
taiping 太平
 Xiahou Xuan 夏侯玄
 Xiang Xiu 向秀
xuanxue 玄學
 Wang Bi 王弼
 Wang Chong 王充
 Wang Guang 王廣
 Wang Ling 王凌
 Wang Sengqian 王僧虔
wu 無
xian 仙
xing 性
 Yan Yuan 顏淵
 Yin Hao 殷浩
 Yu Huan 魚豢

Yuan Zhun 袁準

Zhao Qi 趙岐

Zhong Hui 鍾會

Zhong You 鍾繇

Zhu Xi 朱熹

CHAPTER XI

ZHU XI'S DAOXUE WISDOM

JOHN BERTHRONG

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I first had the pleasure and honor of meeting Julia Ching at a conference on Chinese philosophy and Whitehead in the mid-1970s. She was already a senior scholar but kindly took an interest in the first professional paper that I had ever read and I was truly honored to have a senior scholar comment on my work. My last professional contact with Julia was the honor of reviewing her major study of the religious thought of Zhu Xi (1130-1200). I did have the pleasure of telling her how much I admired the study before she died. I was transported back to the first time I had met her because she included an appendix on the relationship of Zhu to Whitehead as part of her study of Zhu's religious thought. As always, I learned a great deal from her.

In 1980 I moved to Toronto where Julia had joined the faculty of the University of Toronto. She was the only professional colleague I knew there. When I called to let her know that I was in town she invited me over to her office to talk about Chinese philosophy and about what plans I had for work in Toronto. I confessed to Julia that I had no formal job prospects at that time. With typical dispatch Julia introduced me to her friends. One of them was Will Oxtoby who was later to be her husband. Julia and Will made sure that I began a fruitful formal relationship with the Centre for Religion Studies at the University of Toronto. Over the years I was able to teach and give lectures at the Centre. They also introduced me to the United Church of Canada. The United Church was looking for a new Interfaith Dialogue Secretary and Julia and Will, I later discovered, persuaded the church to take a chance on a young academician as the second Secretary for Interfaith Dialogue in the Division of World Outreach. And if all of this help was not enough, Julia and Will even bought a house about three blocks from my home in Toronto and always welcomed my family and me there. Julia and Will remained good friends as well as senior colleagues.

All this personal history is to demonstrate that I cannot be neutral or objective about the life and work of Julia Ching. To me

she was a friend, and more, she embodied the best virtues of the two traditions that she loved so much, the Christian church and the Confucian Way. Her life and scholarship continue to teach me about these two great world religions and cultural systems.

ZHU XI'S WISDOM

The theme of wisdom chosen for this conference honoring the memory of Julia Ching is astute in considering the examination of Zhu Xi's philosophic achievement. Julia's last book was about Zhu's religious thought as a form of profound wisdom (Ching 2000). In fact, the focus on wisdom is a welcomed one because it throws light from a different angle on the perennial debate about whether or not Confucianism is a 'religion'. Obviously Julia Ching believed that Confucianism, or at least some Confucians, were religious, both broadly and narrowly conceived. The contemporary default position for the debate about the nature of the religious traits of the Confucian Way is that, at a minimum, there is a distinctive religious dimension to the Confucian Way that if overlooked, precludes a true appreciation of the teachings of the Confucians from Kongzi to the modern New Confucians.

The argument for a religious dimension, which can range from the robust to the more modest, is that the term religion as now used in scholarly English is a concept defined by the Modernist and Enlightenment projects of the Western world. In short, from the time of the Jesuit mission to China in the 16th Century, Western scholars and missionaries set forth looking for the 'religions' of the peoples of Asia, assuming that everyone had a religion, and that this religion conformed to the pattern they were familiar with in the West, namely the various manifestations of the Christian movement. The early modern missionary scholars were also aware that there were deviations from the norm, both internal heretics and external religions such as Judaism and Islam. Whatever the range of charity in interpreting schismatics, heretics, Jews and Muslims, the dominant model was still that of the religions of West Asian origin. The Confucians, Daoists, popular religious practitioners and Buddhists of East Asia hardly ever fitted this paradigmatic norm of religion as a species of the larger genus of religion as defined by the norms of the Atlantic West.

However, as scholars continued to study the Confucian Way, it became more clear that there were dimensions or aspects of the Confucian Way that were close enough to share family

resemblances to the West Asian models such that it became impossible not to recognize that the East Asian traditions were religious in some dimensions, though not in others (Taylor 1990; Tu 1989). Scholars simply recognized that Confucians, Daoists, popular religious practitioners and Buddhists organized their life worlds differently from the dominant Western models and hence Confucianism both was and was not a religion from the Western perspective. No one has done a better job of presenting the Confucian religious perspective than Julia Ching over the last three decades in academic and popular publications and speeches.

Anne Birdwhistell, in trying to explain the style of Neo-Confucian discourse in her study of Li Yong (1627-1705), argues that Confucian thinkers "...rarely mentioned the principles and issues guiding their thinking" (1996, 8; Kim 2000). Confucian philosophers were often as interested, as Birdwhistell demonstrates, in the exhibitivite and active dimensions of human judgment as the assertive (see footnote 1 for definitions of these terms), thorough thinkers such as Zhu Xi and Chen Chun (1159-1223) were certainly capable of writing using the assertive forms of judgment. Birdwhistell writes, "Chinese philosophical thought was a dynamic system, but it left certain critical features unsaid" (Birdwhistell 1996). This may generally be correct, but just because something is left unsaid in an assertive mode does not mean that it is not manifested in an active and/or exhibitivite mode and these modes are often the domains par excellence of the creative world of the metaphor. Li Yong, for instance, was famous for living and acting in the way a Confucian scholar was supposed to act. As Birdwhistell writes "Li implicitly supported the assumptions that much behavior is a form of knowledge and so can be taught and that knowledge is a form a behavior and so does not necessarily require words" (Birdwhistell 1996, 122).

Birdwhistell carefully points out that while Confucian philosophers do use assertive judgment quite often, they work from a different programmatic starting point. She calls this a paradigmatic context, or a paradigmatic example or theoretical frame (Birdwhistell., 12). Moreover, many of the paradigmatic contexts and examples are resolutely metaphoric in nature. "Philosophic thought proceeded "outward" from the paradigmatic context" (Birdwhistell 1996). For instance, the role of Kongzi as a transmitter and teacher of the lore of the ancient sages is crucial to both an exposition of a paradigmatic context, i.e., the teacher of sage wisdom and as a paradigmatic example, i.e., the very

historical memory of how Kongzi himself functioned as a sage is as important as any definition of wisdom as a philosophic concept.

Birdwhistell also suggests that the paradigmatic example for Confucian philosophy is what she calls the function of reality as “the living entity” as informed by notions of order and organization. “Indeed, I would argue that any living thing was ultimately to be seen in terms of order, as opposed to formlessness or disorder” (Birdwhistell., 13). The notion of a living entity as a paradigmatic example of what Justus Buchler would call a natural complex leads many Confucian philosophers to resort to metaphors of life, birth, seeds, patterned growth, inception, arising, maturation and finally death as part of the natural living cycles of interrelated living entities. Birdwhistell then lists the cores of her generative metaphors:

These are the plant, the family, and the stream. The plant, with its roots and branches, and the stream, with its source, derive from the living world of nature. The human world contributed the family or lineage, which suggests ancestors and descendents” (Birdwhistell 1996).

Later Confucian philosophers added additional metaphors such as the mirror or still water such that “...the idea of reflection, and the example of the sun suggested the idea of brightness and an “illuminating power” of its own” (Birdwhistell 1996). Li Yong, she notes, finally places his greatest weight on the highly suggestive metaphor of philosophy as medicine. The philosopher is one (and this should resonate with many modern Western philosophers) who diagnoses our illnesses and provides a regime and medicine for a cure. Metaphor is central to defining both the paradigmatic context and the paradigmatic examples that dominate Confucian discourse.

In terms of contemporary Zhu Xi studies, Donald Munro (1988) has also stressed what he calls ‘structural images.’ Munro chose not to call these ‘images’ metaphors or analogies because of the Western philosophic debates about these terms. Munro does not want to focus our attention on the Western arguments about the philosophic role of metaphor, though, rather like Birdwhistell, Munro’s structural images are perfect examples of what Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999) have defined as metaphoric and embodied philosophy. Munro’s lists six major images: (1) the

family network, (2) the stream of water, (3) the light source, (4) the mirror, (5) the plant, and (6) “finally, the picture of ruling explains the relationships among aspects of the mind” (1988, 22-29).

Although Munro analyzes the six structural images, he conducts the analysis in service to a hypothesis about two major tensions in Zhu’s mature philosophy that even an astute manipulation of the images does not resolve. “One is the dichotomy between family love and love for people outside the basic role relationships. The other juxtaposes self-discovery of nature’s principles and reliance on objective authority” (Munro 1989, 41). Munro makes the point that images can be helpful in dealing with philosophic issues of major import and they can also serve to obscure the analysis and resolution of these tension. I wonder if these two Confucian conundrums are not perfect Confucian examples of what the Buddha called unsolvable questions. When confronted with complex metaphysical questions, the Buddha pointed out that some questions are simply so empirically complicated that there is not enough data to answer them correctly; others simply may not have any logical or ontological solution. For example, the numbers of grains of sands in the Ganges River or questions such as whether or not the world is created in time are examples of unanswerable (1) empirical or (2) metaphysical questions. On the other side of the world, contemporary Western philosophers could still debate how many sub-atomic particles exist at any given time or seek a solution to the question of the one and the many. The Buddha’s religious point is that such questions take us away from seeking the path toward Nirvana. My counter hypothesis is that perhaps Munro’s two tensions are simply central to the very nature of Confucian philosophy and are not capable of easy resolution – they are examples of what can be called creative tensions in Confucian discourse. What is, as Whitehead would say, important is that the answers to the questions are stimulating rather than correct simply in terms of being right or wrong *simpliciter*.

Wisdom is a perfect way to look at the issue of religious traits and metaphors of the Confucian Way – and how to try to mediate the tensions between different theories and their train of metaphors. In fact, it is a way to turn the whole question of the definition of religion around. If we no longer assume that all the ‘religions’ of the world must fully resemble the West Asian model, then how can we continue to use the term religion

usefully? One way would be to take Zhu Xi's search for wisdom as a more general Eurasian way to think about 'religion' per se, and to use the term religion as a particular Western species of the genus wisdom. This use of wisdom would reverse the flow of the definition of religion from the Atlantic West to Confucian Asia. The more capacious category, if we compare the Chinese case with the Western one, might well be to understand wisdom as the larger view and thus define religion as one distinctive way that human beings have sought wisdom. In order to explore this hypothesis, I will discuss the philosophy of Zhu Xi as an example of the search for wisdom.

AN OUTLINE OF ZHU XI'S PHILOSOPHY AS A SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Master Zhu was not only famous for defining and cataloging the essential traits of the reality of the Dao, he was perhaps even more reputed for giving reasons why this was the case. There was a distinctive organizational method to his philosophy, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit as with even the most systematic of thinkers, and it was this systematic trait that was expanded and elaborated by some of his students such as Chen Chun. This is the origin of Zhu's purported 'rationalism'. I am using rational in a mild sense; Zhu Xi and his disciples developed an ordered method to describe the cosmos and most specifically the actions, habits, dispositions and intentions of human beings (Kim 2000). Moreover, Zhu offered reasons, examples, arguments and metaphors to make the case that his method of description corresponded to intersubjective human experience and fit into what he took to be the patterns of the ceaseless creativity of the Dao.

Except for Zhu's concern for accurate description backed by the presentation of warrants for his position, his system certainly does not closely resemble the classical rationalism of the European Enlightenment project. One of the commonplaces that many modern Western philosophers have noted about Chinese thought on first encounter is that it lacks a concern for rational discourse, or what Justus Buchler calls assertive judgment in the propositional, didactic mode.¹ What this complaint boils down to is that Confucian thinkers declaim without explaining or offering dialectical defenses of their positions. In this regard, the Confucians are more like dogmatic theologians who are out to

teach a form of religious life than philosophers interested in proposing a rational justification of the nature of things as they really are. Confucians always seem to confuse the value neutral description of the world with a normative set of comments on the nature of the world and how we ought to conduct ourselves based in this descriptive analysis. Of course, in an age grown weary and skeptical about the claims of technical rationalism, it seems less and less odd to fuse pragmatic concerns for life and ethical interpretations of human flourishing into a more unified whole. This was, of course, the classic purpose for the study of systematic or speculative philosophy as *paideia* in Western thought throughout most of its history.

Keep in mind the perspective of the Chinese Confucian cumulative tradition. What makes Zhu and Chen uncharacteristically 'rational' is their attempt to give reasons, citations, definitions, arguments, metaphors and speculative hypotheses for some of their proposals about how the world works. In terms of method, Zhu and Chen work on two levels. The first, as we shall see, concerns the analysis of the mind-heart as the bridge between *qi* and *li*. Second, they give a meta-account of how this tripartite schema works for the entire creative order of the world. It was this account or speculative *ars contextualis*² that made Zhu's philosophy famous or infamous depending on your level of agreement or disagreement with the fundamental ideas operative both in the concrete cultivation of the mind-heart and in the broader reflections on the constant conjunction of vital force and principle.

It is obvious that Zhu's teaching about the relationship of vital force and principle was complicated. Zhu's students returned again and again to questioning him about how they should understand the conjoined doctrines of *li* and *qi*. The problem did not so much reside in the individual definitions or discussions of vital force and principle – these terms were part of the common philosophic patrimony of Chinese second order discourse and in fact, were as much part of Daoist and Buddhist philosophy as they were of Confucian speculation. By the Southern Song (1127-1279), Zhu's disciples believed that they understood, with degrees of qualification, what he was talking about as a patterned process of the Dao. In fact, vital force was as close to metaphysical concept as one could find in the period; the problem then was a lack of concern to define precisely what was meant by the term. *Qi* was such a ubiquitous player in the *ars contextualis* of the Song

that no one seem inclined to define it with great precision or care. Many Song Confucians would have noted that Master Zhang Zai had already explored the world of vital force in detail rich enough to satisfy the expository demands of Confucian discourse. Zhu may have simply assumed, though the Evidential Research Scholars of the Qing would disagree vehemently with Zhu's claim, that all he was doing was correctly placing Zhang's reflections on vital force in its proper place in the tapestry of the Northern Song masters' revival of the Confucian Way in terms of special reference to the theory of principle enunciated by the Cheng brothers.

What intrigued the students was how Zhu combined vital force and principle. The most common thing Zhu would say was that vital force and principle were everywhere and always inextricably combined. There is no thing or event in the world that does not combine vital force and principle. This is precisely what Chen is teaching in the opening sections of the Glossary (the *Beixi ziyi/Pei-hsi tzu-i*, Chen 1986), and it is something that is repeated over and over again in Zhu's recorded conversations with his students and in his letters to his friends. Where Zhu introduces the seed of doubt for later generations is that, at certain times, he does recognize that principle comes 'first'. What does he mean by 'first'? What is the wisdom of such a basic ordering of the first principles (a pun) of *dao*xue?

In terms of *dao*xue discourse, Zhu actually had a theory of the *li/qi* relationship that is quite distant from any Western form of dualism. It is a vision of reality that revolves around three poles and one ultimate goal. In previous studies I have called these the domains or traits of form, dynamics and unification (1994; 1998). In order to bring completion to Zhu's interpretive schema, I must add the idea of actualization or perfection (*cheng*) to the tripartite list to explain not only what Zhu thought but also where he thought it would lead. The fourfold schema is:

Formal: *Taiji* or Supreme Ultimate qua principle, pattern, order; human nature

Dynamic: *Qi* as vital force; the dynamism of emotion

Unification: *Xin* as mind-heart; the unity of human nature and emotion

Goal: *Cheng* or actualization of humaneness as a complete manifestation of *ren* (and the other virtues)

Zhu instructs anyone who cares to listen that this schema (in my terms, not Zhu's) can never be read as a distinct ontological level of reality. The concepts or descriptive traits are always and everywhere inextricably conjoined together in the harmony of the achieved values of the ten thousand things. All of these elements are found together beginning with the primordial unity of vital force and principle. Nonetheless, Zhu also presents this analysis as a species of processive *ars contextualis* because he wants to propose reasons for saying that the world works this way.

Although I have explained in detail the tripartite [form, dynamics and unification] metasystem or *ars contextualis* of Zhu and Chen in previous publications (1994; 1998), I must provide a very short outline of what is meant by the three modalities and assumed goal of self-cultivation to provide a background for the further discussion of the process of achieving sage wisdom. The first modal trait is form. This is the element of principle which Zhu and Chen found so prominent in the works of the two Cheng brothers. The term *li* means pattern, order or form (of definiteness). One of its most archaic definitions was that of the striations in a piece of jade. It is the pattern, plan or mandate that a thing assumes or embodies as its root metaphor or principle when it becomes something definite as one of the ten thousand things or events. The most important principle for the person according to Zhu and Chen is the distinct ethical norm called human nature. This is the pattern or form that a person receives from heaven, its Supreme Polarity or mandate of heaven. I have defined it as the formal element of anything that is. It is also what allows us to recognize and discriminate one thing from another.

The second modal trait is the dynamic rhythm of the creative forces of the Dao. The most obvious candidate for the dynamic trait of vital force is *qi*. Just as the Cheng brothers supplied Zhu and Chen with the theory of principle, Zhang Zai was the patron-author of vital force theory in its neo-Confucian specification. In the meso-cosmic level of human life, *qi* as vital force and dynamic activity was always identified with the emotional side of human activity. The emotions, though they certainly had their own principles, were thought to represent something else, the less stable and potentially dangerous and disruptive aspect of human life. Nevertheless, the emotions are what give impetus to human life; vital force is alive, active, but somewhat directionless. It moves but not always prudently.

According to Zhu, vital force needs principle in order to discipline its raw and unpredictable activities.

The third modal trait is the unification of determining pattern and vital force into the achieved value of actual existence. The traits of principle and vital force need to be unified in some manner. In terms of the human being, the mind-heart brings unity to the passionate, active vital force and norming or patterning principle. Ideally the mind-heart should bring unity in terms of the virtue of each of the principles appropriate to human life, however, unity can be better or worse. We can incorrectly unify vital force and principle. We need to be balanced in finding unity, nonetheless, nothing can exist until and unless there is this unity of vital force and principle. This unity is expressed by *cheng* as a supreme form of self-actualization of the human person – the goal of humanity as expressed in sage wisdom.

Although Zhu prefers to discuss the unity of vital force and principle in terms of the mind-heart, he also notes that even more mundane items such as fans have their own unity of vital force and principle. For a fan to merit the name of a good fan it must function to provide cooling *qi* for the person. The fan's construction out of paper and bamboo strips can be well fashioned or badly made. A fan that falls apart because it was not carefully crafted would be an example of failed unity. But if the fan, or even a rice cooker, worked the way it was supposed to work, then there was a successful unity of vital force and principle. *Tian* or heaven literally mandates or commands/*ming* as the fitting principle and vital force as the dynamic agency of any of the ten thousand things.

Chen Chun begins the Glossary in a distinctive way with an analysis of the trait of *ming* or a command or mandate, a highly unlikely choice in terms of most Song *daoxue*. Most *daoxue* literati begin with an analysis of the Dao, the Supreme Ultimate or principle, pattern or order. The term *ming* is often conjoined with *tian*/heaven as *tianming* or the mandate of heaven. I think that Professor Chan, who notes that this choice of a beginning is Chen's unique contribution, goes a long way in explaining why Chen sought to begin the Glossary with a section on *ming*. "The *Tzu-iziyi* is dedicated to seeking the Source, that is, the Principle of Heaven. Like Cheng Mingdao [Ming-tao], who discovered the Principle of Heaven himself, one must accept it as a command, a command to engage in the universal current of production and reproduction" (Chen 1986, 32). If Professor Chan is correct, Chen

begins his exploration of the Dao by referencing one of the most famous metaphors in the Song repertoire, the idea of a source – which Munro and Birdwhistell both selected in terms of water metaphors as one of Zhu Xi’s favorite metaphors for the Dao.

As I have thought about this question of beginnings, I would add one more note to Professor Chan’s remarks. As a disciple of Zhu Xi, Chen no doubt resonated with the notion of *ming* because it signaled his role as a disciple charged, commanded as it were, to present as accurately as possible his Master’s teachings about 26 key Confucian terms. *Ming* is both a command from a beloved teacher and the source of the teaching not only of the Master but also of the entire *daoxue* itself. *Ming* is the source of what Peter Bol (1992) has called the Song quest to preserve and promote ‘this culture of ours’.

Thomas Metzger (1977) draws out attention to another interesting point of the Chen’s choice of *ming* as a starting point. Metzger confesses,

The Neo-Confucian category of *ming* has proved the hardest to fit into my analysis. Not even explicitly mentioned in much of the Neo-Confucian writings about central cosmological and ethical questions, it is also largely passed over in modern Chinese interpretations of the Neo-Confucian “spirit” (1977, 128).

Actually, this lack of interpretation might not be quite as serious in one sense as Metzger believes. It could simply indicate that *daoxue* intellectuals did not think that it was a particularly difficult term to understand or that it was a common term that did not need the kind of elaborate explication as terms such as *li*/principle or the mind-heart. Still, I have always been struck by Metzger’s next sentence. “One is almost tempted to compare it to a stranger who has stumbled into a gathering where he really has not functional role to play” (Metzger 1977). While appreciating Metzger’s point, I think that Chen really did want us to think about *ming* as a beginning for the *daoxue* project.

What interests Chen about the role of *ming* is the *daoxue* question as to the cosmological formation of things or events.³ If there is no creator God fashioning the heavens and earth, then how do we explain the ceaseless production and reproduction of the myriad things of the world? Chen reasons that when anything at

all emerges as some definite object or event, that is to say, when it emerges out of what he calls the “great transformation,” there must be some a point when it becomes the specific thing and not something else. “This is similar to giving an order (Chen 1986, 37)”. Actually, Alison Black (1989) has a very suggestive account of why Chen might have begun the glossary with a section of *ming* in her study of Wang Fuzhi’s alternative interpretation of principle and vital force.

Black notes that “The general import of his [Wang’s] argument was to remove from *t’ai-chi/taiji* the concept of generative source and define it as a principle of harmony characterizing yin and yang” (Black 1989, 65). In short, Black argues that Wang is critical of Zhu for giving the Supreme Ultimate (or Supreme Polarity) not only pride of place but also mistakenly giving to the Supreme Ultimate/Polarity the sense of something with generative command power over the emergence of the ten thousand things. As Wang himself wrote, “What the Supreme Ultimate is in fact is simply the blended harmony of yin and yang” (Black 1989, 66). Black interprets Wang to mean that “According to this passage, *t’ai-chi* is not a physical or metaphysical *entity*, but a *state* of perfect harmony characterizing the dually constituted *ch’i*; or if is to be treated as an entity it is merely *ch’i-in-harmony*” (Black 1989) This goes to the heart of the argument between one reading of Zhu and the alternative interpretation of someone like Wang, who believes he is much more faithfully following the teachings of the Northern Song master Zhang Zai. This would also be the reason why Zhang and Wang were seen as champions of a ‘one source’ cosmological theory as opposed to the ‘two source’ theory of Zhu and his followers. For Wang, it really was just *qi* all the way down.

In terms of comparative philosophy, Black urges a reading of Zhu Xi that makes *taiji* the abstract locus of the generative power of pattern within the emergence of the various things and events of the cosmos. The crucial point Black wants to make is that “... the element of transcendence that *li* contained in Chu Hsi’s philosophy and that was certainly expressed in his concept of *t’ai-chi* (which was still for him a generative source) distinguishes Chu Hsi’s view from Wang Fu-chih’s” (Black 1989, 67). This is a very useful exegetical insight. Zhu and Chen probably do want to make a case for the generative impact of a form of definiteness coterminous with the emergence into concrete reality of any thing at all that can be conceived of as some object,

thing or event. On the other side of the great Neo-Confucian debate, “Wang traces the essential diversity of things to the yin and yang modes of *ch’i*. He takes pains to show that the unity existing between them is not something that can be reified as logically antecedent. This was the mistake, he thinks, made by some Sung philosophers with regard to *t’ai-chi*, the Supreme Ultimate” (Black 1989, 63).

But again, we must be very careful to define just what we mean by terms such as ‘antecedent’ and ‘transcendence.’ I will argue that there can be a very robust version of naturalism that has a place for Zhu and Chen’s notion of *ming*, *li* and *taiji* as symbols of the forms of definiteness that are the very nature of anything that becomes actual or definite in any sense whatsoever when contrasted to anything else. Zhu and Chen could counter that there is nothing wrong in beginning with an analysis of things based on the theory that these things or events are really distinct one from each other – even if they are not ontologically disparate. But again, we must be very careful to define just what we mean by transcendence. I will argue at length in a forthcoming monograph that there can be a very robust version of naturalism that has a place for something like Zhu and Chen’s notion of *ming*, *li* and *taiji* as symbols of the forms of definiteness that are the very nature of anything that becomes actual or definite in any sense whatsoever. Chen would be very loath, I believe, to give up the image or metaphor of command as an important part of the unique insight of Master Zhu’s *daoxue*.

The notion of *ming* is closely linked to the notion of principle in Chen’s presentation. Moreover, Chen strove to explain that Zhu’s *lixue* was not some kind of metaphysical dualism. This attempt to show the ontological parity of the conceptual schema comes out in section 11 of the glossary. This is a rather odd section, and Wing Tsit-chan and other commentators, deem it to be misplaced within the text of the Glossary. As a section it fits much better with the sections on principle and the Supreme Ultimate/Polarity. The original Glossary was supposed to have only twenty-five sections and Professor Chan surmises that the section on *iguan* or the ‘one thread’ somehow became separated from its original place and became the errant twenty-sixth section.

The section is named after the famous conversation Kongzi had with his disciple Zengzi as recorded in *Analects* 4:15. Ames and Rosemont (1998) translate the passage as:

The Master said, “Zeng, my friend! My way (*dao*) is bound together with one continuous strand [*yiguan*].”

Master Zeng replied, “Indeed.”

When the Master had left, the disciples asked, “What was he referring to?”

Master Zeng said, “The way of the Master is doing one’s utmost (*zhong*) and putting oneself in the other’s place (*shu*), nothing more.” (1998, 92)

Generations of Ruist literati have commented on various aspects of this teaching, and to good effect. It is one of those fairly rare examples of Kongzi giving a definition of one of his key teachings. But the teaching is in terms of illustration drawn from common life, a metaphor of the Dao as a single thread or a continuous strand as Ames and Hall translate the term *yiguan*.

Chen Chun has a *daoxue* style explanation of Kongzi’s text about the ‘one thread’. He is particularly interested in showing how the notion of *i* as ‘one’ is analogous to principle and *guan* is equated with the threading of the one principle throughout the ten thousand things. “*I* is simply principle, which is undifferentiated in its totality, the one great foundation. *Guan* is this one principle spreading out in its operation and penetrating the ten thousand things.” (Chen 1986, 94). There are moments when I have considerable sympathy with the Qing scholars when they read this commentary. It is really a highly specialized interpretation of a saying of Kongzi that only makes sense within the cosmology of the emerging *daoxue* movement. At the end of this paragraph, Chen asserts that there is nothing at all, however mundane, but the spread of principle within all the domains of the world, such that “...none is but this one great fundamental principle operating and penetrating” (Chen 1986, 95).

I have selected this passage to show how Chen makes use of metaphors or images such as the teachings of the sage linked by the single thread of the Dao of the sages. Chen is also trying to make another point as well. I will cite the whole last paragraph of section 11 to illustrate how Chen makes the case for the unity of the world. Chen was convinced that Master Zhu was not a ‘two source’ theorist when it comes to the explanation of the relationship of principle and vital force.

Heaven is nothing but the material force of the One Origin, operating without cease. This is the

great foundation; this is the Great Ultimate. All things come out of it, whether small or large, whether high or low, whether birds or fish, and whether animals or plants, each fulfilling its own destiny and each possessing its own Great Ultimate, all complete sufficient and lacking nothing. It is not that Heaven manipulates in each case but each naturally flows from the great foundation. This is how Heaven penetrates all with the one. (Chen 1986, 96)

Contrary to Wang Fuzhi's fear that Master Zhu was positing some kind of external order to the flow of the cosmos, Chen is explicit in stating that all of this activity, including the unity of principle and vital force, comes about via the completely natural flow of the great foundation, which is indeed *taiji* in one of its manifestations. One could make the case that the nature of the *taiji* itself is specified by *ziran* or spontaneity or naturalness. *Ming* may be a command, but it is one that is only obeyed through spontaneity, if at all.

To return to Chen's early exposition of *ming*: immediately after he has explained the basic meanings of *ming* as mandate (which Chan glosses as mandate, destiny, order and fate), he goes on to stress that principle is to be found within the vital force as the two primal material forces of yin and yang. "In actuality...the process of production and reproduction (*shengsheng*) has gone without ceasing from time immemorial" (Chen 1986, 38). The term *shengsheng* is key here. Mou Zongsan (1994) often argues that *shengsheng* and the phrase *shengsheng buxi* represent creativity itself; Chinese dictionaries define it as production and reproduction and so forth. As *The Classic of Changes* says in the Great Commentary, "The great virtue of Heaven and Earth is called 'generation' "(Lynn 1994, 77).

Chen argues that vital force needs something to direct or order it and this, of course, is the role of principle. The basic principle itself is that of immemorial production and reproduction. It is a principle of cosmic generativity without a beginning or end. "Principle is in material force and acts as its pivot. This is why as the great transformation functions and prevails, production and reproduction have never stopped" (Chen 1986, 38). I note that Chan is here translating *qi* as material force. As we have already seen, there is no single and elegant translation of *qi*: vital force,

material force and matter-energy are all shots at capturing in English some of the protean semantic range of the Chinese original. In the very next section, Chen states, "The production of man and things does not go beyond the material forces of yin and yang (passive and active cosmic forces)" (Chen 1986, 39). Wing-tsit Chan himself added the paraphrase of 'passive and active cosmic forces' to characterize yin and yang.

I will not return to a defense of this tripartite reading of form, dynamics and unification, having already discussed it at some length in other publications (Berthrong 1994; 1998). However, I will dwell for a moment on the fourth element, namely the goal or aspiration to realize or embody true value, ideally of a positive, harmonious direction for human flourishing. Without wanting to sound too much like Aristotle, I believe that Zhu desired to answer the question of ultimate reasons and causes, albeit it in a very different mode from Aristotle. This is where Song *daoxue* moves toward the world of religious discourse, or at least examination of comprehensive reasons, and ultimately to questions of the nature of human wisdom. There are ultimate reasons for us to act as we should and Zhu and Chen want us to understand these ultimate goals. They are ultimate in the sense that you can only fully understand them if you embody them. Zhu is forever teaching his students, as would Wang Yangming, that the proof of knowledge is in action and the crafting of a virtuous life. To simply say that you understand something and prove to be unable to carry out that understanding in praxis means that you do not really understand the unity of the mind-heart with vital force and pattern/order. The Confucians have a resolutely axiological and pragmatic turn to their version of process thought understood as an inclusive form of naturalism.

The terms that Zhu and Chen used to pinpoint the goal of the unity of vital force and principle is *cheng*. There is nothing surprising about this choice; even Xunzi also wrote about the importance of *cheng* as the ultimate form of axiological self-actualization. Various translations of *cheng* have been suggested, the most common being sincerity or integrity – the most radical is 'creativity' as proposed and defended by David Hall and Roger Ames (2001). Moreover, *cheng* has an impeccable Song Confucian pedigree because it is such an important concept in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the most 'metaphysical' or profound of the Four Books according to Zhu and Chen. By the time of the Song revival, *cheng*'s semantic range had expanded considerably. Chen

begins the section on *cheng* by noting that it indeed does mean both loyalty and faithfulness, and hence continues to bear the early signification of sincerity. Chen notes that *cheng* represents "...a description of natural principle, whereas loyalty and faithfulness have to do with human effort" (Chen 1986, 97). Here again we see Chen's method of presenting both the formal and dynamic side of any trait.

Chen demonstrated that in the Song revival, *cheng* has become a key term for the goal, the principle or formal order, of human self-cultivation. It comes to represent the real and true; it illustrates the lack of error and the actualization of virtue that is the ultimate goal of human life. After presenting a series of metaphors drawn from the classical and Song literature, Chen proffers another definition of *cheng*. "In the case of man, it is simply that in the operation of this real principle, what has been endowed in him naturally manifests itself" (Chen 1986, 98). Just before giving that definition, Chen quotes Hu Hung (1106-1161) to the effect that "*Cheng* is the way of destiny" (Chen 1986). Chen shows how *cheng* as the manifestation of principle in the cultivated life is linked to the mandate of heaven itself. To be a person of *cheng* is to achieve the highest value for a human being, including the manifestation of the cardinal virtues of the Confucian Dao.

In previous discussions of Zhu's version of *daoxue*, I have hesitated to place the modality of perfected goal alongside the other three traits of form, dynamics and unification because I was not sure that *cheng* works rhetorically in the same way that the other three do. Throughout the works of Zhu and Chen the formal, dynamic and unifying traits are used over and over to show how things and events come into being. When the specific focus is on human beings, then Zhu and Chen resort to the classical language of virtue and self-cultivation. This is completely consonant with the meso-cosmic focus of Confucian inclusive humanism and naturalism. Moreover, Confucian discourse never strays far from its axiological moorings in social ethics. After the analysis of how something functions in becoming one of the definite ten thousand things, from a fan to a rice cooker to the work of the realized sage, Zhu and Chen will almost inevitably show how this functioning is connected to ethical concerns. The path is ethical and needs to be defined in terms of the classical vocabulary of the Confucian Way.

Nonetheless, for human beings there are always complicated goals to be sought, something very much captured by

Fingarette's (1972) phrase about the secular as the sacred within the classical vision of Kongzi. Of course, Zhu and Chen are careful to respect the processive, dynamic nature of the ethical quest and do not want to suggest that there is just one goal for all persons. They remember the various students of Confucius who report how the master encouraged them to keep moving along the path of virtue by constantly challenging them to achieve their distinctive forms of human flourishing, each appropriate to the special humanity of the individual in creative participation with the mandate of heaven. The path is long and the burden of walking the path is heavy. One not only carries the responsibility for personal self-cultivation, but also struggles with the onus of what the Confucians call 'this culture of ours'. Would Zhu and Chen want to argue that there is a similar goal for the fan mentioned before? On one level, of course they would maintain that the fan illustrates the unceasing combination of formal and dynamic traits. But it would be pushing the language of human self-cultivation a bit too far to use the language of *cheng* without significant exceptions for the fan. But, and this is an important but nonetheless, Zhu and Chen ultimately would defer to the judgment of the *Zhongyong* that "*Cheng* is the beginning and end of things" (or as Hall and Ames 2001, 106, translate it, "Creativity is a process (*wu*) taken from its beginnings to its end..."). Even in this context the *Doctrine of the Mean* is chiefly concerned with showing how sincerity leads to ultimate self-actualization. In fact, when a person can embody true *cheng*, then the person can form a trinity with heaven and earth in their unceasing nourishing powers of 'creativity itself' as Mou Zongsan would define this aspect of the Confucian Dao at the end of the 20th Century. Therefore, a fan can be described in terms of principle and vital force, but perhaps not in terms of self-actualization because it is something made and not something that partakes of the creative process of heaven and earth.

I am not sure that I would want to push the distinction between a living person and a non-living fan too far. There is a religious strain in the thought of Zhang Zai (1020-1077) that sees life and process everywhere, even in inanimate objects like a fan. Zhu and Chen are sensitive to this almost mystical qua world-affirming Confucian vision about the living unity of the cosmos. But they are not Daoists and do not dwell too much on the non-human goals or outcomes of objects and events. This is because they want to focus on the ethical life and follow the Confucian

tradition that holds that human beings are the most refined ethical agents in the world. Xunzi held that other living creatures have ethical potentials. But only human beings have the possibility of cultivating all the major virtues. It was only a person who could embody all the virtues and hence become a humane person. For instance, my poodles Fafner, Diva and Yo-yo can be loyal and even crafty, but cannot create a complete civilized society because poodles lack the gift of language – according to Xunzi. My poodles are ethical but sometimes very perverse animals when they make off with freshly washed socks as toys. I am convinced, following Xunzi and Leibniz (but not Descartes), that dogs do have a sense of right and wrong, or perhaps the awareness of not wanting to be caught with the socks. However, Xunzi's point is to focus on the growing complexity of animal actions and plans as a way of marking off significant divisions in the animate world. Human beings have the potential for all the virtues and, via language, for the creation of ethical culture according to Xunzi. Perhaps this is just a complicated way of saying that there are axiological goals for human life.

I take Zhu Xi's constant responses to his students about the inseparability of principle and vital force to decline the appearance and reality gambit so common in post-Platonic Western philosophy. Richard Rorty admonishes modern Western philosophers to adjure the dubious pleasures of seeking presence and essence because this search for essence and true reality is a mistaken linguistic application of the appearance/reality dualism. We surely need dualities Rorty agrees, but only as a way to describe the world in a better or worse form. Rorty (1999) calls this a panrelational pragmatism. Rorty's apt characterization of this processive turn runs thus: "They (that is, pragmatic, antiessentialist thinkers) are trying to replace the world of pictures constructed with the aid of these Greek oppositions (NB--such as the appearance-reality opposition) with a picture of flux of continually changing relations" (Rorty 1999, 47). Actually, a "flux of continually changing relations" is not a bad summary of Zhu's general discourse on the unification and harmony of principle and vital force.

Chen's Glossary discussion illustrates the problem of interpreting principle without recourse to the appearance-reality split. He commences by making a distinction between principle and the Dao. Although Chen believes that generally the two terms "are the same thing," they are distinguished by two different

words; he concludes that this means that there must be some difference between the meaning of principle and the Dao/Way. The Dao is a way, and Chen believes that it is a metaphor for a road on which people travel. This makes a great deal of sense from the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson who believe that metaphors of roads, of travel, of moving from one point to another, and the importance of the movement itself are common in many kinds of philosophy.

Chen then goes on to explain a second difference, namely that Dao is a broad term whereas principle is “more concrete” (Chen 1986, 112). Moreover, Chen immediately adds that principle “...has the idea of being definitely unchanging” (Chen 1986). Of course, this is precisely the kind of statement that has led generations of Chinese, Korean and Japanese critics to posit a static formalism at the heart of Zhu’s philosophy. Chen continues by stating that what he means by the unchanging trait of principle is that it is a “specific principle (*tse*) of what a thing should be (*tang-jan*)” (Chen 1986).

At this point in Chen’s explanation it is tempting to believe that we have found a Song version of Platonic forms. Although I am not a proponent of Wittgenstein, his warning about the bewitchment of language floats ever so gently into the emerging interpretation of principle as a standard or pattern of my conscious mind. We run the risk of becoming so seduced and enchanted by a long Western history with philosophic forms, essences and monadic substances that we are tempted to attribute these interpretations to the Chinese word *li*. However, the lure must be resisted.

For instance, what does Chen mean by “unchanging” and principle both as pattern and as a standard? “What a thing should be is simply its being proper, that is, not being excessive or deficient. This is specific principle” (Chen 1986, 112-113). The first thing to notice, not surprisingly, is that the discussion of principle is defined in moral terms. Mou Zongsan has said that real Confucian thought is always moral metaphysics. While some modern or post-modern scholars might demur about metaphysics, few will gainsay the fact that Confucians do tend to think, if not always act, in moral terms. Though principle does not change, it is subject to deliberations about what is excessive or deficient. It is the proper correlation, the relationship as it were, between too much and too little. Moreover, if these images are spatial, it is important to remember that they can also be parsed in temporal

terms. In any event, what does not 'change' in seeking the end of virtue does need process between the excessive and deficient in becoming a standard or pattern for conduct. Chen concludes this section by giving illustrations about the proper standards of ethical virtue and conduct by noting the various actions of rulers, ministers, fathers and sons. He then also gives an example about the posture of a foot poised for ritual action.

The key here is the axiology of the norm, the action of principle. Principle as a norm functions in two ways. The first is to coordinate the unification of principle and vital force into the specific form of definiteness for the emerging person. Second, the norm is also the sense of appropriateness for the particular quality of the principle as it comes to order the person in the specific situation. For Zhu and Chen, to become is to make choices and to accept some form or norm for our conduct. Merely to become something is not enough. We always stand in relation as something definite to other persons and are hence acted upon by them and act on them in turn. The world really is defined by influence and response.

As I have remarked before, Confucians do not always follow the assertive road of query. They are also committed to exhibitivite and active modes of query. When you are tempted to ask, but what is the essence or defining characteristic of the Confucian Dao qua principle, they tell you a story. Socrates did not like stories in place of dialectical argument. Yet if Lakoff and Johnson are correct, the world of metaphors found in stories are probably as good a way to point toward a good argument as any other. A story indicates a direction. My favorite narrative about the normative nature of the Confucian Dao is found the *Analects*. In fact, it is a story told by Confucius' most favored disciple, Yan Hui. Yan Hui, for whom the Master so deeply grieved when he died young, was one of the patron saints of the Song Confucians. He was the model student and even, according to Kongzi, resided in humanity for three months.

This is what Yan Hui said about the normative quality of the Master's teaching.

Yan Hui, with a deep sigh, said, "The more I look up at it, the higher it soars; the more I penetrate into it, the harder it becomes. I am looking at it in front of me, and suddenly it is behind me. The Master is good at drawing me forward a step at a

time; he broadens me with culture (*wen*) and disciplines my behavior through the observance of ritual propriety (*li*). Even if I wanted to quit, I could not. And when I have exhausted my abilities, it as though something rises up right in front of me, and even though I want to follow it, there is no road to take.” (Ames & Rosemont 1998, 128-129).

Anyone who has recognized how hard it is to be good at anything at all can understand what Yan Hui is bemoaning here. All of us have had that brilliant teacher, or that friend who could pick up spoken languages (even Chinese) within two months, or play music well enough to make your spirit ache. It is there before us, and sometimes along with Yan Hui, it feels like there is no more road for us to follow in despair at failure at our puny efforts. Yet the Master refuses to let us off the hook and not move forward. Master Kong demands sincere effort even if he himself recognized that even he could not achieve all the goals he had set for himself. Sometimes the problem is really with the stars and that the times are out of joint.

And yet, and yet. The harmonious goal as a lure for action is always there. The trick is to learn how to respond to the ‘it.’ From the viewpoint of Confucian self-cultivation, the ability to discern the ‘it’ of our common moral tendencies is the beginning of wisdom. The shock, the emotional dynamics if you like, comes from the ability to compare and contrast what is with what is not, with what is and what should be. I do not want to over rationalize this moment. It is more emotional, and dare I say spiritual, than purely technically cognitive, and this is what the Yan Hui story does so well. There is recognition of the morally wise Way of the master, and yet there are moments when you simply cannot rationally discern the way forward. Even more, there are moments when the fleshly heart-mind is tired. And yet there is still the insistent nagging of the spirit to compare and contrast what is with what isn’t, what is with what has never been on land or sea.

The stock Song Confucian answer to the question of why Yan Hui feels the way he does is that Master Kong has nurtured his seeds of virtue into a life that seeks to be in harmony with the mandate of heaven. Because his moral consciousness has awakened, even though it is fatigued in the extreme, Yan cannot forget that he has seen a vision rising up around him everywhere.

And like the peaks of a mountain for the traveler, there is both a challenge and a promise. The challenge is to surmount the mountains; the promise is to find the wonderful valley on the other side. However, the problem is even deeper, because the master then points out more mountains and holds out the promise of even more valleys.

Dorothy Emmet (1958) has a wonderful way of describing the symbolic nature of stories such as Yan Hui's account of his encounter with Master Kong. "I shall call this their *promissory* character" (Emmet 1958, 198; italics in original). This is a fine characterization of the future-oriented drive found in Yan Hui's lament. The road is forward in both space and time. The reward is a promise; but a promise is never an end in and of itself. Emmet continues her discussion of the role and power of symbols in human life by noting that "Some of the great recurrent symbols...have a power of pointing forward to meaning beyond that which is consciously seen and given to them in any one time" (Emmet 1958). Moreover, "It is perhaps a quality of a good religious symbol that the person who produces it builds better than he knows" (Emmet 1958, 196).

In order to understand what Chen means by principle, pattern or form we need to move back one section in the Glossary to Chen's study of the Dao. Actually, Chen's section on the Dao is so much larger, about six times as long, than the one on principle, and has its own logic concerning its length and placement. First, we need to remember that the preferred self-designation of the movement begun by Zhu Xi was *daoxue* or the Teaching of the Way. The other common term, *lixue* or Teaching of Principle, was applied to differentiate Zhu's philosophy from other Song-Ming Confucians, and especially from Wang Yangming and his followers. Of course, many of Zhu's contemporaries thought that it was the height of arrogance to abrogate the name of the Way for the opinions, and controversial opinions at that, for the tag of only one branch of the Northern and Southern Song Confucian revival. The argument revolved around how broadly you were willing to interpret the Dao. Second, Dao was actually a more important term than principle in Confucian discourse. Dao was the more general term for the proper way of Confucian assertion, exhibition and action than any other specific term. Dao was the royal road for Confucian self-cultivation. Therefore, it made sense to defend Zhu's specific interpretation of the pan-East Asian philosophic mainstay.

Chen starts by playing on the metaphor of Dao as a road. He notes that a road is only a road if more than one person walks on it. "The general principle of Dao is the principle people should follow in their daily affairs and human relations" (Chen 1986, 105). Moreover, the source of the Dao is none other than *tian* itself. Here Chen quotes Zhang Zai's statement: "From the Great Vacuity, there is Heaven. From the transformation of material force (NB: *qi*: vital force) there is the Way" (Chen 1986). Chen interprets *tian* not in theistic terms but as what is naturally so of itself (*ziran*). Although *ziran* is most commonly linked to Daoism in general and the Zhuangzi tradition in particular, it was also part of the general Chinese philosophic vocabulary and could be used for perfectly legitimate Confucian purposes.

The argument that then follows is enough to make one embrace Hall and Ames' hypothesis that a field-focus metaphor for Chinese metasystems is a better one than the whole-part metaphor more common to much Western philosophy. It is an answer to the question of a dead principle (rider) riding a living horse as later critics of Zhu's position would phrase it. Chen deems Zhang Zai to be arguing that principle is *tian*. Moreover, "Obviously principle is not something dead just lying there. As the material force (vital force) of the One Origin spreads out, it produces man and things" (Chen 1986, 106). And if this were not enough, Chen directly says: "This is what it is when one traces the source of creative process" (Chen 1986). The term that Chan translates as creative process does indeed carry the semantic load of transformation as creative response to the living situation. Principle is then the various patterns, the lines and veins such as found in a piece of jade, which give us direction for our task of self-cultivation. While it can be called a formal trait, as I have done in the past, it is really a pattern or a focus emerging when a person seeks to follow the Dao or Way of *tian*. In the end, Chen puts an active spin on the Dao by noting that it is "...the principle according to which daily human affairs should be conducted and the road on which people past and present all travel" (Chen 1986). Here again motion, as the process of travel in a moral direction, is crucial to Chen's understanding of the Dao.

Slightly later in Chen's explanation of Dao, he comes back to the question of the relationship of principle and vital force. If it is true that principle penetrates or pervades everywhere, it is equally true that vital force is everywhere. The processive trait is highlighted: "Prominent principles are seen in the process of the

creation, the development, and the nourishment of things” (Chen 1986, 109). In terms of Hall and Ames’ metaphor of the field and focus, vital force is the field and principle provides the focus. Both are equally in the grip of the process of creation.

It is always important to remember that for *daoxue* theorists such as Zhu Xi and Chen Chun the role of theory is always pragmatic. By this I mean that it is the practice of human flourishing and good character that is the ultimate goal and not the articulation of theory per se that is the goal of their system building. However, both Zhu and Chen would probably agree that a good theory is a better instrument than a bad theory, and that in the end, a good theory and good praxis is what is needed to achieve the goal of becoming a sage. The sage as a moral exemplar is an intersubjective achievement that is both diachronic and synchronic. Sagehood is synchronic because we are always located in life with other people, including our families and teachers and diachronic because we are cultural creatures with a history preserved in language. For instance, Zhu taught that we need a method to read the classics because they are difficult works to understand without proper interpretation.

From a comparative perspective, the *daoxue* project is appealing these days because it provides an example of a vision of human flourishing that is resolutely naturalistic in a robust sense of including religious or spiritual traits within the broad purview of its systematic articulation of its theoretic vision and its praxis orientations. It demonstrates that one can be spiritual without embracing a dualism that divides the natural from the supernatural as the coin of faith that must be paid for the union or interaction of the transcendent and the immanent. The particular Confucian sense of transcendence, as both Mou Zongsan and Julia Ching have shown, is a fusion of immanence and transcendence that appeals to those who share non-reductionistic naturalistic worldviews. The notion of wisdom is one of the philosophic traits that links Confucian thinking about how transcendence and immanence can be conceived as part of one Dao rather than as separate ontological realms of being.

Wisdom, therefore, turns out to be a particularly good theme to describe the aim of *daoxue* self-cultivation. It is the wise person that can become attuned to the mandate of heaven and can then act in ways appropriate to the shifting times and circumstances of the seasons of a human life. No one has shown

the role of reason as wisdom in the thought of Zhu Xi better than Julia Ching.

NOTES

1. In my analysis of query, I am following the lead of Justus Buchler. Although not a comparative philosopher (1990) by any means, Buchler's reflections on the various ways by which philosophers and religionists mount and defend their second-order cognitive reflections is helpful in situating the discussion of the role of metaphor in philosophic discourse. In summary, Buchler argues that human query seeking to make judgments is generally expressed in three distinctive modes, which he calls the assertive, the exhibitivite and the active. Moreover, in the domain of Western philosophy the assertive mode, which relies heavily on propositional discourse in terms of 'assertive' sentences and careful univocal definition has been deemed to be the proper form or genre of philosophic exposition. So, for instance, metaphors, which hardly ever meet the strict definition of clear propositions, are deemed as less than adequate though often unavoidable ways of philosophic query. The second and third forms of judgment are the active and exhibitivite, and they are often the domain of metaphoric discourse and action.

More specifically, Buchler writes "...when the underlying direction is to achieve or support belief; when it is relevant to cite evidence in behalf of our product, we produce in the mode of assertive judgment..." (Buchler 1974, 97). As for active judgment, "When we can be said to do or to act; when the underlying direction is toward effecting a result; when "bringing about" is the central trait attributable to our product, we produce in the mode of active judgment..." (Buchler 1974). And finally, we judge in an exhibitivite mode, "When we contrive or make, in so far as the contrivance rather than its role in action is what dominates and is of underlying concern; when the process of shaping and the product as shaped is central, we produce in the mode of exhibitivite judgment...." (loc. cit.). Whereas all three modes of judgment can make use of metaphor, reliance on the mode of assertive judgment in terms of predication, statement or affirmation (to borrow Buchler's language again), and we deem that such predication, statement and affirmation must be give rise of clear and distinct modes of discourse, then the role of metaphor as a primary philosophic trait is diminished. But when, on the other hand, we

exhibit some mode of ethical conduct, then metaphors of following paths and the polishing the mirror of the mind-heart or cultivating the seeds of virtue make more sense.

2. I borrow the term *ars contextualis* from David Hall and Roger Ames. They believe it to be the normative Confucian form of discourse and invented the term in order to distinguish this Chinese form of philosophy discourse from Western concepts such as metaphysics, ontology and cosmology. They define *ars contextualis* as

Our focus/field model must be understood in terms of the general vision of *ars contextualis*. It is the “art of contextualization” that is most characteristic of Chinese intellectual endeavors. The variety of specific contexts defined by particular family relations or social-political orders constitute the “fields” focused by the individuals who are in turn shaped by the field of influences they focus (Hall & Ames 1995, 273)

Or as they write in their last book, “The world is an interactive field” (Hall & Ames 2001, 11) and wisdom becomes a way for the person to focus on the Way as the goal for self-cultivation.

3. Shun Kwong-loi (1997, 14-21) has an excellent discussion of the role that *ming* plays in the development of classical Ruist philosophy as found in the *Mengzi*. I find Shun’s analysis and synthesis of the debates about how to interpret *ming* judicious and philosophically insightful.

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GLOSSAR OF CHINESE TERMS

Beixi ziyi 北溪字義

Chen Chun 陳淳

cheng 誠

Cheng Mingdao 程明道

dangran 當然

daoxue 道學

Hu Hong 胡宏

Li Yong 李顥

lixue 理學

ming 命

Mou Zongsan 牟宗三

Qing 清

li 禮

shengsheng buxi 生生不息

shengsheng 生生

Song 宋

taiji 太極

tianming 天命

tian 天

Wang Fuzhi 王夫之

wen 文

CHAPTER XII

POETRY AS SELF-CULTIVATION: NEO-CONFUCIANISM IN YAN YU AND GAO BING

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The concept of poetry as vehicle of self-cultivation characterizes one major stream of later Chinese poetics and was closely connected with two main facets of poetic theory: a commitment to a so-called “orthodox” transmission of the tradition of poetry and the idea of “enlightenment” as the font of individual poetic genius. To understand what “orthodoxy” and “enlightenment” meant in this context we must examine the concepts and practices of two figures – Yan Yu (嚴羽) (ca.1180-ca.1235) whose *Canglang shihua* (滄浪詩話) became most influential, and Gao Bing (高棅) (1350-1423), whose *Tangshi pinhui* (唐詩品彙) practically attempted to differentiate Tang poetry according to Yan’s “orthodox” views. Yan Yu’s influence resulted in three basic features common to later theories of poetry: (1) identification with an “orthodox” (*zheng* 正) tradition which had to be followed for one to become a master of poetry himself; (2) belief in poetic “enlightenment” (*wu*) which meant that the enlightened poet achieved perfect intuitive control over the poetic medium; (3) realization that enlightenment only comes thorough assimilation – a complete internalization – of the orthodox tradition. As Yan provided the theory, so Gao supplied the practical guidebook to orthodoxy and all the secrets of enlightened poetry. Inevitably, however, all this led to an inordinate emphasis upon the formal dimensions of poetry and the belief that imitation of past masters constituted the sole basis of poetic training. Much of Ming poetry is characterized by excessive formalism and slavish imitation, and the blame for this can be laid ultimately at Yan Yu’s door. Countless run-of-the-mill Ming and Qing poets learned their craft in the *Canglang shihua* and the *Tangshi pinhui*, and their mediocre achievements have done much to discourage modern scholars both from examining the theoretical bases of their poetic activity and from appreciating the few poets who deserve attention.

Although the outward signs of later poetry might be formalism and imitation, its real significance lay elsewhere: poets

in the Yan Yu and Gao Bing tradition looked upon poetry as a medium of self-cultivation. In formal terms, enlightenment (*wu*) meant the achievement of perfect intuitive control over the poetic medium, but in psychological or spiritual terms it meant the attainment of a state of being where subjective self, medium of communication, and objective reality become one. The ultimate aim of self-cultivation was self-transcendence, and in this important aspect poetry as a discipline closely resembles quiet-sitting, mind control, and other activities usually associated with Neo-Confucian self-cultivation proper (Cf. de Bary 1975, 170-216). It should be emphasized that poetry did not just provide an objective correlative for the individual's state of self-cultivation – a gauge of his spiritual progress. The act of composition itself was an act of self-cultivation. Poetry provided the context within which the individual came to grips with himself and his environment. It not only gave him knowledge of self; it also provided him with a means to know the world outside himself – and, most important, it supplied the link between the two.

These poets insisted that experience be interpreted in linguistic terms. This very insistence upon words places the whole phenomenon in the Neo-Confucian camp rather than identifying it with either philosophical Daoism or Chan Buddhism – both of which abhorred words as impediments to truth and enlightenment. This tradition of poetry – like the larger sphere of Neo-Confucianism itself – owes much to Chan as a source of inspiration, ideas, and terminology, but in the final analysis its ultimate aims lie within the boundaries of Neo-Confucian discipline and aspirations.

We can now turn to a consideration of Yan Yu's *Canglang shihua*, that mainspring of critical impulse and theoretical direction. The following selection of passages proved most influential:

夫學詩者以識為主：入門須正，立志須高；以漢魏盛唐為師，不作開元天寶以下人物。若自退屈，即有下劣詩魔入其肺腑之間。由立志之不高也。行有未至，可加功力，路頭一差，愈緊愈遠，由入門之不正也。。。。先須熟讀楚詞，朝夕諷詠以為之本；及讀古詩十九首，樂府四篇，李陵蘇武漢魏五言皆熟讀，即以李杜二集枕藉觀之，如今人治經，然後博取盛唐名家，醞釀胸中，舊之自然悟入。雖學之不至，亦不失正路。

For the student of poetry, judgment is the most important thing: his introduction must be correct (zheng), and his ambitions must be set high. He takes Han, Wei, Jin, and High Tang as his teachers, and he does not wish to be someone who lived after the Kaiyuan [713-741] and the Tianbao [742-755] eras. If he yields, he will have the devil of inferior poetry enter his bosom – this because he did not set his ambition high. If one has not yet reached the end of his journey, he can increase his efforts, but as soon as he goes off the road, the more he hurries the more he goes astray – this because his introduction was not correct. . . . First one must thoroughly recite the *Chuci* and sing them morning and night so as to make them his basis. When he recites the *Nineteen Ancient Poems*, the “*Yuefu* in Four Sections,” the five-syllable poetry of Li Ling and Su Wu and of the Han and the Wei, he must do them all thoroughly. Afterward, he will take up the collected poetry of Li [Bai] and Du [Fu] and read them in dovetail fashion as people of today study the *Classics*. Next he will take up comprehensively the famous masters of the High Tang. Having allowed all this to ferment in his bosom for a long time, he will be enlightened spontaneously (*ziran wuru*). Although he might not attain the ultimate of study, still he will not go off the correct road (Yan 1987, 1).

This passage is reminiscent of certain Neo-Confucian writings:

聖人之道，坦如大路，學者病不得其門耳。得其門，無遠之不到也。求入其門，不由于經乎？。 . . . 覲足下由經以求道，勉之又勉，異日見卓爾有立于前，然后不知手之舞，足之蹈，不加勉而不能自止矣。

The Way of the sage is as level as a highway. The trouble with students is that they cannot grasp how to enter it, but if one grasps this, one will reach it no matter how far away it is. Are not the *Classics* the way by which to enter it? . . . I hope

you will search for the Way through the *Classics*. If you make more and more effort, someday you will see it rising lofty before you, and then you will unconsciously dance with your hands and feet and without further effort you cannot stop from keep going (Cheng Yi quoted in Zhu and Lü, 2:7a; cf. Chan 1967, 47-48).

The general sense of Yan Yu's statement is so close to that of Cheng Yi that one wonders if it is not based upon it. Of course, in Neo-Confucian writings the "great road" or "highway" is a common metaphor for the orthodox tradition of the Confucian school, and it ultimately derives from the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*):

夫道若大路然，豈難知哉！人病不求耳。

The way of truth is like a great road. Is it difficult to know? The trouble is that men do not follow it (*Mencius*, 12:2).

This metaphor was also not restricted to the Song Neo-Confucianists; Wang Yangming 王陽明 (Wang Shouren 王守仁 [1472-1528]) used it some three hundred years later:

到純熟時，自無此矣。譬之驅車，既由於康莊大道之中，或時橫斜迂曲者，乃馬性未調，銜勒不齊之故，然已只在康莊大道中，決不賺入傍蹊曲徑矣。近時海內同志到此地位者曾未多見，喜慰不可言，斯道之幸也！

When you become thoroughly familiar with it [*liangzhi* 良知 (innate knowledge)], this [lack of *yingche* 瑩徹 (crystal clarity)] will vanish of itself. It may be compared to driving a vehicle. You are driving it on a broad highway, which sometimes slopes up or down or bends right and left, and your horses whose natures are not yet well trained then might take the bit irregularly, but you yourself must just stay right on the broad highway and be sure not to make the mistake of going off onto sidetracks or crooked paths. Of late, I am only aware of a few of our like-minded friends

anywhere in the realm who have reached this stage of progress, so I am very happy, for this is good fortune for the Confucian Way (Wang, *Chuanxilu*, 2:122b; cf. Chan 1963b, 172).

Xu Ai 徐愛 (1487-1518) regarded Confucian orthodoxy in the same light and of course considered that his teacher's (Wang Yangming) philosophy was its latest true successor:

其後聞之既久，漸知反身實踐，然後始信先生之學為孔門嫡傳，捨是皆傍蹊小徑，斷港絕河矣。。。。其後思之既久，不覺手舞足蹈。

Afterward, I gradually realized that his [Wang's] teachings are to be applied to one's own life and put into practice, and then I came to believe that they represent the direct heritage of the Confucian school, and that all the rest is but byways, small paths, and dead ends After I thought this over long enough, I was so happy that I unconsciously danced with my hands and feet (Wang, *Chuanxilu*, 1:64a; cf. Chan 1963b, 24).

All these statements suggest that enlightenment (in poetry and in moral truth) depends upon the assimilation of an orthodox tradition, which is represented as a broad highway. Heterodoxy, as Wang Yangming and Xu Ai pointed out, is nothing other than "sidetracks" and "dead ends," or, as Yan Yu phrased it:

禪家者流，乘有大小，宗有南北，道有邪正；學者須從最上乘，具正法眼，悟第一義。若小乘禪，聲聞辟支果，皆非正也。論詩如論禪。漢魏晉與盛唐之詩，則第一義也。大曆以還之詩，則小乘禪也，已落第二義矣。晚唐之詩，則聲聞辟支果也。學漢魏晉與盛唐詩者，臨濟下也。學大曆以還之詩者，曹洞下也。。。。試取漢魏之詩而熟參之，次取晉宋之詩而熟參之，次取南北朝之詩而熟參之，次取沈王楊盧駱陳拾遺之詩而熟參之，次取開元天寶諸家之詩而熟參之，次獨取李杜二公之詩而熟參之，又取大曆十才子之詩而熟參之，又取元和之詩而熟參之，又盡取晚唐諸家之詩而熟參之，又取本朝蘇

黃以下諸家之詩而熟參之，其真是非自有不能隱者。儻猶於此而無見焉，則是野狐外道，蒙蔽其真識，不可救藥，終不悟也。

In the tradition of the Chan there is a Lesser and a Greater Vehicle, a Southern and a Northern School, and a heterodox and an orthodox Way (*dao you xie zheng*). The student must follow the very highest Vehicle, embody the Correct Dharma Eye and experience enlightenment of the first order (*wu diyi yi*). If it is Lesser Vehicle Chan, the attainment of the Śrāvaka or Pratyeka, it is never orthodox (*zheng*). Discussing poetry is like discussing Chan. The poetry of the Han, Wei, Jin, and the High Tang is enlightenment of the first order. Poetry of after the Dali [766-779] era is Lesser Vehicle Chan and has already fallen into enlightenment of the second order (*dier yi*). The poetry of the Late Tang is Śrāvaka or Pratyeka. He who studies the poetry of the Han, Wei, Jin, and High Tang is an adherent of the Linji School, and he who studies post-Dali era poetry is an adherent of the Caodong School. . . . If one tries to take up the poetry of the Jin and the Song and thoroughly identify with it, then tries to take up the poetry of the Southern and Northern Dynasties and thoroughly identify with it, then tries to take up the poetry of Shen [Shen Quanqi 沈佺期] Song [Song Zhiwen 宋之問], Wang [Wang Bo 王勃] Yang [Yang Jiong 楊炯] Lu [Lu Zhaolin 盧照隣] and Luo [Luo Binwang 駱賓王] and thoroughly identify with it, then tries to take up the poetry of the masters of the Kaiyuan and Tianbao eras and thoroughly identify with it, then especially tries to take up the poetry of Li [Bai] and Du [Fu] and thoroughly identify with it, then tries to take up the poetry of the Ten Talents of the Dali era and thoroughly identify with it, then tries to take up the poetry of the Yuanhe era [806-820] and thoroughly identify with it, then tries to take up the poetry of all the masters of the Late Tang and thoroughly identify with it, and finally tries to

take up the poetry of Su [Su Shi 蘇軾] as and Huang [Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅] of the present dynasty, and of their followers and thoroughly identify with it – then truly what is right and what is wrong will not be able to remain hidden. If there is still any poetry which is not seen among all of these, then it is wild-fox heterodoxy, which obscures true knowledge. One can not save himself from it and will never reach enlightenment (Yan 1987, 10-11).

Many critics of Yan Yu have accused him of confusing poetry with Chan – and with a Chan that he did not really understand. Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), for instance, dismissed Yan as someone who possessed only “half-baked intelligence and who thoroughly misunderstood Chan,” and Feng Ban 馮班 (1614-1671) had this to say about him: “Canglang said that to use Chan as a metaphor for poetry was precise and illuminating. However, I regard this as mere unintelligibility and confused nonsense.” Then Qian and Feng go on to say that Chan is an inappropriate metaphor for poetry since poetry deals with words and personal emotion and Chan lies beyond both. They are so dissimilar that only harm will result if one tries to understand one in terms of the other. Also, the charge has been leveled at Yan that it is improper for a Confucian gentleman to talk about Buddhism anyway – and to introduce Chan into a discussion of serious literary art is really unthinkable. Of course this all misses the point. Yan never said that poetry was Chan or Chan poetry. He merely borrowed the Chan tradition (as he, a layman, saw it) as an analogy for the tradition of poetry – as he said:

故予不自量度，輒定詩之宗旨，且借禪以為喻，推原漢魏以來，而截然謂當以盛唐為法，（後捨漢魏而獨言盛唐者，謂古律之體備也。）雖獲罪於世之君子，不辭也。

Therefore, it is in disregard of my own limitations that I always fix the general scope of poetry, for which I have borrowed Chan as an analogy. Having made a careful analysis, from the Han and the Wei on, I decisively say that we must take High Tang as law (or *Dharma*). (Here the Han and

the Wei are set aside and only the High Tang is mentioned – which is to say that with the High Tang all forms of ancient and modern-style verse are complete.) Even though I incur the censure of all gentlemen in the world, I will not recant (Yan 1987, 27).

The idea persisted, however, that Yan Yu tried to identify poetry with Chan and that the theory of poetry espoused in the *Canglang shihua* was based on Chan mysticism. Actually, Yan was no more committed to Chan than any Neo-Confucian philosopher who used Chan terminology, and we should accept his explanation – he was drawing a convenient analogy between poetry and Chan. This is true for other later critics, whose critical writings are often filled with Chan terminology and concepts.

The student of poetry bears the same kind of relation to the tradition of poetry as the student of Chan bears to the Chan tradition, or the aspiring sage bears to the Confucian tradition. He is introduced to what is correct (*zheng*), assimilates it, and then with practice he achieves spontaneous control over it. Study for the student of poetry means imitation of correct models, and success means identification with them:

詩之是非不必爭，試以已詩置之古人詩中，與識者觀之而不能辨，則真古人矣。

There is no need to argue about what is right and what is wrong in poetry. All one has to do is take his own poetry and place it among the poetry of the ancients. If, upon showing it to a connoisseur he is unable to notice that it is any different, one is then a true man of antiquity (Yan 1987, 138).

We saw how Yan Yu declared that the poetry of the High Tang was “law.” In this he meant that it was the supremely proper model for the student to emulate. Although the student of poetry had to internalize all stages of the poetic tradition in order to attain enlightenment, in addition he had to aspire to the “very highest Vehicle” and have enlightenment of “the first order.” Yan, in fact, believed that there existed different levels or depths in poetry just as in Chan:

然悟有淺深，有分限，有透徹之悟，有但得一知半解之悟。漢魏尚矣，不假悟也。謝靈運至盛唐諸公，透徹之悟，他雖有悟者，皆非第一義也。

However, there are different depths and different scopes of enlightenment (*wu*). There is thoroughly penetrating enlightenment (*touche zhi wu*), and there is enlightenment which only reaches partial understanding (*yizhi banjie zhi wu*). The Han and the Wei are indeed supreme! They did not depend upon enlightenment at all! Those masters from Xie Lingyun [385-433] down to the High Tang had thoroughly penetrating enlightenment. Although there were also others who achieved enlightenment, it was not that of the first order (Yan 1987, 138).

One statement in the above passage is particularly intriguing: The Han and the Wei did not “depend upon enlightenment at all!” Yan elaborates upon this elsewhere:

南朝人尚詞而病于理，本朝人尚理而病于意興，唐人尚意興而理在其中，漢魏之詩詞理意興無跡可求。

People of the Southern Dynasties [420-587] excelled at diction (*ci*) but were weak in reason (*li*). People of our present dynasty [the Song] excel in reason but are weak in conception (*yi*) and inspired interest (*xing*). The people of the Tang excelled at conception and inspiration, and reason was inherently there. However, in the poetry of the Han and the Wei no outer sign of diction, reason, conception, or inspired interest can be found (Yan 1987, 148).

The poetry of the Han and the Wei is then beyond craft since it is thoroughly spontaneous and exhibits no sign of conscious effort. As in perfect enlightenment in Chan, these poets were able to eliminate all distinctions between themselves as subjects and the topics of their poetry as objects, and they also became one with the medium of expression. They did not “depend upon enlightenment

at all” because in their perfectly naive and unself-conscious state they were enlightened by nature and did not have to go through any training or discipline to achieve it.

The poetry of Xie Lingyun down to the poetry of the masters of the High Tang, on the other hand, at best only achieves “thoroughly penetrating enlightenment,” and as such is of lower quality. Even though some of these later poets, Li Bai and Du Fu for instance, were able to transcend self-conscious craft, they still had to pass through a stage of training before they were able to unlearn all the rules of conscious poetic craft. By the thorough internalization of the rules they were finally able to approach the perfectly naive and unself-conscious poetry of the Han and the Wei. However, they never quite reached it since they had to depend upon enlightenment. The poetry of the Han and the Wei is then beyond reach of all later emulators since the Chinese poetic tradition developed in such a way that rules and conventions made learning how to write poetry a formally conscious affair. The best that a student could hope to achieve is “thoroughly penetrating enlightenment” – a suppression of self-conscious design and a recovery, at least to some extent, of naive spontaneity.

Although the poetry of the Han and the Wei was beyond the reach of the student, the poetry of the High Tang was not, and it represented the supreme model for him to follow. Li Bai and Du Fu were the best of the High Tang, but Du Fu was the most worthy of study:

少陵詩法如孫吳，太白詩法如李廣。少陵如節制之師，少陵詩憲章漢魏而取材于六朝，至其自得之妙，則前輩所謂集大成者也。

In poetic method (*shifa*) Shaoling [Du Fu] is like Sun [Wu] and Wu [Qi] and Taibai [Li Bai] is like Li Guang. Shaoling resembles a teacher who goes by the rules. His poetry takes its regulations from the Han and the Wei and acquires its material from the Six Dynasties. As for the marvelousness he himself achieves, this is what people of prior generations call the great consummation of synthesis (Yan 1987, 170-171).

Sun Wu and Wu Qi, of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras respectively, were famous military strategists and generals

who gained their victories through the careful application of rules and procedures. Li Guang, on the other hand, won more than seventy victories over the Xiongnu, at the beginning of the Han, by his brilliant and unconventional actions conceived of “on the spot.” Yan Yu here declares that if one carefully studies the poetry of Du Fu, he will be able to see how it succeeds, but that the poetry of Li Bai is beyond rational analysis – and so an inappropriate model to try to emulate. This is very much like what Cheng Hao advised the student of sagehood:

孟子才高，學之無可依据。學者當學顏子，入聖人為近，有用力之處。

Mencius's natural endowment is on a very high level. To learn from him presents nothing to hold on to. Students should learn from Yanzi, for as a way to enter sagehood, his learning is nearer at hand and contains definite places where the student can make effort (Chen Hao quoted in Zhu and Lü, 2:7b; cf. Chan 1967, 49).

How ever, there is another good reason to make Du Fu the best model to study: “The poetry of Shaoling finds its rules and regulations in the Han and the Wei and obtains its materials from the Six Dynasties. As for the marvelousness which he himself achieves, this is what earlier generations have called the synthesis of the great achievements of others.” Du Fu, as the great synthesizer, sums up the best that the tradition has to offer, and so makes the ideal teacher.

Yan Yu describes “thoroughly penetrating enlightenment” in this manner:

學詩有三節：其初不識好惡，連篇累牘，肆筆而成；既識羞愧，始生畏縮，成之極難；及其透徹，則七縱八橫，信手拈來，頭頭是道矣。

There are three stages in the study of poetry: At first one does not know good from bad and writes one thing after another as quickly as his brush will go. Next he is ashamed and begins to feel timid; it is extremely difficult to write then. But when one is thoroughly penetrating (*touche*) then, in an all

encompassing fashion, he trusts his hand to do as it pleases, and everything goes smoothly in accordance with the Dao (Yan 1987, 131).

This is enlightenment of “the first order,” and only Li Bai and Du Fu had ever achieved it. Nevertheless, this is still the goal for which all poets should strive. However, the student must make his way to enlightenment through one who has become enlightened (Du Fu) and should not attempt to emulate those poets who never had to rely upon enlightenment at all (poets of the Han and the Wei). The same kind of distinction existed in the tradition of Confucian sagehood. Cheng Hao once remarked:

堯與舜更無優劣。及至湯武便別，孟子言性之反也。自古無人如此說，只孟子分別出來。便知得堯舜是生而知之，湯武是學而能之。文王之德則似堯舜，禹之德則似湯武。要之皆是聖人。

Yao and Shun were beyond comparison. When it came to Tang and Wu, they were different, for, as Mencius said, they [unlike Yao and Shun] returned to their nature. No one from the beginning of time had ever said anything like this – it was only Mencius that made this distinction. Thus we know that Yao and Shun were born with the knowledge [of Virtue], whereas Tang and Wu only acquired the ability to practice it after having learned it. The Virtue of King Wen was like that of Yao and Shun, but Yu’s Virtue was like that of Tang and Wu. But generally speaking, they were all sages (Cheng Hao quoted in Zhu and Lü, 14:1a; cf. Chan 1967, 289).

After Yao and Shun, only King Wen and Confucius were sages by nature. All the rest, from Yanzi and Mencius on down, had to learn sagehood, or, as Cheng Hao put it:

仲尼無跡，顏子微有跡，孟子其跡著。

Zhongni [Confucius] left no trace; Yanzi left a small amount. In Mencius, the traces are clearly.

visible.

Zhu Xi in his commentary on this passage observed:

如顏無伐善無施勞皆是。若孔子無迹。

To be like Yanzi is never to brag of one's own good qualities and never to shift one's duties to others. But to be like Confucius is to be free of all such outward signs (Cheng Hao quoted in Zhu and Lü, 14:1a-1b; cf. Chan 1967, 291).

Therefore, just as the student of sage-hood could only aspire to the perfection of the sage-kings and Confucius through Yanzi and Mencius, so the student of poetry could only aspire to the perfection of the poets of the Han and the Wei through Du Fu and Li Bai. Yan Yu admitted that he used Chan as an analogy for poetry; he could have said just as much for Neo-Confucianism.

Yan Yu, in his *Canglang shihua*, always spoke of the orthodox tradition of poetry in rather general terms and never clearly differentiated Tang poetry into all its component parts. Although he did distinguish between the High Tang, Middle (post-Dali) Tang, and Late Tang, he did not say anything about the Early Tang or how poets other than Du Fu or Li Bai ought to be ranked on the ladder of enlightenment. Gao Bing's anthology of Tang poetry, the *Tangshi pinhui*, attempted to supplement these deficiencies and to present the student of poetry with a convenient and practical guide to enlightenment. Gao divided Tang poetry in the following way. First he divided it into seven categories: five-syllable ancient verse (*gushi*), five-syllable regulated verse (*lüshi*), five-syllable quatrains (*jueju*), five-syllable "regulated verses in a row" (*pailü*), seven-syllable quatrains, seven-syllable regulated verse, and seven syllable ancient verse. Then he subdivided these categories chronologically according to this sequence: Early Tang, the "Orthodox Beginning" (*zhengshi*); High Tang – divided among "Orthodox Patriarchs" (*zhengzong*), "Great Masters" (*dajia*) "Famous Masters" (*mingjia*), and "Assistants" (*yuyi*); Middle Tang, the "Immediate Successors" (*jiewu*); and Late Tang divided between "Orthodox Innovation" (*zhengbian*) and "Lingering Echoes" (*yuxiang*). Gao meant his anthology of Tang poetry to be the literal manifestation of the concept of poetic orthodoxy expounded by Yan Yu. In the *Tangshi pinhui*, he put it this way:

使學者入門立志，取正於斯。

If the student would enter the gate and establish his ambition, he can obtain what is orthodox from this (Gao 1982, 4b).

This, of course, is a close paraphrase of the opening lines of the *Canglang shihua*, and it is obvious that Gao's anthology is the collection he thought Yan Yu would have made had he ever been so inclined.

So far we have discussed Yan Yu's theory of enlightenment in terms of intuitive control over the poetic medium. Now we can turn to a consideration of its implications for psychological or spiritual self-cultivation. Perhaps the most significant passage in the *Canglang shihua* which deals with this is the following:

盛唐諸人惟在興趣，羚羊掛角，無跡可求。故其妙處透徹玲瓏，不可湊泊，如空中之音，相中之色，水中之月，鏡中之象，言有盡而意無窮。近代諸公乃作奇特解會，遂以文字為詩，以才學為詩，以議論為詩。夫豈不工，終非古人之詩也。。。。且其作多務使事，不問興致。

The people of the High Tang were only concerned with inspired interest (*xingqu*). They were antelopes that hung by their horns leaving no trace by which they could be found. Their marvelousness (*miaochu*) lies in being as transparent as crystal (*touche linglong*) and beyond rational analysis (*coupo*) Like a sound in the void, color in appearances, like the moon reflected in water or an image in a mirror – their words come to an end, but their ideas (*yi*) are limitless. Modern writers make bizarre interpretations. Consequently they consider language to be poetry, talent and learning to be poetry, or disquisitions to be poetry. They certainly are not unskillful, but their poetry will not be up to the poetry of the ancients. . . . Moreover their writings involve much working over of allusions, and they do not concern

themselves with inspired atmosphere (*xingzhi*)
(Yan 1987, 26).

“Inspired interest” and “inspired atmosphere” probably refer to the same thing – an inspired awareness of the ultimate reality of things. Since this awareness transcends both sense and reason, the kind of poetic language required to render it into words must have the capacity of limitless suggestion, connotation, and implication. The passage seems to indicate a cognitive function for poetry – poetry defined as a means by which one knows, or gains an intuitive awareness of, things as they really are. Immediately preceding this passage is the statement:

夫詩有別材，非關書也；詩有別趣，非關理也。然
非多讀書，多窮理，則不能極其至。所謂不涉理
路、不落言筌者，上也。

Poetry is concerned with a different kind of talent, which is not concerned with books; it involves a different kind of meaning, which is not concerned with principles. However, if one does not widely read books and thoroughly investigate the principles of things, he will not be able to reach its [poetry's] ultimate meaning (*zhi*). That which has been called “don't travel on the road of principles, don't fall into the fish trap of words” is the superior way (Yan 1987, 26).

The above passages strongly suggest that, while book learning and rational investigation are prerequisites for poetry, poetry itself is concerned with intuitive apprehension – something that lies beyond words. Words themselves are connotative signs which, while limited entities in their own right, have the potential to suggest limitless ideas. They have value, but they are not ends in themselves. Although we can discern strong influence from Chan here, Neo-Confucian writings also advised the student to have a balanced appreciation of the value and limitation of words:

學者不泥文義者，又全背卻遠去。理會文義者，又
滯泥不通。。。凡觀書不可以相類泥其義。不
爾，則字字相梗。

Among students, those who do not rigidly adhere to the literal meanings of words completely turn their backs on them and remove themselves far from them, while those who understand the literal meanings of texts adhere to them so rigidly that they do not understand them. . . . In reading books, we should not stick to their literal meaning because the words are the same or similar. Otherwise every word will be a hindrance (Cheng Yi quoted in Zhu and Lü, 3:5b-6a; cf. Chan 1967, 98).

This much is clear, but we still have to determine what the object of this verbalized intuitive apprehension is – to what, after all, is it directed, and what does it really mean?

The key to this problem lies, I think, in unraveling what Yan Yu meant by “like a sound in the void, color in appearances, like the moon reflected in water or an image in a mirror.” This has puzzled many later commentators and actually antagonized some. At first glance it merely looks like a string of metaphors for the limitless capacity of verbal connotation and suggestion, all dressed up in fanciful, if not mystical, imagery. However, it means more than that, and if we turn to texts where similar imagery is employed, the meaning becomes clear. Probably the first mention of the mirror image occurs in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子:

至人之用心若鏡，不將不迎，應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷。

The mind of the perfect man is like a mirror. It does not lean forward or backward in its response to things. It responds to things but conceals nothing of its own. Therefore, it is able to deal with things without injury to [reality] (*Zhuangzi* 7:32 in Chan 1963a, 207).

Perfect knowledge, then, occurs when the mind reflects things as they are – when one is able to completely eliminate all distinctions between self and object, knower and known, and “look” at things from their point of view. Water functions in the same way as a mirror, and the *Zhuangzi* also compares it to the mind of the sage:

水靜則明燭鬚眉，平中準，大匠取法焉。水靜猶明，而況精神！聖人之心靜乎！天地之鑑也，萬物之鏡也。

When water is tranquil, its clearness reflects even the beard and the eyebrows. It remains definitely level, and master carpenters take it as their model. If water is clear when it is tranquil, how much more so is the spirit? When the mind of the sage is tranquil, it becomes the mirror of the universe and the reflection of all things (*Zhuangzi*, 13:3 in Chan 1963a, 208).

Tranquility of mind does not mean mindless unconsciousness but rather a state in which personal elements are missing. The mind takes things as they are, not as it wishes them to be. It operates passively, without the demands of preconception and prejudice or any other manifestation of ego. Both W. T. Chan and P. Demiéville have pointed out that these passages with their mirror and water metaphors had considerable influence upon Neo-Confucianism as well as Chan (Chan 1963, 207-208; Demiéville 1948, 117-119), and probably both schools of thought contributed to the passage in question in the *Canglang shihua*. However, I think that Yan Yu also had another passage in mind from the *Zhuangzi*:

世之所貴道者書也，書不過語，語有貴也。語之所貴者意也，意有所隨。意之所隨者，不可以言傳也。。。。故視而可見者，形與色也；聽而可聞者，名與聲也。悲夫，世人以形色名聲為足以得彼之情！

Men of the world who value the Way all turn to books. But books are nothing more than words. Words have value; what is of value in words is meaning. Meaning has something it is pursuing, but the thing it is pursuing cannot be put into words and handed down. . . . What you can look at and see are forms and colors; what you can listen to and hear are names and sounds. What a pity! – that the men of the world should suppose that form and color, name and sound, are sufficient to convey the truth of a thing (*Zhuangzi*, 13:64 in

Watson 1968, 152).

In effect, Yan Yu accepts the challenge of the *Zhuangzi* and declares that what words, through meaning, are pursuing can convey the truth of a thing. He says that the poets of the High Tang wrote poetry which is like a sound in the air or color in appearances, like water or a mirror which reflects things as they really are. In Yan's view, this poetry of "thoroughly penetrating enlightenment" or "enlightenment of the first order" represents the verbal equivalent, the objective correlative, of the mind of the perfect man, the tranquil mind of the sage, and these great poets used their poetry as a means to perfect knowledge and self.

Of course, it is unlikely that Yan Yu derived this view of poetry and sagehood solely from a firsthand reading of the *Zhuangzi*. Undoubtedly he was also aware of passages in contemporary Neo-Confucian texts which treat sagehood in similar terms – though nowhere there is there anything as extreme as Yan's extravagant claims for poetry. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the Yan Yu-Gao Bing tradition, which formed the basis of Ming and Qing era archaist (*fugu* 復古) poetics and largely defined the discourse of later Chinese poetics as a whole, shows throughout a close affiliation with the major concerns of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation. It is hoped that this exploration of Neo-Confucian literary aesthetics has brought more light to bear on this affiliation and helped to define this major trend in later Chinese literature and thought.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE WISDOM BEHIND THE LAW: THE IMPLICATIONS OF YANG-MING PHILOSOPHY FOR THE LAW

GRAHAM MAYEDA

The purpose of this paper is to rethink the relationship between ethics and the law with the help of Chinese philosophy, and in particular, the philosophy of Wang Yangming. Generally speaking, we assume that the European and North American conception of this relationship is founded on highly individualistic ethical and legal theories. Given this fact, it seems natural to assume that Chinese philosophy, with its fundamental recognition of the importance of relationships and its emphasis on self-cultivation, could simply be used as a corrective for the overly individualistic approach. However, this would be to over-simplify the contribution that Chinese philosophy can make to an understanding of the relationship between ethics and the law. Thus in this paper I will accomplish the following tasks:

1. Question the overly simplistic view that Kantian philosophy is purely oriented towards obligation, while Confucian philosophy is purely a virtue ethics. This will help to draw out the similarities and differences between the Kantian approach and the Confucian approach.

2. Challenge the general view that the North American and European conception of law denies the importance of relationships, and compare and contrast models of relationality in the Western tradition (e.g., that of Emmanuel Levinas) and the East Asian tradition (Confucianism) that can help us to reconceive the traditional individualistic conception of law.

3. Suggest that the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent as conceived in Wang Yangming's philosophy can help us to revitalise the notion of relationality that underlies the law. It can do so by reconceiving ethics, and so the ethical foundation of the law, as involving a transcendence firmly rooted in the concrete nature of our experience of the world. This reconception of the law allows us to conceive of the law as a response to the need of others, and recognises our responsibility to avoid the perpetuation of injustice.

THE KANTIAN CONCEPTION OF LAW AND THE RELATIONALITY OF LAW

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that right is “the sum of the conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the choice of another in accordance with a universal law of freedom” (Kant 1996, 24 [6:230]). Thus only those ends are legitimate which are chosen in accordance with the universal law, which states that every individual’s actions must be consistent with the freedom of others. Legality is the domain of external law-giving (Kant 1996, 21 [6:220]). It is distinguished from morality, which is the domain of internal law-giving. In the case of morality, the compulsion to fulfil one’s duty as set out in a moral law results from the duty itself, rather than from the use of external coercion, which compels respect for the freedom of all. As Kant states, “[t]hat lawgiving which makes an action a duty and also makes this duty the incentive is *ethical*. But that lawgiving which does not include the incentive of duty in the law and so admits an incentive other than the idea of duty itself is *juridical*” (Kant 1996, 20 [6:219]). The role of law, then “is to make freedom possible, rather than to make morality actual” (Ripstein 1999, 4), with the result that legality in some sense is the condition for the possibility of the moral, since it opens that realm of freedom within which moral life is possible.¹

However, if we take the traditional Confucian approach to the relationship between legality and morality, we arrive at the opposite conclusion: morality is the condition for the possibility of legality. In speaking of ritual propriety (*li*),² for instance, Confucius states that “[i]f a man is not human (*ren*), what has he to do with ceremonies (*li*)? If he is not human, what has he to do with music?” (Confucius 1963, 24 [3:3]). In other words, the foundation of morality, human-heartedness (*ren*), is the animating force behind ritual, and hence behind rule-based systems such as the law. Morality is thus given priority over legality. Given this inversion, the question becomes the following: “What can Chinese philosophy teach us about Western conceptions of the law?” In many ways, the problem facing Confucius – how to re-animate the Zhou rituals – sheds light on an important question for law today – how to relate a system of laws (understood as a system of rules) to the domain of concrete human action. For Confucius, the answer

was to turn to *ren*, which points to the relationality of human existence and the human capacity for self-realisation.

This insight that law and justice implicate relationships between people as well as the individual is present in some Western views, as we shall see. However, Western conceptions of relationality exist in tension with the individualistic foundations of both Western ethics and law – an individualism which arises from the initial emphasis of Greek virtue ethics on reason, and which culminates in the development of Kant’s duty-based moral and legal thought. In this paper, I look at how Western and Confucian conceptions of relationality differ in three contexts:

1. The relationship between virtue and obligation;
2. The relationship between self and other;
3. The relationship between the transcendent and the immanent.

THE NEED FOR A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE LAW

To set the stage, it is important to realise that many thinkers within the Western tradition have recognised the relational nature of law. They suggest that Kant’s formulation of law as a system for ensuring the freedom of all implies that the law is fundamentally about the relationship between free individuals. As Ernest Weinrib points out, in the context of private law, Kant conceives of justice as corrective justice, rather than distributional justice. The implication of conceiving of justice in this way is that legal relationships must be considered as bipolar, as Weinrib explains:

[T]he bipolar nature of corrective justice has many aspects. Corrective justice embraces: a bipolar conception of interaction that relates the doer of harm to the sufferer of that harm; a bipolar conception of injustice as a violation of quantitative equality; a bipolar conception of damage as a loss by the plaintiff correlative to the defendant’s gain; a bipolar conception of the adjudicative process as a vindication of the quantitative equality of the litigants; and a bipolar

conception of the remedy as the annulment of the parties' correlative gain and loss. (Weinrib 1995, 65-66)

The law, then, is about the relationship between two parties, one of which has harmed the other and thereby deprived her of the exercise of a certain right to which she was entitled. The remedy must therefore reflect the degree to which the defendant has harmed the plaintiff, thereby eliminating the gain that the defendant would otherwise have made at the expense of the plaintiff.

Other legal scholars, too, point to the essentially relational nature of the law. Arthur Ripstein, for instance, points to responsibility as one of the cornerstones of the law. He is critical of two views of responsibility. The first is the causalist view, which sees responsibility as arising out of the production or causation of a particular effect in the world. The second is the voluntarist view, which sees responsibility as arising from a person's intentions (what they will). The basis of this critique is that both causalists and voluntarists "make questions of responsibility independent of questions of what people owe each other." They thus both suffer from the deficiency that "they cannot be reconciled with the idea that holding people responsible is itself required by fair terms of interaction. Nor can they explain why particular coercive responses are appropriate in some contexts but not others" (Ripstein 1999, 18). In other words, both views ignore the relationship between the defendant and the plaintiff. Ripstein aims to correct this oversight through a relational understanding of responsibility.

Last, Robert Gibbs, in *Why ethics?*, sees law as relational, not only by relating plaintiff and defendant, but in its function of promoting dialogue among citizens, and between law-makers and those subjected to the law:

[T]he value of law for society is precisely its ability to GENERATE MANY CONFLICTS: to formalise and communicate just what we disagree about. Law not only produces the conflicts, but also the complexity with which to treat the conflicts. The promise of legal judgement provides the space in which dissent flourishes, in

which factions can be tolerated. We judge through law in order to allow conflict to become more complex, outside the realm of force. But law marshals the complexities of the past into this present. (Gibbs 2000, 215)

Not only does the law provide a realm of freedom for the individual, but the procedure of law-making itself opens communicative relationships. These relationships involve both the present relationships between law-makers and the public, and relationships between the past and the present. Laws, insofar as they articulate the meaning of social and political institutions, necessarily draw on past understandings of these institutions and the history of justice and injustice which they represent.

If relationality is essential to understanding the law, then the challenge for a Western conception of the law is to realise how the ideal of the relationship relates to actual, concrete relationships. For Kant, law is not about a particular relationship, but about relationality as a regulative ideal. This is because only two aspects of a person are relevant to the law – her status as a free being, and her capacity to reason. How, then, can we reconceive the Western notion of legality so as to incorporate the concrete relationship between individuals? The solution is pointed to by Julia Ching in her work on Wang Yangming. For Yangming, she emphasises, wisdom “is at the same time present in the self and the others, while transcending both self and others” (1976, 185). As we will see, this complex understanding of the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent should provide us with guidance about how to reconceive the relationship between concrete and abstract relationality.

In order to understand the challenges involved in using Chinese thought as a resource for re-invigorating the traditional individualistic conception of law, it is important to understand a number of different relationships. These relationships are those between virtue and obligation, the self and the other, and the immanent and the transcendent. The relationship between virtue and obligation is important for two reasons. First, it points out some homologies between Western and Confucian thought. Kantianism and post-Kantian ethics have frequently been characterised as duty-based, and thus a departure from traditional virtue-based ethics. In contrast, Confucianism has been considered

a virtue ethics. I will problematise this view by demonstrating the important role of virtue in Kantian ethics. However, my second task will be to point out the effects of Kant's subordination of virtue to obligation, and Confucianism's inversion of this relationship, which subordinates obligation to virtue. The implications of this reversal are that Kantianism and Confucianism put a different emphasis on what aspects of the self are important for ethics – in the former, the self as absolute – i.e., as rational agent – is prioritised, while in the latter, both the self as contingent, socially and historically-situated individual and the self as absolute are emphasised. The emergence of the focus on the relationship between self and other will carry us into our next section, in which we unpack Wang Yang-ming's understanding of the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent and the self and the other in the context of his writings on wisdom.

Through a study of these three pairs of terms, we will be able to clarify the different ways in which Western and Confucian thought conceptualise the *relationship* between them. We will then be in a position to draw some conclusions about the unique contribution that Confucian thought can make to re-conceiving the law and its purpose in light of a new understanding of relationality.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIRTUE AND OBLIGATION

Western Views on the Relationship Between Virtue, the Passions and Obligation

Kant's approach to ethics in many ways understands ethics as a realm of duty. The purpose of *The Doctrine of Virtue* is to provide the reader with an understanding of how one can have an end that is also a duty. Ethics goes beyond law because it "provides a *matter* (an object of free choice), an **end** of pure reason which it represents as an end that is also objectively necessary, that is, an end that, as far as human beings are concerned, it is a duty to have" (Kant 1996, 146 [6:380]). This focus on duty has led scholars to posit a fundamental difference in emphasis between Confucian and Kantian ethics. Generally, we consider Confucian ethics as focusing on the question of what it means to be human (see Tu 1985, 149-170). In contrast, Kant emphasises that ethics, with its focus on reason, is not to be

pursued through a study of human nature. He states in *The Metaphysics of Morals* that the study of human nature is restricted to moral anthropology, which should in no way be confused with a metaphysics of morals. A study of human nature is only important in order to understand how to instruct people about their moral obligations and how to reinforce these obligations within the individual (Kant 1996, 10 [6:217]). This distinction between Confucian ethics and Kantian ethics is generally summarised as a distinction between an ethics of virtue, which focuses on the development of human nature, and an ethics of obligation, which focuses on restrictions on this nature.

It is not clear, however, that this is a useful distinction, since it is not apparent that the focus on duty necessarily excludes a role for the virtues. As pointed out above, the virtues serve to reign in our passions, thereby enabling us to fulfil our duties. As Kant points out, we have a capacity to resist external coercion – *fortitude* – but we also have a capacity to resist internal coercion – virtue (Kant 1996, 146 [6:380]). By internal coercion, Kant means our ability to be swayed by our non-rational faculties – our emotions and passions. To act virtuously is an expression of human freedom because it entails overcoming our inner natural impulses and acting in accordance with ends that are also duties:

Virtue is the strength of a human being's maxims in fulfilling his duty. – Strength of any kind can be recognized only by the obstacles it can overcome, and in the case of virtue these obstacles are natural inclinations, which can come into conflict with the human being's moral resolution; and since it is man *himself* who puts these obstacles in the way of his maxims, virtue is not merely a self-constraint (for then one natural inclination could strive to overcome another), but also a self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom, and so through the mere representation of one's duty in accordance with its formal law. (Kant 1996, 156 [6:394])

This recognition of a role for the virtues as an expression of human freedom from the bonds of our passions leads us to

question whether it is right to oppose Kantian ethics to a virtue ethics. As Martha Nussbaum points out:

Nobody can any longer think of Kant's view as obsessed with duty and principle to the exclusion of character-formation and the training of the passions. We are well aware that he offers a general account of virtue, in terms of the strength of the will in overcoming wayward and selfish inclinations; that he offers detailed analyses of standard virtues such as courage and self-control, and of vices, such as avarice, mendacity, servility, and pride; that, although in general he portrays inclination as inimical to virtue, he also recognizes that sympathetic inclinations offer crucial support to virtue, and urges their deliberate cultivation. In short, his account of virtue covers most of the same topics as do classical Greek accounts. (Nussbaum 1999, 165)

But if we deny that "virtue ethics" identifies a specific type of ethics, then the general categories of "virtue ethics," "deontological ethics" and "utilitarian ethics" become somewhat useless in distinguishing Confucian ethics, which is generally considered a virtue ethic, from contemporary Western ethical views, which generally fall into the latter two categories.

Instead, in our comparison of Confucian and Kantian understandings of duty and virtue, it is important to identify precisely what is at issue in Western and East Asian conceptions of virtue and duty, without simply juxtaposing virtue and obligation. Nussbaum usefully sets out some of the common views held by Western virtue ethicists:

1. Moral philosophy should be concerned with the agent, as well as with choice and action.
2. Moral philosophy should therefore concern itself with motive and intention, emotion and desire: in general, with the character of the inner moral life, and with settled patterns of motive, emotion, and reasoning that lead us to call someone a person of a certain sort (courageous, generous, moderate, just, etc.).

3. Moral philosophy should focus not only on isolated acts of choice, but also, and more importantly, on the whole course of the agent's moral life, its patterns of commitment, conduct, and also passion. (Nussbaum 1999, 170)

This list helps us to understand the Western conception of the role of virtue. Firstly, in its focus on the agent, it emphasises the *individual's* struggle against the forces that oppose the fulfilment of our obligation to ourselves and others. Second, this struggle is an *internal* struggle, since the forces that the development of virtue combat are our emotions and passions. Third, the approach is *teleological* insofar as it considers the totality of the individual's life as a process of moral development.

Confucian Conceptions of the Relationship Between Virtue and Obligation

Kant's deontological ethics, to the degree that it sees the purpose of virtue as a tool for helping us fulfil our obligations, focuses heavily on the individual's internal struggle to become a moral agent who fulfils her obligations. In contrast, Confucian philosophy has a radically different view of this relationship: duty is subordinated to obligation. In other words, it is not our duties that make the cultivation of virtue desirable. Rather, it is virtue that makes the fulfilment of duty possible and necessary. Virtue is not a tool to be used to encourage conformity with duty. Rather, it has a much more central role. For instance, Wang Yangming points out that the obligatory observances set out in the ritual texts are all animated by virtue as it is rooted in human nature:

There are three hundred rules of canonical rites (*ching-li*) and three hundred additional rules of demeanor (*ch'ii-li*). Not one of them is not based on humanity; not one of them is not based on human nature. Such are the directives and arrangements of Heaven. (Wang 1965, 7:241b; trans. in Ching 1976, 96)

As we will see, this reversal results in significantly different positions on the three claims held by Western virtue ethicists:

1. Moral philosophy should be concerned with the agent in relation to others.
2. As a result, moral philosophy should be concerned with both our inner moral life and its manifestation in our external relations.
3. Moral philosophy should focus on the unfolding of the individual's whole life as a part of the unfolding of the universe of which she is a part.

How has this relationality been imported simply through the reversal of the understanding of the relationship between virtue and obligation? Kant's prioritisation of a rational conception of duty necessarily limits the scope of virtue to fulfilling the necessities dictated by reason. His philosophy thus reflects the general view of the ancient Greek and Roman virtue theorists who "were strong partisans of reason" (Nussbaum 1999, 178), and who "chose philosophy [as a way of life] in the conviction that what it offered, reasoning and explaining, was central to the pursuit of a good human life" (Nussbaum 1999, 179). In contrast, the Confucian view is that rationality, and hence a rational conception of obligation, do not exhaust ethical activity. The virtues are not seen simply as an internal device to control the passions, and so Confucians are more free to consider virtue, not simply in terms of the internal dictates of reason, but also in terms of the external requirements of community.

Thus by reversing the priority of virtue and obligation, we see the following consequences. First, Confucianism focuses both on the *individual's* struggle against the forces that oppose the fulfilment of our obligation to ourselves and others and the importance of *harmonisation* of the individual with others in concrete life situations. Second, this struggle is an *internal* struggle. But it is also an *external* struggle that implicates social, political and legal structure. Third, it is *teleological* from the point of view of the development of the individual, but it also implicates the development of society and the universe as a whole.

The value of the Confucian insight is that it is able to accommodate both universality and particularism. It considers universality to the degree that rationality is involved, but it also considers particularity by considering the non-rational elements of human existence such as our intuitions, and historical elements such as traditions and customs. It thus makes the question of the

origin of virtue in historical, cultural and social realities just as relevant to the understanding of what ethics is as the search for the absolute within us. As Julia Ching points out, wisdom for Wang Yangming implicates both this contingent self, and the self as absolute: “. . . Yang-ming’s teaching of *hsin chih pen-t’i* and *liang-chih pen-t’i* not only suggests the presence of the absolute within the contingent self, but provides also a description of the process of transformation by which the contingent self becomes more and more related in harmony with the absolute within, without ever destroying the tenuous balance between immanence and transcendence” (Ching 1976, 184-185).

This initial clarification of the relationship between virtue and obligation in Confucian thought will allow us to provide a clarification of the Confucian understanding of the relationship between law and morality. This will in turn help to explain the apparent incompatibility between the Western and Chinese concepts of law and morality. As we will see, differences arise because of the fundamentally divergent concept of ethics of each tradition. For the Chinese tradition, ethics is based on a relationality, while for the Western tradition, it is on an individualistic concept of obligation. The inner and the outer are thus intimately related in the Confucian view, while they remain completely separate in the Western view. The result is that Kant can separate law and morality based on a distinction between external coercion (legality) and internal coercion (ethics), while Confucians can see a continuity between both legality and ethics. The question remains whether the Western conception of legality, insofar as it is dependent on an abstract relationality, is adequate to the regulation of concrete relationships.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE OTHER

If Kantian philosophy and its predecessors provide a relatively impoverished conception of the role of otherness in both ethics and the law, it might be useful to consider some alternative Western views on otherness. Emmanuel Levinas, operating within and against the phenomenological tradition, provides one such conception. For Levinas, justice is precisely the relationship between the self and the other in which the other “is my master,” to whom I must answer for all that I do:

Justice consists in recognizing in the Other my master. Equality among persons means nothing of itself; it has an economic meaning and presupposes money, and already rests on justice – which, when well-ordered, begins with the Other. Justice is the recognition of his privilege qua Other and his mastery, is access to the Other outside of rhetoric, which is ruse, emprise, and exploitation. (Levinas 1969, 72)

I am thus never in a relationship of equality with the other, but rather the other always forces me to put myself in question by being confronted with an otherness that cannot be reduced to my own experience through my understanding. As Levinas points out, the other is thus also the absolutely other, the stranger who disturbs and disrupts my complacency:

The absolutely other is the Other. He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say 'you' or 'we' is not a plural of the 'I.' I, you – these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger [L'Etranger], the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself [le chez soi]. (Levinas 1969, 39)

While seeking a concept of relationality within the Western tradition that will provide homologues with East Asian conceptions, it is important not to conflate the Confucian understanding of the other in the relation of *ren* with Levinas' understanding of the other. For Levinas, the relationship between self and other is a non-reciprocal relationship. This is clear in *Time and the Other*, for instance, when Levinas explains that alterity does not involve reciprocity:

. . . [I]n the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life, alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship – that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneity.

The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity. (Levinas 187, 81)

In contrast, for Confucians, alterity implies reciprocity. For instance, in the *Analects*, the following exchange is related:

Zaiwo asked about the three-year mourning period, saying, 'Even a full year is too long.' [. . .]

The master said: 'Would you, then, be able to enjoy eating your rice and wearing your finery?'

'Yes. I would.'

'If you are able to enjoy them, do so by all means. The gentleman in mourning finds no relish in good food, no pleasure in music, and no comforts in his own home. That is why he does not eat his rice and wear his finery. Since it appears that you enjoy them, then do so by all means.'

After Zaiwo had left, the Master said, 'How unfeeling Zaiwo is. A child ceases to be nursed by his parents only when he is three years old. Three years' mourning is observed throughout the Empire. Was Zaiwo not given three years' love by his parents?'" (Confucius 1979, 147 [17:21])

This passage indicates the reciprocity involved in the relationship with one's parents. As the last paragraph points out, parents provide for us in our early infancy when we are helpless, and in return, we should mourn for them for the same period of time. As Shen points out, Confucius' response to Zaiwo's questioning emphasises the importance of reciprocity as the foundation of human relationships (Shen 1998, 9).

Does the ideal of reciprocity involved in Confucian philosophy imply the identification of the self with the other, and thus the erasure of the distinction between the self and other which is central to Levinas' characterisation of otherness? At times, it appears that this is the case. For instance, Julia Ching explains Yangming's doctrine of "All in one" (*wanwu yiti*) in the following way:

[S]agehood [culminates] in an experience of oneness with Heaven and Earth and all things, an experience which permeates the sage's thinking and being and acting, which becomes identified with his *hsin* or *liang-chih* and its *pen-t'i*, overflowing into a concrete awareness of his social and political responsibilities. (Ching 1976, 126)

It is important to note the last line, however. This feeling of oneness does not entail the erasing of distinctions. Sagehood does not involve the adoption of a purely spiritual perspective, but rather also implicates the concrete social and political realities and the responsibilities these entail. Individuals are not identical, but set in a social, cultural and political context. Insofar as the context of each individual's life differs from ours, so to will the nature of our responsibilities towards that individual change. It is for this reason that Confucians like Yangming support a graded concept of love, rather than the Mohist doctrine of universal love. As Julia Ching points out, the danger of the Mohist concept of universal love ". . . is that by promoting an 'equal love of all,' the very nature of love [is] denied. For if love springs spontaneously from man's nature, it must also recognize the order of nature itself, with its inherent distinctions, based on natural kinship and obligations" (Ching 1976, 129). Unity with others through the process of cultivating *ren* thus does not result in the obliteration of distinctions between myself and the other, but rather involves a keen awareness of the differential responsibilities that arise in different concrete contexts. We will see the implications of this reciprocal conception of otherness for the law in the final section of this essay.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TRANSCENDENT AND THE IMMANENT

Wang Yangming's Concept of Wisdom and the Relationship Between the Transcendent and the Immanent

For Yangming, wisdom involves both the inner and the outer at the same time. He rejects Zhu Xi's emphasis on the

external aspects of learning – studying the classics and extending knowledge through the study of natural phenomena – and turns us inwards to our mind (*xin*). The proposition *xin ji li*, which Ching translates as “the source of all being and virtue lies in *xin*, in man’s mind-and-heart” (1976, 57) indicates this turn inwards. Ching points out that “this proposition represents Yangming’s attempt to internalize the moral quest, by claiming for the mind-and-heart, the possession of all moral principles, and even by identifying *xin* with virtue or the sum total of moral principles” (1976, 57-58).

But it is not accurate to say that Yangming, through the proposition of *xin ji li*, thereby inverts Confucian orthodoxy of the time, replacing the external with the internal, and replacing an emphasis on principle (*li*) with an emphasis on *xin*. As he explains in a letter to a friend:

What one calls *li* (moral principle) in an object or event, righteousness in the manner we relate ourselves to it, and good in nature, is differently designated on account of the things to which they refer, but in reality are all manifestations of my *hsin*. There is no object, no event, no moral principle, no righteousness and no good that lies outside *hsin*. . . . To insist on seeking the supreme good in every event and object is to separate what is one into two things. (Wang 1965, 4:179b-179a; trans. in Ching 1976, 59)

Morality, though it concerns the internal – our mind – nevertheless also involves external affairs, since the principles of their functioning are identical with mind. As Ching indicates, moral development does not isolate [the individual] from reality, nor remove him from the world of active involvement. Rather, it represents the fusion of inner and outer concerns. The development of an ever-deepening mind-and-heart in the aspirant for sagehood brings about a union between the agent and the object of his intentions and actions, thus transcending the dualism between the self and nonself, between *xin* and *li*. (1976, 60)

Does this union of agent and object involve erasing all differences between self and other? Clearly not. For this fusion between inner and outer involves manifesting inner virtue in the external world in such a way that one’s mind becomes, through the

cultivation of virtue, automatically focused on the realm of human relationships and the responsibilities these entail, rather than being focused on one's selfish desires, which are at odds with the necessities of a harmonious society. There is thus no moral cultivation simply for one's own benefit. As Ching points out,

[Yang-ming's] goal was not self-perfection for its own sake. It was to be a Confucian sage, a man who united "kingliness without" with "sageliness within," a man who "manifested" his "clear virtue" not only by cultivating himself, but also by allowing self-cultivation to overflow into the fulfillment of responsibilities toward the family, the state, and the world. (1976, 72)

The differences between self and other that make relationality possible are thus not erased through an egological fixation on self-cultivation. Rather, the fusion of external and internal involves recognition of an orientation towards others, not a subordination of otherness to the demands of the self.

The pursuit of human wisdom, then, as the manifestation of virtue, unifies two aspects – the inner and the outer. In its inward manifestation, wisdom is "the harmony and purity of the mind-and-heart, perfect in its spontaneity, true to its pristine nature." In its outer manifestation wisdom is "the proven ability of dealing with a variety of human situations according to an inborn moral intuition . . ." (Ching 1976, 73).

The Root of Relationality in the Encounter with the Other – Grounding the Transcendent in the Concreteness of Experience

We have already seen that one of the problems with the Western conception of legality is the difficulty its perspective presents for understanding the link between abstract relationality and the concrete relationships of everyday life. In this regard, Wang Yangming can again be helpful. For him, wisdom is not something abstract, but something which manifests itself in concrete situations. In his defence of King Wu of Zhou, who began a military expedition without having buried his father, and Emperor Shun, who married without having consulted his parents, Wang Yangming points to the particularity of a present situation

as the occasion for the manifestation of virtue. Despite the initial impression that their actions were lacking in virtue, each of these individuals demonstrate the virtue of filiality in the context of a specific set of circumstances. As Ching points out, this shows that “[t]he capacity to know the good, while being inborn, relies not on abstract principles which can be applied universally, but on the guidance of experiential wisdom” (1976, 109-110).

It is thus the encounter with a new, novel situation which is the occasion for the manifestation of virtue. It is not the abstraction from a given context which gives rise to right action, but rather right action is manifest in the response of a mind open to a situational context. Yangming explains his principle of the inborn moral sense (*liangzhi*) as precisely this openness to a particular situational context:

Our knowledge of the good (*liang-chih*) does not come from seeing and hearing, and yet seeing and hearing are all functions of *liang-chih*. [. . .] Our capacity to know the good (*liang-chih*) is in the human heart, the same through all time and in the whole universe. It is the “capacity for knowledge which does not depend on reflective thinking” which “works with ease and knows where danger is.” It is “the ability for action which does not depend on learning,” which works with simplicity and knows where obstruction is”. (Wang 1965 2:113b and continuing at 2:116a; trans. in Ching 1976, 107-108)

Prof. Ching’s gloss on these lines, pointing as it does to Mencius’ story about the child falling into the well, indicates the importance of a spontaneous response to a situational context as the occasion for ethical action: “To be genuine,” she states, “*liang-chih* must be spontaneous, pre-reflective. It is the feeling of alarm and commiseration any man would have when he sees a child fall into a well” (Ching 1976, 108). In other words, the encounter with the other in a particular context is the occasion for the manifestation of virtue.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TRANSCENDENT AND THE IMMANENT

From the foregoing study of Wang Yangming we have learned something about the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent. This relationship is circular – a sort of feedback loop. While this circularity implies separation between the transcendent and the immanent – a certain heterogeneity – there is likewise an identity between the transcendent and the immanent – i.e., homogeneity. On the one hand, the concrete encounter with another, such as when we see the child fall into the well, is the occasion for the ethical, yet at the same time, the expression of the ethical through my response to the concrete manifests the transcendent aspect of human existence. This is the human capacity for virtuous action. This separation between the concrete and the transcendent which this account presupposes, however, is belied by the identity of the external experience and the inner response. This is what Ching means when she characterises Yangming’s concept of wisdom as “experiential wisdom” (1976, 110). It is not wisdom as an abstract principle, but wisdom that intimately links our inner capacity for wisdom to the external world of action through our experience.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR LAW

According to Prof. Ching, Yangming never denies the importance of reflection for determining right action. As she points out, “. . . although *liangzhi* begins as an inborn moral sense, it does not always offer a clear program of detailed action. There is often need of reflection, of careful deliberation, for the sake of clarifying the basic response given by this ‘inborn moral sense’” (Ching 1976, 109). We see from this that it is not Kant’s plea for a reflective, rational foundation for both law and morality which is the problematic aspect of his philosophy of law. Indeed, Kant’s epitaph clearly expresses the unity that he sees between the transcendent and the immanent – the universe and human existence: “Two things fill me with awe,” he says, “the starry skies above, and the moral law within.” Yet what is missing in Kant is a recognition of the importance of the concrete encounter as the occasion for reflection, and the implications this encounter has for the nature of this reflection.

What does the encounter imply for the law? For ethics, it clearly implies critique. For the law as a procedure for ensuring the validity of legal norms, it similarly emphasises the importance of giving voice to the other, i.e., taking account of the appeal of the other. As Emmanuel Levinas points out, justice is the “face to face” (Levinas 1969, 71) in which my spontaneity, my freedom, is called into question by the other. In the case of law-formation, this means ensuring that law-making procedure gives voice to those who are systematically marginalised and oppressed. It is to recognise the importance of dialogue, and the role of normative arguments, rather than reducing our law-making institutions to markets of competing self-interest.

In the case of private legal relationships, it means vigilantly observing when legal standards such as “reasonableness” result in the systematic denial of justice to particular classes of defendants who have traditionally been cast as “unreasonable.” But it also means ensuring that we conceive of the role of law as a principled approach that preserves the importance of the relationship between plaintiff and defendant, rather than seeing the courtroom as a forum in which to reproduce welfare-maximising social policies.

But as we have seen, for Confucians, the relationship with the Other is not exhausted by the Levinasian concept of otherness as absolute difference. We have also seen that the relationship to the other involves reciprocity. This reciprocity implies unity or harmony with all things, without collapsing the distinction between them. Unlike the Mohist concept of universal love, human-heartedness (*ren*) helps us to recognise our social and political responsibilities to others, responsibilities which differ based on cultural, social and political context. The appeal of the other is followed by a spontaneous feeling of commiseration, which leads us to respond to the appeal based on the responsibilities particular to the other’s situation.

This reciprocity has implications for social welfare policies, such as the duty to provide for the poor. For Kant, this duty is based on an abstract conception of duty. According to him, progressing from the state of nature in which property rights are an innate right to a condition in which the state guarantees property is a duty, since “[t]he establishment of institutions of public right removes – indeed, is the only way to remove – the unilaterality of judgement, coercion and acquisition that characterizes the state of

nature” (Weinrib, forthcoming, 14). In other words, it is only in within a legal regime of property that the individual is free from the arbitrary attempts of others to acquire my property. But this duty to leave the state of nature results in a conflict with duty. A property regime would allow individuals to possess property without being in physical possession of it, and so it is conceivable that all property can be occupied, leaving me with nothing, which is an infringement of my duty to myself not to be dependent on others for my survival, and so not to allow myself to be treated as a means to another’s end. This impasse is overcome through the establishment of a duty to support the poor, as Ernest Weinrib points out:

The public duty to support the poor breaks – and indeed is the only thing that can break – this impasse [between the duty to leave the state of nature and the duty not to make oneself dependent on others]. The requirement allows all persons, consistently with their rightful honor, to consent to the establishment of a civil condition. The sovereign’s assumption of the duty to support the poor makes up for the possible inaccessibility of the means of sustenance. The result is that in the civil condition, just as under innate right, no-one’s subsistence is imperilled by the actions of others. Moreover, because the duty to establish a civil condition cannot proceed without ensuring everyone’s sustenance, supporting the poor is as much a duty as is the establishment of a civil condition; the necessity of the end entails the necessity of the means required to effect it. (Weinrib, forthcoming, 20)

Rather than taking this abstract approach, the Confucian notion of otherness and the reciprocity which it implicates provide an account of our responsibility to the poor which is both intuitively more appealing, and which better reflects the reality of our encounter with others. Our encounter with the other in a context of need inspires within us a feeling of commiseration which points to our oneness with others, and a recognition of a reciprocal responsibility of each to the other within the specific

social context of the encounter. Unlike for Kant, virtue is not merely a means of ensuring that I conform with my obligations, but rather the impetus for realising a responsibility that arises based on the particularity of the appeal of the other. The well-field system advocated by Mencius, in which land is divided into nine sections, one of which is cultivated communally for the benefit of all, is a manifestation at the legal level of the reciprocity implied by human-heartedness, which gives rise to a concept of “human government” (Mencius, 3A:1).

To summarise, the Confucian understanding of relationality implies the need for providing representation for those who are systematically excluded from the process of legal-decision making and excluded from access to justice. It also implies a legal duty to provide for those in need because of their individual need, rather than because an abstract obligation founded on the individual’s freedom. What does this account imply for the Kantian understanding of the relationship between the law and ethics? Was Kant wrong to put the law before the ethical? Is the Chinese tradition perhaps correct to see a continuity between the two? Both, ultimately, are correct. For Kant, ethics is individual reflection on duty and its content. For Confucians, ethics is the manifestation of relationality – *ren* as human-heartedness, whose root is “going towards the other.” What we need is a conception of the relationship between law and ethics that sees the fundamentally relational nature of human existence (the insight of Chinese philosophy) as the foundation for legality and justice, which in turn provides the realm of freedom necessary for pluralism, and for inner moral freedom.

NOTES

1. This is what John Rawls points to as the priority of right over the good (1993, 173). See also Weinrib 1995, 87.

2. While not “law” to the extent that they prescribe punishment for transgressions, rituals (*li*) nonetheless prescribe certain restrictions on human behaviour, and thereby fulfil one of the functions of modern law, which is to coerce particular behaviour

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Part III

Wisdom in Daoism, Buddhism and Religious Experience

CHAPTER XIV

THE WISDOM OF MORAL CONDUCT: WHY DAOISTS PRACTICE THE PRECEPTS

LIVIA KOHN

INTRODUCTION

Daoist precepts are the rules and statutes that regulate Daoist community life. They are not typically at the forefront of discussions on Daoism, since ethical considerations and forms of communal interaction tend to be seen secondary to philosophical speculation and practices of cultivation.¹ Daoism tends to be associated most commonly with the thought of Laozi and Zhuangzi or with cultivation practices, such as Taiji quan, Qigong, breathing exercises, *qi* regulation, and fasting, while ethical issues are typically linked with Confucianism or, to a lesser degree, with Buddhism. Discussions of morality and rules of conduct are not usually part of descriptions of Daoism, implying the tacit assumption that realizing the Dao through philosophical insight or physical cultivation has nothing to do with ethical status, conscience, or behavior in society. Nevertheless, Daoists in the over two thousand years of their history have brought forth elaborate communal organizations that were regulated by strict moral codes and behavioral guidelines. They formed a central element of the religion, as much as concepts of guilt, sin, and expiation were essential to Daoist soteriology and practice.²

In this regard Daoism does not stand alone. Precepts play an important role in all other religious traditions. They are commonly placed at the very foundation of religious aspiration and practice, formulating the proper way of conducting oneself in daily life and in relation to others, prohibiting destructive and disruptive behaviors, and encouraging practitioners to develop a positive and helpful outlook toward themselves and the world. Only on this basis of essentially moral conduct can true inner cultivation grow and higher levels of spirituality be attained.

Daoism shares with other religions the emphasis on various sets of precepts observed by practitioners and considered requisite to serious attainment. It is unique, though, in that its rules, which make use of both traditional Chinese values and

Buddhist precepts (see Liu 1990), are meant neither as solid entities to be observed at all cost nor as mere formalities taken at the entrance into a higher plane. Rather, the precepts in Daoism form a conduit for the power and energy of the cosmos as it works in and through practitioners, both individually and communally. The rules lay the foundation of an attitude that realizes the universal interconnections in everything one is and does. Daoism with its strong emphasis on the flow of *qi* in the larger cosmos strives to create a form of human behavior that activates the direct consonance of the life-giving power of the universe with personal and communal reality.

Unlike in Western traditions, human conduct is not isolated in the human sphere and separated from nature, but located fully in the larger context of the cosmic flow. Individual rules, as a result, are not as important as the sense of the codex as a whole; compliance can be handled flexibly and carries merit or personal standing only if undertaken as an expression of cosmic spirituality. As such, the precepts are neither foundational nor separate, but constitute a key aspect of practice that affects the nourishing powers of heaven and earth and ultimately leads to the transformation of the individual into a fully realized cosmic being, the immortal or perfected.

Daoist precepts, as the rules that regulate Daoist community life, first arose with the earliest Daoist communities of Great Peace and the Celestial Masters in the second century C.E. They have proliferated ever since and have formed an important foundation of all the different schools, both in middle ages and today, and a total of over seventy precepts texts remain in the Daoist canon and its supplements.³ Using predominantly sources from the middle ages, i.e., third to eighth centuries, that will be introduced as necessary, in this presentation I would like to address the question of the justification of the precepts. Why did Daoists believe the precepts were essential to religious practice? What benefits did they expect from their observation? How did they argue to skeptics and outsiders that following the precepts was the best way of living in the world?

JUSTIFICATION

Justification of moral actions has been a key issue in the discussion of morality among ethicists and still is essential today. Ideally, as Immanuel Kant demanded (1959), being morally good

should be a goal in itself and bring its own reward; one should be good for its own sake, behaving morally should be the rational thing to do, and morality should not need an exterior motive. The argument here is that the moral rules are so self-explanatory, so logical, so universal, that any thinking and feeling individual would follow them no matter what (Green 1987, 96). Still, even Kant admitted to the need for supraempirical beings “because of the severity of the rational dilemma raised by moral obedience” (Green 1978, 74), the fundamental conflict between natural instincts of self-preservation and submission to the rules or the service of others, between inclination and duty (Kant 1960). There has to be a level of benefit and wellbeing beyond preserving the self and one’s material existence if moral action is to be logically defensible. This level can only be of a supernatural, divine, or cosmic nature (Green 1978, 76, 109); it could be the belief in justice, God, karma, or ancestral wrath.

Other justifications for moral behavior acknowledged by ethicists include utilitarianism (or prudence) and soteriology (divine command). The utilitarian or prudential position claims that people act morally because it is useful for them and for society. “It is, by and large, advantageous to be a morally upright person and disadvantageous to be an immoral one” (Green 1987, 95). The cost for breaking rules and precepts, both on the psychological and social (material) levels, is enormous. It is thus easier, and more useful, to comply. Much of the modern penal code and prison system relies on this concept, imposing harsh punishments for misdeeds in the hope that people will see their uselessness.⁴ Vice versa, the ancient Buddhist propagation of the five precepts included a distinct set of benefits for laymen, such as wealth, good repute, self-confidence in public, an untroubled death, and rebirth in heaven (Gombridge 1971, 247; Obeyesekere 1968, 28; Keown 1992, 44-45).

Unlike this explanation for moral behavior, the soteriological viewpoint, also known as “divine command morality,” emphasizes the belief in a superior deity or law. People act morally not because it is logical and good to do so, nor because it gives them distinct advantages, but because a divine agency, a root power of the universe, has so decreed. The rewards of morality, despite all apparent futility on this earth, are of a higher nature; the purpose of the rules is beyond the limited faculties of human reason and perception to comprehend. Problems with this particular approach arise when the deity demands actions that are

not only incomprehensible but even cruel and repulsive. At this point the devotion to the divine has to be tempered with human reason, and conflict arises.⁵

Religiously based morality in general tends to be of the soteriological group. Within this framework, however, modifications apply. Buddhist ethics, for example, has been identified as an ethics of intention, as a form of moral determinism, and – especially in its Mâhâyana form – as a system that promotes altruism over all other considerations.

Intention in Buddhism is considered the central factor for all actions, whether mental, vocal, or physical. “By the law of karma, every intention good or bad will eventually be awarded or punished” (Gombrich 1971, 246), often independent of the actual outcome of any given deed – or vice versa, the same outcome will be treated differently depending on the original intention of the perpetrator. The classical example for the latter is the case of the masturbating monk in contrast with the one having seminal emission during a dream. The former is guilty and punishable according to the *Vinaya*, the latter is not.⁶ The goal of the Buddhist path with all its disciplines and meditations accordingly is to create a “choosing will” (Horner 1936, 280) that is based on right knowledge and will always opt for actions in accordance with the best intention and the purest mind. “One wills to act because his actions are in conformity with his own inward state that has been cultured by awareness derived from right knowledge” (Holt 1981, 67). It is the purity of mind and moral quality of intention that brings about the desired soteriological results, i.e., improvement of karma and the eventual complete release from the chains of conditioned existence (see Varma 1963, 41).

In terms of moral determinism, Buddhist ethical thinking assumes that the life and good fortune of the individual are determined by his or her moral actions, that there is “a law of just recompense in the world” (Varma 1963, 26), which will make sure one reaps exactly as one sows. This viewpoint stands in contrast with materialistic accidentalism, according to which everything happens at random and is due entirely to chance; it is also significantly different from divine election or fatalism, which maintains that decisions about one’s life and fate are made on a supernatural plane and have nothing to do with one’s actions or intentions (Varma 1963, 26). Moral determinism takes into account three factors: the motivation or intention for one’s action; the physical and instrumental steps taken to carry it out; and the

consequences resulting from it (Varma 1963, 27; Obeyesekere 1968, 22-24). Aside from providing a reasonable answer to the fundamental questions of fate and good fortune, it also encourages social conservatism (since social status is due to previously gained merit) and individualism (since one is fully responsible oneself) (Varma 1963, 42-46).

A third characteristic of Buddhist ethics is its orientation toward altruism, defined as “a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons, without the need of ulterior motives” (Nagel 1970, 79; Munroe 1996, 6). It can be motivated by various emotions such as benevolence, sympathy, love, or compassion; or it can be pure, an act done for its own sake and the welfare of others (Nagel 1970, 80). The key to altruism is perspective and cognition: it involves a different way of looking at the world, regarding oneself as merely a person among others, finding identity as part of a larger whole, imagining oneself in the situation of others, and seeing fellow human beings where ordinary people only see strangers. As a result of this perception, altruists typically state that their unselfish actions are entirely natural and that they do not have a choice over whether or not to help someone.⁷ In Buddhism, especially vows and resolutions serve the purpose to create this kind of mindset, a bodhisattva way of looking at the world as a whole and seeing every creature as a suffering being striving to realize buddhanature.

Religious Daoist ethics as expressed in the precepts presents a mixture of the soteriological and utilitarian positions, with a strong Buddhist influence. Ultimately one acts morally because the gods and heaven demand it, but doing so also brings distinct advantages in this life. Within this framework, Daoist ethics like Buddhist is a form of moral determinism, since everyone will receive their just rewards on the basis of exact record-keeping by the celestial administration and the workings of the law of karma. It is also an ethics of intention, but less so than Buddhism, since the physical execution of an action and its social consequences are also taken into account – less so as the influence of the karma doctrine increases. A strong emphasis on altruism, as opposed to merely not harming one’s fellow beings, too, is obvious only under Buddhist influence and begins in particular with the Lingbao school .

Overall, the various texts on Daoist precepts justify moral actions on four distinct grounds:

- administrative, because the recording officers in heaven keep detailed records of every thought and deed and impose appropriate punishments;
- medical, because noncompliance will bring about disease;
- ritual, because only physically and morally pure agents can conduct rites to their proper effect;
- karmic, because all intentions and actions will have a clear reverberation in one's future fortune and existence;

Taking all this together and examining the metaphors and images used for the precepts, it becomes clear, moreover, that moral behavior and observance of the rules are undertaken because they afford a maximum of control over the vicissitudes of life, providing a guarantee of good fortune and benefits no matter what the outside circumstances may be.

ADMINISTRATION AND MEDICINE

The first and most commonly cited ground for moral action in Daoism is administrative. According to this, Daoists act morally because the agents of the celestial administration keep close track of all actions with infallible certainty and punish by reductions in luck, subtractions from the individual's life, and banishment to the underworld prisons or hells. The notion of a hierarchically organized otherworld with supervising functions over the living goes back far in Chinese history and can be traced back to the Shang dynasty and their ancestral worship.⁸ It continued to develop through the Zhou and Han dynasties and was inherited by Daoism, which expanded and formalized it further.

In the middle ages, the Daoist otherworld became an elaborate construction of bureaus and offices. As the *Siji mingke* 四極明科 (Illustrious Regulations of the Four Ultimates, DZ 184), a fifth-century Shangqing text, describes it, there are three central offices in heaven:

1. the office to the left presides over transgressions of a yang nature, such as killing, theft of celestial treasures, unwarranted spread of sacred texts, cursing and swearing;
2. the office to the right presides over transgressions of a yin nature, including harboring schemes in one's heart,

disobedience, planning harm to others, and never remembering the Dao;

3. the office in the center presides over more essential shortcomings, such as doubts and duplicity, lack of reverence and faith in heavenly perfection, desecration of heavenly treasures, thoughts of removing the scriptures of the Dao, or of defiling perfected writings (1.4b).⁹

All these offices were, moreover, thought to control a big staff, including their own divine guards and bailiffs as well as the five emperors and other, more locally placed agents and officials (1.5a). The latter resided in the nine provinces of earth and were typically staffed by 120 officials, 1,200 bailiffs, and 50,000 troops. They ruled the souls of the sinful dead, and kept them revolving in the cycle of transmigration for countless kalpas, letting them go only after unthinkable pain and torture (1.5b-6a). The only way to prevent all this was to act morally and with proper virtue (1.7b-8a), and to practice the meditations and recitations of Shangqing described in the text (chs. 2-5).

To maintain a sense of what the celestial administration was doing, Daoists from an early period onward attributed specific numerical values to particular deeds – both good and bad, but mostly bad.¹⁰ The currency selected consisted of single days of life, called a “reckoning” (*suan* 算), or stretches of sixty or one hundred days, known as a “period” (*ji* 紀). The earliest attributions of this kind date from the fourth century, found in the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 1185) and the *Nüqing guilü* 女清鬼律 (The Pole Star’s Statutes against Demons, DZ 790). They continued in the sixth-century Celestial Masters code *Xuandu lüwen* 玄都律文 (Rules of Mystery Metropolis, DZ 188) and in the monastic manual *Fengdao kejie* 奉道科戒 (Rules and Precepts for Worshipping the Dao, DZ 1125) of the early Tang.

Another tendency was to list numbers of good and bad deeds and specify the rewards and punishments one could expect in terms of health, good fortune, descendants, and fate after death. The earliest version of this also appears in the fourth century, in the *Chisongzi zhongjie jing* 赤松子中戒經 (The Essential Precept of Master Redpine, DZ 185), a dialogue between the two classical immortals Huangdi and Chisongzi on questions of fate, reward, punishments, and family liability.¹¹ It is taken up in Du Guangting’s 杜光庭 *Yongcheng jixian lu* 墉城集仙錄 (Record of

the Assembled Immortals in the Heavenly Walled City, DZ 783) of the year 905, and eventually grows into the practice of keeping ledgers of merit and demerit, so popular in the Ming and Qing dynasties (see Brokaw 1990).

The calculation of deeds, the clear knowledge of what to expect for what activities, and the awareness of being constantly watched by the celestial officers provided a strong incentive to behave morally in medieval Daoism. There was no escape, there was no relief. The cosmos was working continuously and made no exceptions; every individual was forever tied into its web.

A second motivation for Daoists to be moral was medical. According to this understanding, failure to behave properly caused internal stress, harming the spirit, the souls, the essence, and the *qi* in the body and thus creating first psychological tension, then physical ailments, and eventually death. While early death and sickness were commonly thought of as administered by the celestial officers, there are also texts that present a more direct link between moral behavior and one's medical condition. Especially the fourth-century *Lingshu ziwèn xiánjī* (Immortals' Taboos According to the Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits, DZ 179), a Shangqing document cited earlier, emphasizes this feature. For example, it says:

2. Do not steal or bring about misfortune and evil. As and when you bring about misfortune and evil, your Yellow Court [spleen] is thrown into confusion, and the Three Deathbringers delight in the kill. Your spirit souls and body gods start quarreling with each other; your material souls and inner demons fight for residence. The radiance of your eyes is besieged and scattered, and your mouth emits a noxious vapor. This is the second item that defeats the signs of immortality. (see also Bokenkamp 1997, 363)

The link between moral failure and illness is made through the action of inner forces, envisioned as deities and demons, who fight with each other for dominance in a person's body. Any disturbance of their equilibrium creates disorder and encourages the bad elements to rise to the fore, thus making the person sick. In some precepts, such as the ones against sexual misconduct and intoxication, the connection is more directly physical – valuable

seminal essence is lost or the spirit is deluded. In most, the supernatural intercession is essential, reflecting the dominant Daoist view of the body as a microcosm of the universe and thus inhabited by countless deities or body gods.¹²

It also reflects the understanding of sickness and healing among the early Celestial Masters. They explained sickness entirely in supernatural terms as the attack by one or several demons, who could only gain entry into a person's body if the latter was weakened by sin. As a result, all their healing was undertaken through ritual and magic; acupuncture, herbs, and other medical treatments were expressly prohibited. First the sick person was isolated in a so-called chamber of tranquility or oratory (*jingshi* 靜室; see Yoshikawa 1987), an adaptation of a Han institution for punishing wayward officials involving solitary confinement. There they had to think of their sins, transgressions, and /other moral misdeeds, if necessary tracing them all the way back to their birth to try and find a explanation for the illness.

Once certain sins or misdeeds had been identified, a senior master would come to write them down – in triplicate and together with a formal petition for their eradication from the person's divine record. Next, the three copies would be transmitted ceremonially to the Three Bureaus of Heaven (by burning), Earth (by burying), and Water (by casting into a river). The divine officials would then set the record straight, expel the demons, and restore the person's good health. Additional measures of purification involved the ingestion of "talismán water" (*fushui* 符水, the ashes of a talismán dissolved in water), gymnastic exercises patterned on cosmic energy movements (*daoyin* 導引), and meditations (*jingsi* 靜思).¹³

None of these measures worked, however, while sin was still present in the person and continued to open the gates to demonic influences. Moral behavior and a clear conscience were thus directly linked to physical health and mental wellbeing, a connection not limited to ancient China. Modern physicians, too, in explorations of psycho-somatic medicine, have seen that "guilt-producing behavior, negative emotions, etc. tend to throw the body into a precarious position, to disturb necessary homeostasis, and to make the person more susceptible to the ravages of germs and bacteria, which up to this time have been kept under control by various natural barriers" (Belgum 1967, 50). Accident-prone people might, then, be seen as punishing themselves; and those

already ill might have a harder time healing (or dying) while moral issues remain unresolved.¹⁴

The understanding of a close connection between morality and wellbeing – through natural links or mediated by demonic activities – together with the Daoists' wish for good health, strength, and a long life therefore provided a strong motivation to act morally and in accordance with the rules of the religion.

RITUAL AND KARMA

Another justification for moral action lay in the fact that religious activity for Daoists was not possible and rituals could not be effective without the proper purification, both physical and moral. Even in ancient China purity was an essential prerequisite for the performance of rituals, typically undertaken as a set of purifications known as *zhai* 齋 that included baths, fasting, sexual abstention, and the avoidance of death, blood, and other forms of defilement. The Daoist alchemical tradition, too, placed a high emphasis on purifications. Before even the first ingredient could be placed into the alchemical cauldron, the stage had to be properly set in an uninhabited area far removed from the impurities of ordinary folk, in a grove planted with the right combination of trees for proper *qi*, near an eastward flowing stream, and generally in a natural and pure environment. Then several ritual purifications had to be undergone. As the *Baopuzi* describes them:

Begin by purifying yourself and fasting for one hundred days. Wash your body and hair in water enriched with the five fragrances and make yourself utterly clean. Never approach any defiling or dirty object or let ordinary people come anywhere near you! Let no disbelievers know of your plans. If they denounce the divine medicine, successful preparation will be impossible. (4.5b)

In addition, the seeker had to set up protective talismans, offer a sacrifice to the gods, swear an oath of secrecy, and make a formal pledge (often involving substantial gifts) to the master alchemist. All these measures served to create the proper atmosphere and mindset for the great work – which, as noted earlier, could not be

completed without the virtues and merits created by following the precepts.

Formal purifications were also demanded for all sacred practices of Daoism, both meditations and rituals. Before one could practice visualizations and meditations in the oratory, for example, one had to undergo preparatory periods of fasting, bathing, and abstentions, then don proper garb, burn incense, and perform a series of bows, prostrations, and incantations (see Yoshikawa 1987). Similarly, the practice of purgations, the formal ceremonies of the Lingbao school, also called *zhai* (see Yamada 2000; Benn 2000), involved ten preparatory measures of physical purification as well as the taking of ten precepts for moral and spiritual preparation.

An early document on these rites is the *Jiefa dengzhuyuan yi* 戒罰燈祝願儀 (Observances for Lamps, Spells, and Vows with Appropriate Precepts and Punishments, DZ 524), a fifth-century text ascribed to the well-known Daoist ritualist and compiler Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406-477). It begins by listing ten purificatory measures to be completed before any ceremony:

1. taking baths in fragrant waters;
2. separating from worldly duties and ordinary relationships;
3. fasting to cut off desires for fancy foods and cleanse the organs and digestive tract;
4. donning proper garb to symbolize the majesty and power of the gods while encouraging humility in the practitioner;
5. maintaining silence to avoid speaking wrong or harsh words and only issue sounds to intone scriptures;
6. cleansing all intentions from the heart by avoiding false imaginings and harmonizing the six senses;
7. burning incense and sending up a memorial to invited the participation of the gods;
8. repenting one's sins and begging for forgiveness
9. developing compassion and empathy for all beings;
10. bowing down in faith, opening one's self to the Dao, and pledging to follow the divine law in all (1b-2a; see Kleeman 1991, 179-80; Yoshioka 1961).

Already moving towards the right attitude as part of their preparatory purification, practitioners also had to aspire to mental and moral purity by taking the ten basic Lingbao precepts, a set

based on Buddhist precepts that combined the ten good deeds of the bodhisattva with the ten major precepts of the apocryphal *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (Brahmajâla sūtra; see DeGroot 1893). The precepts begin by prohibiting “evil and envy in the heart” and move on to discourage killing, debauchery, passions, impure speech (lying), intoxication, competitiveness, scriptural criticism, and quarrels. They end in the general admonition that practitioners should always be “of even and unified mind” in all their activities. They are first found in the *Shangpin dajie* 上品大戒 (Great Precepts of the Highest Rank, DZ 177) and various other early Lingbao texts (see Bokenkamp 1983; 1989; Yamada 2000). Their ritual application is evident also from various later texts, where they appear as necessary prerequisites for the performance of the nocturnal annunciation, the Golden Register Purgation, and the Rite of Mud and Ashes.¹⁵

The tendency to require the taking of precepts as a necessary purificatory measure before the performance of any ritual activity also continued in later Daoism and played a role in the establishment of the ordination system, according to which only masters who had taken the highest and most extensive precepts were empowered to perform the loftiest and most efficacious rites.¹⁶ It was a powerful justification for the taking of the precepts, prerequisites to all ritual actions and at the same time an essential part of their success.

Another, even more important, justification for moral action in Daoism was the karma doctrine, most commonly and most extensively cited in the materials on precepts. The reason for this predominance may well lie in the fact that a complex culture of precepts only developed after the introduction of Buddhism and therefore under the influence of the karma doctrine. It may also have to do with the orientation of many precepts towards the alteration of individual behavior, the central feature of karmic concerns.

The karma doctrine, as is commonly known, has been part of Indian religion since the *Upanishads*. It states that all actions have inevitable consequences and, after a period of maturation, revert to their perpetrator. As the individual’s soul or *âtman* is the carrier of this load, it must continue to be embodied in a physical form to receive the rewards and punishments necessitated by its former actions. Thus the notion of rebirth, including that in nonhuman and hellish states, became a close correlate to the idea of personally created and suffered-through karma (Mahony 1987,

262). In Buddhism, which denied the existence of an eternal soul, karma was understood very much as a function of the intention, transmitted in “consecutive moments of a psychic continuum,” unstable and impermanent like the light of a candle (Mizuno 1987, 267). It was, at least according to ancient Buddhist doctrine, entirely centered within the individual and could be neither worsened nor improved by the actions of others.

This notion was later challenged by the Mahâyâna, whose followers claimed that good karma in the form of merit accumulated over long periods of time could not only serve as a positive inspiration to others but also be transferred to improve their lot (Mitomo 1991, 19). This gave rise to devotional cults toward savior figures or bodhisattvas, to rituals that would transfer merits for the sake of one’s ancestors, and to the swearing of so-called bodhisattva vows. The latter placed the practitioner immediately on a high level of karmic attainment and gave him a “karmically protective coding” (Mizuno 1987, 267), with the help of which he or she could fulfill the spiritual goal of universal salvation and compassion for all that lives. Placing a strong emphasis on the community of all beings, Mahâyâna practitioners believed that the karmic activities of each being had an influence on all and that the country and even the world would benefit from the religious activities of the people. The king, therefore, participated to about one sixth in the merit or demerit created by all his subjects (Mizuno 1987, 268), and society as a whole became a forum for karmic and religious unfolding.

The Chinese, initially confronted with the karma doctrine in the first Century C.E., found the intensely personal responsibility it implied not only surprising but abhorrent (Tsukamoto and Hurvitz 1985, 42). However, they could accept the more socially centered vision of its Mahâyâna developments; as a result Daoist precepts very much followed Mahâyâna lines. The justification for moral action was similar too in that it emphasized the horrors of hell for those who did not follow the rules and the delights of future benefits and heaven for devout observers.

The key issue in the Daoist understanding of the karma doctrine, aside from the general notions of retribution (*baoying* 報應), karmic connections (*yuan* 緣), causes (*yin* 因), and fruits (*guo* 果) – all closely adapted from Buddhism (see Kohn 1998b) – was the contrast between “sin” and “good “fortune” (*zui* 罪福). The term *zui* here indicates three different aspects of wrongdoing: the

bad deed itself, the guilt that accompanied it (see Eberhard 1967), and the resulting suffering through disasters and diseases, bad rebirths and the tortures of hell. Bad deeds can be acts of evil (*wu* 惡, as opposed to *shan* 善), transgressions (*guo* 過) or faults (*yan* 衍). They lead to *zui* as bad karma because one has violated (*fan* 返) or gone against (*wei* 違) the precepts; this will eventually bring great suffering (*ku* 苦), defined as physical pains, psychological frustrations, and an overall sense of hopelessness (see Bemporad 1987).

Fu, on the other hand, refers to the positive conditions attained through the practice of the precepts, both in this world and the next, from good health through wealth and intact family relations to fortunate rebirths and residence in heaven. It leads further to the creation of so-called *fujian* 福田 or “fields of blessedness;” understood like physical fields plowed and cultivated by farmers (see Cole 1998), they are essentially areas of goodness that eventually lead to conditions necessary for liberation and immortality. In the Buddhist context, these “fields” refer to the acquisition of virtues, such as charity, kindness, and goodness toward all beings; they do not protect against the vagaries of karma but endow the person with the power to remain mentally calm and inwardly happy (Nakamura 1975, 1187; Mochizuki 1936, 4396b-97c). In Daoism, as described in the *Yinyuan jing* 因緣經 (Scripture of Karmic Retribution, DZ 336), they are more concrete, denoting the activities and wishes to create good living conditions for all beings, from the emperor and the state on down to the poor and orphaned (1.1a-9b). In addition, they guarantee that one will encounter mainly positive and fortunate situations, not only have the mental stamina to deal with adversities.¹⁷

Daoists also identify the punishments for evil deeds very concretely, adapting Buddhist notions, such as the “three bad rebirths” (*santu* 三途), “five realms of suffering” (*wuku* 五苦), “eight difficult conditions” (*banan* 八難), and “ten situations of intense suffering” (*shiku* 十苦). As described in the fifth-century *Jieye benxing jing* 誡業本行經 (Scripture of Controlling Karma and Original Conduct, DZ 345), the three bad rebirths are in the hells, as hungry ghosts, or among animals (15b), while the five realms of suffering are any of the planes rebirth at all, including also the human and divine levels. The eight difficult conditions include life on the borders or among the barbarians; as a slave or servant; in poverty, as an orphan, or as a lowly person; as a sick or

person; as a mentally retarded, mad, or disabled person; in situations of trouble and distress; with no filial piety or compassion for life and death; and in a country that lacks the Dao (14a). And the ten situations of intense suffering are specific punishments in the hells:

1. to have to step on the mountain of knives;
2. to have to climb the tree of swords;
3. to be thrown in the boiling cauldron;
4. to be tied to the hot iron pillar;
5. to have to lie on the bed of spikes;
6. to be tied to a fiery chariot and plunged into icy water;
7. to have one's head grasped and the tongue twisted;
8. to have to swallow fire and eat burning charcoal;
9. to be tied and locked up by the three officers, hit with metal cudgels and beaten with iron staffs;
10. to come to life only to be tied by fetters, deeply in trouble and distress, and eventually killed (*Jiye benxing jing* 12b).¹⁸

These ten are adaptations of the hells of Buddhism, especially the eight fiery ones.¹⁹ With visions of such suffering in store for wrongdoing, and with no escape from the burden of individual responsibility, it is not surprising that Daoists tended to place the notion of karma and rebirth centrally in their discussions of why people should observe the precepts – had, in fact, no other reasonable choice than to observe them.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the motivation and justification for moral action in accordance with the precepts, ultimately the Daoist vision of morality comes down to two central concerns: control over fate and its vicissitudes; and the emergence of the fully conscious human being in transcendental freedom.

The problem of control becomes clear when examining the question of “moral luck.” That is to say, however morally correct a person may act, there are always circumstances that he or she has no control over which may seriously influence the

outcome of his or her actions. For example, as Thomas Nagel points out:

There is a morally significant difference between reckless driving and manslaughter. But whether a reckless driver hits a pedestrian depends on the presence of the pedestrian at the point where he recklessly passes a red light. (1979, 25)

Or again, there may be a careful driver who runs over a child just because she happened to run out into the street at that particular moment (Nagel 1979, 28-29). In other words, the outcome of our actions is determined not entirely by our intentions but limited by opportunities and factors beyond our control, subject to a broad range of external influences that are coincidental and can only be described as lucky or unlucky. Ascribing guilt to people on the basis of such external circumstances “amounts to holding them responsible for the contributions of fate as well as for their own” (Nagel 1979, 31) – and that is precisely what medieval Daoists are doing.

In Daoism, following the precepts means control not only over one’s own intentions and actions but over the situations one will encounter. A person in good karmic standing will always step into lucky circumstances, while one who fails to follow the precepts will be haunted by back luck – the direct result of bad karmic connections, ritual inefficiency, medical violations, and the punishments imposed by the celestial authorities. Obeying the precepts is thus a safeguard against the vagaries of fate; it serves as the ultimate control over things commonly associated with luck or external factors: infections and diseases, accidents and mishaps, natural disasters, political upheavals, and even cosmic catastrophes.

The metaphors and images used for the precepts bear this out. For example, the *Jinjie jing* 禁戒經 (Scripture of Prohibitions and Precepts), a text of the early Tang that survives among Dunhuang manuscripts (S. 784), describes the precepts as “the medicine of the divine law” with the power to “eradicate life and death and all serious illness,” as “the raft of the divine law which can take us beyond life and death and the ocean of suffering,” as “the sharp sword of the divine law – they can cut down all entanglements and attachments of life and death” (l. 53-54). They are the guarantee of liberation, helping people to accumulate merit

with every thought just as “polishing a mirror makes it gradually brighter,” inevitably taking them beyond the ocean of life and death, just as “a boat will cross the great sea” (*Qianzhen ke* 千真科, DZ 1410; 10a).²⁰ Besides serving as the ultimate control mechanism for the vicissitudes of fate, the precepts are also the key factor in the creation of the fully conscious and individual person, one who has ultimate personal and transcendental freedom – in the sense that, as John Silber says in his discussion of Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*,

by telling us what we *ought* to do regardless of what our inclinations and desires may bid us do, the moral law forces us to be aware of ourselves as agents rather than as mere creatures of desire. (1960, lxxxvii)

In other words, the active adoption and observance of the precepts raises the person from an entity driven largely by desires to a conscious, considerate, and thoughtful human being, an individual in the fullest sense of the term as an independent agent with clear intention and complete responsibility. This entails for the first time a sense of freedom from drives and desires and an inherent liberty to fulfill the ideal of the universal human – the perfected.

Vice versa, the commitment of evil is an act of bondage and the result of a failure to evolve. As John Silber says,

Not even a wicked man wills evil for the sake of evil. His evil consists in his willing to ignore the moral law and to oppose its demands when it interferes with his non-moral incentives. His evil consists in his abandonment of the conditions of free personal fulfillment in favor of the adoption of the conditions of his fulfillment as a natural creature of desire. This represents the ultimate point in the abnegation of personality. (Silber 1960, cxxiv)

Daoists closely echo this statement when they describe sinners as being no better than animals:

Sinful people, obstructive and evil, are close to animals – they may have entered the human realm

but failed to obtain a human heart. In vain they engage in human relationships. Utterly polluted, they may listen to the divine law of the sages, yet their entire inclination is like that of animals kept in a dark pen. Even if all living beings were liberated, they would still not be awakened. With intentions of their low nature, they would only desire to return to their original bodies. (*Xuanmen shishi wei yi*, DZ 792, 16b)

Punished for their obstinacy in extensive periods of hellish tortures, they yet are not free from suffering but will retain their animal nature and show it in an even more obvious way.

When they finally attain rebirth, they will come back in the body of a domestic animal, a pauper or lowly person, a dumb, deaf, mute or crippled man, with warped hands and deformed feet and an overall ugly and repulsive appearance. (*Jinjie jing* line 75; *Zuigen pinjie* 1.7b)

People without the precepts are described as being blind, lacking the basic ability to see, or as continuously hungry: People without the precepts forever remain starved for the Dao (*Qianzhen ke* 10a). They are not fully human and by choosing to follow their lesser instincts rather than the call to moral purity actively forego all chances of perfection and the attainment of immortality. The precepts, therefore, form both the essential foundation and the overarching network of the Daoist enterprise, the line that divides the merely outwardly human from the fully perfected and transcendently free.

NOTES

1. There are some discussions of the ethics in early Daoist texts. See for example, Graham 1983; Girardot 1985; Peerenboom 1991; Ames 1992; Kjellberg and Ivanhoe 1996; Kirkland 2001; and Vankeerberghen 2001.

2. An earlier discussion of religious Daoist ethics, including also an annotated bibliography of original sources, is found in Kleeman 1991. Daoist rules in relation to overall Chinese values, such as filial piety, are discussed in Liu 1990, 133-46. For

an analysis of guilt and sin in Chinese popular religion, see Eberhard 1967.

3. For a detailed study of the various precepts used in the different schools, see my forthcoming *Daoist Precepts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Three Pines Press, 2004).

4. For more on the utilitarian model, see Mabbott 1969, 15-30; Hare 1965, 112-36; Baier 1958; Richards 1971; Williams 1980. For readings from original texts, see Taylor 1972, 136-95. A summary of all the different Western positions on ethical motivation is found in Becker and Becker 1992.

5. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see Idziak 1980. More information on the problems of religion and morality is also found in Outka and Reeder 1973.

6. For a discussion, see Holt 1981, 53-55; Sadhatissa 1970, 74; Sasaki 1956; Pachow 1955.

7. For a detailed discussion of the altruistic perspective, see Munroe 1996, 9-14, 197-216; Nagel 1970, 82-83, 100-2.

8. For a discussion of the early system, see Chang 1980; Keightley 1978a; 1978b. On its later development, see Poo 1997; Shahar and Weller 1996.

9. These three are a development of the earlier celestial administration of the Celestial Masters, which was divided into the Three Offices of Heaven, Earth, and Water (see Kobayashi 1992). In Lingbao Daoism, the division appears under the name of the Three Primes, are each in control of different types of misdeeds (see Sanyuan pinjie 三元品戒, DZ 456; Kohn 1993, 98-100). The *Siji mingke* also summarizes the various earlier models (1.5a).

10. The one exception is a Dunhuang manuscript fragment of the *Fengdao kejie*, entitled "Compassionate Assistance" (P. 3682; Ofuchi 1979, 220-21; Tonkôkôza 1983, 175-76. For example, to develop the good intention that all beings should be free from obstacles and obstructions when one sees a broken bridge or blocked road will create an additional 420 days of life.

11. Cited already in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* (6.5a), this text goes back to fourth-century south China; however, as indicated by the preface, its present edition dates only from the Song dynasty (see Ren and Zhong 1991, 135-36; Yoshioka 1960, 730-31; 1970, 220). The text is mentioned in various Song catalogs (Loon 1984, 110) and cited in works of that period, such as the well-known *Ganying pian* 感應篇 (On Impulse and Response, DZ 1167), and to the present day forms a part of popular retribution culture (dat. 1127-1150; Hervouet 1978, 370-71; Suzuki and Carus 1973; Bell

1992; Liu 1990, 142-43). For a discussion of its notions of fate and quantification, see Kohn 1998a.

12. On the Daoist understanding of the body, see Schipper 1978; 1994; Kohn 1991; Saso 1997..

13. On healing among early Daoists, see Kleeman 1998, 70-71; Kobayashi 1992, 22-25; Levy 1956, 217-18; Schipper 1984, 206; Tsuchiya 2002. The most thorough study of the relationship of religion and healing is found in Ohnuki-Tierney 1984.

14. For more on the subject of guilt and healing, see Belgum 1967, 211-12; Siivals 1962; Simmons 1956, 55. It is quite commonly acknowledged nowadays that a peaceful death is not possible with sinful matters weighing on a person's mind. See Kübler-Ross 1979.

15. Materials on the precepts in these contexts are mainly contained in the sixth-century encyclopedia *Wushang biyao* 無上秘要 (Secret Essentials of the Most High, DZ 1138; see Lagerwey 1981). It cites the *Dajie jing* 大戒經 (Scripture of the Great Precepts) (35.6b-7b), the *Jinlu jing* 金籙經 (Scripture of the Golden Register [Purgation]) (48.5a-6a), and again the *Dajie jing* (50.3b-4a).

16. An example of the use of the precepts in Song-Yuan Daoism is found in the *Duren dafa* 度人大法 (Great Rites of Universal Salvation, DZ 219; 71.25b-26b), a Yuan dynasty collection of ritual methods (see Boltz 1987, 28-29).

17. The *Daojiao yishu* 道教義樞 (The Pivotal Meaning of the Daoist Teaching, DZ 1129) devotes an entire section to futian (sect. 30). It describes them as areas and qualities of life where future good karma can first blossom, based on good moral behavior and purity of mind (9.1a-2a).

18. A more complete list of Daoist hells is found in the sixth-century *Taiji zhenren shuo ershi si men jing* 太極真人說二十四門戒經 (Scripture of Twenty-Four Precepts for Followers, Revealed by the Perfected of Great Ultimate, DZ 183). Each of its twenty-four precepts is associated with punishment in a specific hell – of the boiling cauldron, the mountain of knives, the tree of swords, the stove full of coal, the iron plow that cuts the tongue, the steel pestles that grind down the body, the poisonous snakes that eat away the heart, the molten copper, the hot copper pillar, the iron wheel, the heavy boulders, the bed with iron spikes, the forest of swords, the lake of ice, and so on.

19. Further descriptions of hell are also found in the Santu wuku jing 三途五苦經 (Scripture of the Three Bad Rebirths and Five Sufferings, DZ 455) and the Jiuyou bazui jing 九幽拔罪經 (Scripture on Removing Sins from the Nine Realms of Darkness, S. 957). A modern description of the punishments of hell, still taught in tantric Nying-ma practice, is found in Hopkins 1982, 64-72. For traditional Buddhist sources, see Mochizuki 1936, 1132a.

20. These and other images for the precepts echo the metaphors used for *śīla* in Buddhism, including those of a basis, such as roots, the earth, or the foundations of a city; of protection, e.g., a guide in the wilderness, a safeguard, and a destroyer of poisons; of motion, such as the raft crossing the ocean or the feet; of purification, including water, fire, and wind; and of precious objects, including perfume, jewels, ornaments, treasures, and fabric. See Keown 1992, 48-54.

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CHAPTER XV

MANIFESTO FOR A DAOIST THEOLOGY OF MESSIANIC WISDOM

JAMES MILLER

MANIFESTO...

This manifesto is an attempt to mark the theoretical foundations for a constructive Daoist theology of wisdom. It asks what the characteristics of such a theology ought to be and establishes the parameters within which such a theology ought to operate, and argues for the necessity of such a mode of theological reasoning. As a manifesto, it has a peculiarly personal quality to it, in the sense that it is my first-person-singular attempt to articulate the value, the necessity and the characteristics of such a mode of theological reasoning. As a manifesto, it also has a public quality to it, in the sense that it is an invitation to others to join with me in the task that I delineate below. The manifesto is not a common genre of scholarly literature, but I have chosen it because it is convenient for the task of constructive theological reasoning that aims, finally, toward what may be termed a deeper "insistence" within the totality of cosmic processes that shape our evolving universe. By insistence I means the recursive nature of our being-within multiple fields of insistence that constitute our environment. Daoist theology takes insistence to be the basic question with which it must grapple. As I argue later, Christian theology is primarily concerned with existence, extrinsic relationships and responsibilities. Daoist theology, by contrast, is concerned with insistence, that is to say, the relationship of our individual potential (*de* 德) or nature (*xing* 性) to its determining contexts (*ming* 命) or fields (*dao* 道).

A manifesto is usually seen as a response to a critical situation. There is a sense in which all situations are manifestly critical – that is our experience of them is that they seem to necessitate an ethical response: yes or no; left or right; this way or that way. From its very inception, Daoist wisdom has refused – and refuted – this dichotomous experience of the world. The Daoist universe is, ultimately, both plural and monadic,

constituted of a plurality of processes each reflecting an evolving Dao. This relationship is encoded in the classical Chinese philosophical dyad of form and function (*ti-yong* 體 – 用). The essence of this relationship is that although reality seems to be divisible into binary categories (essence and manifestation, form and function, structure and process, stasis and transformation, pattern (*li* 理) and energy-matter (*qi* 氣) the nature of these cognitive constructs is that the one constitutes the other.¹ As Zhuangzi argues, “this” or “not this” do not correspond to the way in which our bodies engage their environments (*Zhuangzi* 2). Rather, reality manifests itself around us as plurality of “microfields of insistence” which are themselves holographic reflections of the macrocosm of an eternal (nontemporal) field of insistence, known as Dao.

The best way to explain this is to imagine that the Daoist universe is constituted recursively; that it is not a three-dimensional field of space passing through a fourth linear dimension of time but in fact an infinite kaleidoscope of insistences that themselves reflect and refract the myriad other processes of reflection and refraction. The universe – or pluriverse – thus appears to evolve recursively, multiplying the reflections and refractions on top of each other in an infinitely deep recursive loop. This is an old idea. The *Daode jing* puts it simply: Dao models itself after its own spontaneity (or, as I would term it, insistence) (*Dao fa ziran* 道法自然; *Daode jing* 25).

For this reason, a manifesto such as this is not to be seen as a response, positive or negative, to a crisis; nor is it intended to show the way *forward*, as if the way must necessarily be *before* us. In such a worldview one is already committed to a process of action or engagement, stepping out, or *existence*. This transcendental commitment to existence has been one of the most enduring hallmarks of the Western philosophical approach, that is, until its recent “deconstruction.” In attempting to explain his idea of deconstruction, Derrida notes: “The instance of *krinein* or of *krisis* (decision, choice, judgment, discernment) is itself, as is all the apparatus of transcendental critique, one of the essential “themes” or “objects” of deconstruction” (Derrida 1988, 270). Whereas Derrida’s refusal to judge is based on his rejection of transcendental absolutes and his recognition of the irreducible abyss of *différance*, paradoxically the Daoist refusal is based more on the on the principles of an analogical and correlative

metaphysics where likeness and resonance are the underlying ontological principles. Since each field of insistence (*dao*) in some way mirrors all other fields of insistence there is no ultimate basis from which one can make a critical separation or distinction between things. For this reason the *Daode jing* counsels nonaction (*wuwei* 無為), that is, non-extrinsic action, that is, insistence as the mode of being and acting in the world.

Thus a Daoist manifesto, though it precludes existential judgment, cannot be based on the hermeneutics of *différance*, but rather on the far more analogical hermeneutics of communication or “speech” (*dao* 道 or *logos*) that underpins the Daoist metaphysics of recursive insistence: the nature of each *dao* is to manifest itself in an eternal, ontogenetic and multi-dimensional process of communication. A Daoist manifesto should similarly base itself upon this principle of reflective communication.

Daoists literature famously explains the idea of communication (*tong* 通) by analogy with a close homophone (*dong* 洞), translated as “cavern” or “grotto.” The term grotto was most importantly used by Lu Xiuqing (406–477) in his catalogue of revealed Daoist scriptures (*jing* 經). Caverns have four recursively related meanings:

1. caverns are celestial libraries from which Dao *dao*-s (communicates), usually via intermediary deities, to humans;
2. caverns are also dark recesses in the mountains where Daoists strive to become more attentive to the process of communication around them;
3. caverns may be places where texts reveal themselves;²
4. caverns are also locations within the body.³

Thus caverns are empty spaces in the body, the landscape and the sky, and simultaneously, the principle of communication 通 that exists between these three fundamental dimensions of existence, heaven, earth and humanity (天地人). This manifesto similarly aims to set forth the dynamic, communicative reciprocity that exists among these three layers of cosmic evolution.

The aim of this act of communication is thus not to articulate a response to a crisis (an act of morality, ethics or existential responsibility) but simply to manifest the life, the *insistence* that “insists in” the communicative reciprocity between heaven, earth and humans. In this way Daoist wisdom, like

Confucian moral wisdom, is constituted within the nexus of reciprocal relationships that constitute the anthropocosmic self. The nature of *daos* are to insist, that is, to manifest innate vital potential (*de* 德 through deeper insistence within the myriad fields of insistence. Many Confucian and Buddhist philosophers take the primary location of this field of insistence as the mind (*xin* 心). Daoists, by contrast, locate it in the body. For this reason, the primary mode of being for Daoists is not the moral being of existential responsibility, but a cosmic insistence that is primordially rooted in the innate ontogenetic power of the cosmos simply to be in the process of spontaneously arising (*dao fa ziran*). To make a contrast with Christianity, the task of Christians is to *respond* to the *existence* of a nameless deity and unfamiliar neighbours – that is, to name and bring into relation the externality of the experienced world, whether construed as the relative alterity of those whose names one does not know, or the ultimate alterity of the nameless numinous. The task of Daoists is to manifest within their bodies the *insistence* of the cosmic vitality that indwells and constitutes their being. The present text is a literary manifesto of such insistence.

A DAOIST...

By now some of the features of the metaphysical picture of the Daoist universe should be clear. The universe consists of myriad fields of insistence all of which aim to manifest a pattern of cosmic insistence, of being in-and-among; all of which aim to manifest their ontogenetic nature, symbolized as the Dao as mother of all things. The nature of this insistence is thus to manifest life – and from this it is no surprise that Daoists have concentrated on cultivating this life within their bodies. But the complement to this life-insistence is evident in the second meaning of the verb 道, namely, to speak. If we understand “Dao” not only as the cosmic way, but at a fundamental level an act of “speech” then we can construct an interpretation of “Dao” not only as the matrices of the universe, but also a means of communication between the three fundamental realities of the universe: humans, the earth and Heaven. It was this root meaning of Dao as the pathways or a means of communication that the Daoist religious traditions fully exploited. Dao is thus not only a cosmological

principle but also the insistent forms of communication that take place between humans, the earth and Heaven.

Perhaps it is stating the obvious, but one of the most important things to consider when trying to understand any canonical Daoist scripture, is that it is to be read as a manifestation of the Dao itself. Thus when trying to understand what the Dao means in Daoist religion, a key element is that the Dao is revealed in the form of literary scripture as well as in the form of important personages such as Laozi. The ultimate purpose of this communication according to some Daoist traditions is not to “save” or “liberate” human beings from their finitude (though this may be one result) but rather more grandly, to assist in (or insist upon) the continuing evolution of the cosmos. This fact was well recognized in Daoist movements going back as far as the Way of Great Peace in the 2nd century.

This early Daoist movement envisioned the role of human beings as facilitators of a “central harmony” in the cosmos. The central text of that movement, known as the Scripture of Great Peace, asserts that “it is our human mission to preserve, protect, and circulate harmonious communication between the realms of cosmos and humanity” (Lai 2001, 104). There are two chief aspects to the way in which Daoists continue to promote such a “harmonious communication”: communal ritual and self-cultivation. These two activities though different sociologically and phenomenologically can be understood as sharing a common theological purpose, namely to promote the dynamic exchange of power and vitality within the three levels of the cosmos, heaven, earth and humanity, so as to achieve a level of optimal harmony among them.⁴

The multiplicity of Daoist revealed texts suggests that the communications of the Dao are literary manifestos, that the cosmic insistence of the Dao is at some level a textual insistence. It is not, however, the content of the transmission that is important, but rather the fact that the language of the Dao facilitates communication between the diverse layers of existence (celestial, human and earthly). Daoist texts thus do not prescribe doctrines, but rather modes of conduct that facilitate the intercommunication between humans, the earth and the heavens. Indeed, for most Daoist texts, it is the texts themselves that are the methods of communication. Simply possessing or reciting one of these texts is seen as strengthening the connections between one’s own being and the

roots of life. Moreover, many such texts describe mythopoetically the ways in which human bodies are implicated in the cosmic processes in our heavenly environment:

The Supreme [Lord] said: People are concentrated essence and accumulated energy. When someone conceives an embryo, blood accumulates, joining yellow and white, ethereal and solidified, cinnabar and purple, melding and vaporizing. In this way one's bones solidify, saliva spews forth, and bodily fluids scatter, diffuse and circulate.

The four limits converge and combine; the nine palaces join unite as one; the five spirits are incarnated in bodily form [i.e. in the five viscera]. The Supreme Unity fixes the tally and register. Suddenly [life] is established. Indistinct, yet it has form. Vague, yet whole. Cast away, yet being born. Thereupon the nine spirits come to stay in their palaces. The five viscera mysteriously grow and the five spirits take residence there.

Fathers and mothers only know the beginning of giving oneself life and nurture, and are unaware that the Imperial Lord and the five spirits come between them. (*Jiuzhen zhongjing* DZ1376 2.a-b).⁵

Another way in which Daoists understand this connection between text and cosmos can be seen in the Chinese character *jing* 經 which conventionally means a classic text or canonical scripture, but refers also to the weft of the cosmos, envisioned as a sacred canopy or fabric suspended from the central cosmic ridgepole (*taiji* 太極) towards which the Great Bear or Big Dipper constellation (*beidou* 北斗) points.

A Daoist text is thus a cosmic text(ile), woven from the vital threads of the evolving processes of Dao.

...THEOLOGY

Theology is the search for truth about divine matters. In Modern Standard Chinese, the word for truth is *daoli* 道理 – the pattern of Dao. Given the metaphysical framework of cosmic revelation and ontogeny outlined above, in what sense is it possible for humans to cognize and manifest this *dao*-pattern? Since truth is not immediately manifest to humans, it must be sought. The question is not what is truth? but where is truth? Where can the pattern of Dao be observed? Daoists recognized, however, that Dao is not simply something which one should, in the fashion of Confucius, learn to inquire of (*wen* 問), attend (*ting* 聽) or follow (*shun* 順). Dao may also be cultivated (*xiudao* 修道). In this sense, therefore, Daoist theology has two components: a cognitive appreciation of the communicative (and therefore ontogenetic) processes of the cosmos; and a corresponding communicative (and therefore ontogenetic) stimulation of those processes. This dyadic process of interaction has been understood as stimulus-response (*gan-ying* 感應), or, at its simplest level, the inspiration and expiration of vital breath (*qi* 氣) in the forms of activity (*yang* 陽) and passivity (*yin* 陰). Below I sketch out the foundations of how such theological cognition and cultivation could function, but it is important to note that these two modes of theological activity (cognition and cultivation) are complementary and constitutive of each other. To borrow an analogy from computers: cognition is not simply input and cultivation is not simply output for both processes take place simultaneously.

In order to help understand the cognitive mode of Daoist theology I would like to introduce the environmentalist cognitive philosophy of Mark Rowlands (1999). This theory is contrasted on the one hand with the internalist theory of Descartes, and more recent Neo-Kantian cognitive structuralism, in which it is argued that the process of cognition takes place wholly within the structures of the mind – that is the mind fundamentally *constitutes* our experience of the world. Rowlands' environmentalist theory is contrasted, on the other hand, with Putnam's externalist theory (1975) that "it is not possible to understand the nature of cognitive processes by focusing exclusively on what is occurring inside the skins of cognizing organisms" (Rowlands 1999, 31). Rowlands'

environmentalist theory argues that Putnam's epistemological claim must also entail an ontological claim that the cognitive processes themselves are not located exclusively within the body; that the cognitive process itself involves the manipulation of one's environment. Thus cognition is a hybrid process in which individual bodies engage and manipulate the environment in which they are located. Rowlands uses an analogy from psychotectonics (the study of how to build minds) to show that a mind is not like a computer but rather a robot, that is, a machine that interacts with and manipulates its environment *in order to* process information about it (Rowlands 1999,30).

Rowlands argues for this theory of cognition by examining perception, memory, thought and language. In terms of perception, Rowlands defends Gibson's (1979) ecological theory of an optic array, that is, the concept of a spatial pattern of light that is manipulated by the optical system of the perceiving person. Thus, crucially, visual perception is does not simply involve the processing of information collected by the retina and delivered to the optic nerve, but rather the total system in which eyes move and focus, heads turn and bodies move thus manipulating the structure of the optic array in their environment. Any comprehensive understanding of perception, Gibson claims, cannot be understood unless it involves the total ecosystem of manipulating and processing information. That is, we do not acquire visual knowledge simply by internally processing information acquired from external sources. Rather, "in certain circumstances, acting upon, or manipulating, external structures is a form of information processing" (Rowlands 1999, 116). From examples such as this Rowlands argues that Putnam's epistemological claims must also be supplemented by an ontological claim – that some forms of cognition involve the manipulation of structures in one's environment.

A second example of how this works is given in Rowlands' examination of memory. In this example he distinguishes between biological working memory and external working memory, and argues that memory, like perception, is a hybrid of both internal and environmental elements. He cites for an example Rubin's theory of memory in oral traditions (1995). Rubin argues that oral memory (for instance remembering a poem or a song) is constructed out of the sequence of sounds that is involved in the performance of the poem. Specifically, the rules of

rhythm and rhyme severely limit the quantity of information that it is necessary to remember. Provided that one can remember the beginning word of the poem, each word functions as a phonetic cue for the next word: “Eenie” leads to “Meenie” leads to “Miney” leads to “Mo” (Rowlands 1999, 141). Rowlands likes this example because it shows that the patterns of ambient sound located outside the remembering mind help constitute the memory process. The manipulation of one’s aural environment (by voicing the first word of the poem) is not only the first stage in the performance of the poem, but also the first stage in the remembering of the poem.

How does this relate to the concept of Daoist theology? Like the example of oral memory, theology is a process of performing and remembering the cues embedded in the environment in order to grasp the truth (*daoli* 道理). Like the example of visual perception outlined above, Daoist theology is both a cognitive and an environmentally manipulative process. That is, it is a process of understanding Dao that also involves engaging Dao and, ultimately, transforming or cultivating it. Daoist theology, moreover, proposes a teleological value to this process of cognition, namely, the promotion of harmonious communication between the three existentially relevant realms of Dao: earth, heavens and humanity. This harmony is realised in the human ability to cognize the sequential patterns, the rhymes and the rhythms of our environmental matrix and to continue this patterning by supporting the continuing evolution of new patterns and ways that harmonise with the existing sequences. In this respect Daoist theology is an aesthetic endeavour of harmony, rather than an ethical endeavour of response. As David Hall argued,

The Daoist world is not to be seen as *a* Whole but as *many* “wholes.” Because there is no sense of being as a common property or a relational structure, the world lacks a single coherent pattern characterizing its myriad processes. The order of the world is, thus, neither rational nor logical but *aesthetic*. This is the case since there is no transcendent pattern determining the existence or efficacy of the order. Natural order is *ziran* (self-so). (Hall 2001, 252).⁶

Daoist theology thus aims towards the manifestation of the ontogenetic insistence of the myriad *daos* that constitute the universe in such a way as to propagate harmony. It thus involves a type of environmental cognition⁷ and it also involves a hermeneutical performance based on re-membering the cues encoded within our environment. These cues, of course, constitute the classic texts that are revealed from the hidden recesses of the root of the recursion, that is, the primordial *dao* (*yuandao* 元道).

...OF MESSIANIC

The environmental hermeneutics of “re-membering the cosmos” outlined above is, however, more than a purely logical or rational process. Given the recursivity of the Daoist worldview, it is a process that involves all three dimensions of the cosmos (heaven, earth and humans). The one who cultivates theological wisdom thus propagates the ontogenetic insistence of his or her environing field (*dao*). In order to understand the character of such a person, it is helpful to review Julia Ching’s theory of shamanic kingship (1997). Briefly stated, Ching asserts that the notion of kingship provides a key paradigm for Chinese religion. The Chinese character for a king, three horizontal lines connected by a single vertical line, symbolizes the role of the king as the one who mediates between heaven and earth, and, if he is wise and benevolent, facilitates the continuing harmonious transformation of the myriad things that constitute the universe. Ching demonstrates that this paradigm can serve as a powerful key for interpreting the many dimensions of the cosmic role of the Chinese religious functionary. Confucians took as their model the sage-kings of old who, like the pole star in the night sky, merely had to “face south” and all under heaven revolved around them. The sage of the *Daode jing* is a similarly benevolent ruler who, through the charismatic power of actionless-action, spontaneously generates harmonious order throughout his environment. Chinese shamans through ecstatic vision, fly to the stars, and, like the charismatic kings of old, weave a harmony and unity between the celestial and the earthly realms. The strength of this way of looking at Chinese religion derives in part from the fact that Ching generates this perspective from within the tradition itself. It is thus an internally coherent theoretical category which does not suffer

from the weaknesses to which external theoretical impositions are often prone.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Ching's discussion of the sage-king is her use of the term *messiah* as a cross-cultural comparative category. There are obvious difficulties in using a term from one religious tradition, namely, Judaism, as an interpretive category for understanding another religious tradition. When this cross-cultural interpretation is undertaken in the furtherance of, or under the implicit influence of, political ambitions and ideologies, such interpretations are open to the charge of Western colonialism, aggression and imperialism. Here, by contrast, the term "messiah" functions not as an evaluative tool for judging the merit of someone's religious stance, but as a heuristic device for generating understanding and wisdom.

So how does Ching use "messiah" as a comparative category? First she points to its historical understanding in the Jewish tradition, as the "anointed one," that is the King of Israel. Originally this denoted a king whose reign was consecrated by a rite of anointment with oil. In the intertestamental period, however, the term was applied to the future king, who was expected to restore the kingdom of Israel and save the people from all evil. Next she explains that she is not using the term as "literal parallel" (Ching 1997, 208). "But I am suggesting," she goes on to say, "that the idea of an expected political saviour has been very much a part of the Confucian, as well as Taoist and even Buddhist traditions. A belief that the old order was near its end, and a new, better one, was approaching, a 'millenarian belief' – was often also associated with this expectation" (208). Ching's use of the term *messiah* is thus related to her understanding of millenarianism as a feature of Chinese religion. A *messiah*, by her interpretive definition, is a political saviour who will usher in the millennium – a new age of harmony.

Since the theory of millennialism has been tied up with discussion of linear and circular time (Cohn 1970; 1993) and its application to the Chinese context has been variously debated already (Kohn 1998), I do not wish to comment on this aspect of the term *messiah*, except to say that the recursive cosmology outlined above could permit both a cyclical and linear view of time depending upon the perspective of the observer. There are, however, two important connotations of the term *messiah* for a Daoist theology of messianic wisdom. First is the notion that

charismatic power is located within a person and radiates outward from that person to bring his or her environment (social, political or natural) into harmony. This first connotation is simply that a messiah has the characteristic of a sage (*shengren* 聖人). The second is the notion that the source of this charismatic power is not the person him- or herself but rather is conveyed through the person to the world as it were from the future. Thus it is the character of such figures to be expected or anticipated. Such a person functions as a catalyst who rebalances the cosmic field when humans perceive that the imbalances in their environment (social, political or natural) are too great to be affected by those within the imbalanced field. It is as though a listing ship cannot be righted by the efforts of those on board but requires some apparently external intervention. A Daoist “messiah” is such an intervening force in the form of a human person.

Daoist cosmology holds, however, that the nature of the cosmos is to be spontaneously capable of rebalancing itself. Why are such messianic figures necessary? In the Lingbao text *The Roots of Sins*, the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning relates how the law and the texts of Numinous Treasure were made available to the world during various stages of its evolution.

When heaven and earth were established once more, I emerged into world and was called Nameless Lord. I brought forth the Law, to educate and transform, to save [people as] heavenly beings. In this age the actions of men and women were [both] refined and coarse; there was inequality in the same heart. Some believed [in the Dao]; they all obtained long life. Some gave rise to jealousy and hurt, and were evil, rebellious and disloyal; they all died early deaths. At this time there were the roots of karmic retribution of good and evil. After I had passed through, the entire kalpa came full circle. Heaven and earth were again destroyed; there was no more light; dismal and dark it was. After a period of five kalpas came Opening Sovereign, the first year.

The true texts of the Numinous Treasure were opened and made accessible by the three original energies. Heaven and earth were again in correct order; the five writings were blazing and radiant. I became manifest in the Heaven of Beginning Green Energy under the name of the Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning to send down broadly the Law, to educate and transform, and save [them as] heavenly beings. At the time when this first began, the people were simple and pure; they lived a life of “knotted cords,” and their minds were free from rigid conventions. They were in harmony with spontaneity, and all attained long life to the extent of 36,000 years. (*Zuigen pinjie* 罪根品戒, DZ457 ch. 1)

Here the Heavenly Worthy graciously appears to save living beings and to restore them to the simple life when people used knotted cords to keep track of their accounts. Co-incident with this plan to save the world is the appearance of the true texts of Numinous Treasure, and as a result of the texts being revealed, the salvific function of the Heavenly Worthy was fulfilled. Thus in the Numinous Treasure tradition, the process of revealing the texts through the medium of divine beings is itself to be understood as an act of compassion or grace by means of which people are able once again to live a life of harmony and simplicity.

From this it seems that the Daoist concept of a “messiah” is somewhat different from the Jewish or Christian concepts. The similarity is that the messiah is a human figure who is expected in the future to catalyze peace and harmony in the world. The difference is that the Dao itself is the source of the catalytic power. That is, the world itself seems to have a self-healing mechanism built into it. Although it looks as though messiahs appear like a *deus ex machina* to save the situation, the reality is that their charismatic power is itself a function of the ontogenetic insistence of the matrix itself. It itself brings about the harmonious re-balancing that it itself is experiencing. We humans expect this to take the form of some dramatic external liberating force, but in fact the messiah is a function of the ecosystemic balancing power of Dao. It is this characteristic that gives the dao its apparently transcendental character – that it is a force for ecological equilib-

rium, an ontogenetic insistence, that cannot be destroyed. Humans may try hard to prevent this cosmic flourishing from taking place, but it is impossible that they could succeed. When this transcendental force is schematized temporally within human religious experience, it has the character of faith – faith in the future, faith in some final deliverance by gods or messiahs. It is not the future that saves Daoists, however, but the insistent power of Dao welling up all around. For this reason Daoists prefer the metaphors of return (*fan* 反) or reversion (*ni* 逆) to describe their religious journey. This process requires the deepening of connections between their own life, the environment around them, and the root recursion of the primordial dao.

WISDOM

By now the characteristics of Daoist wisdom should be readily apparent:

1. Wisdom takes the character of a manifesto, that is, a personal exposition or showing-forth.
2. Wisdom is cavernous, recursive connectivity that facilitates the communication between the heavens, earth and humans.
3. Wisdom is a mechanism of cognition and activation, an environmental hermeneutic that facilitates the ontogenetic insistence of the fields in which one is located.
4. Wisdom is the balancing function of Dao, and manifests in individuals to catalyze harmony in their environments. Wisdom in the Daoist tradition is thus peculiarly and resolutely personal, but at the same time a function of the environing field in which one is located. Wisdom thus insists within the webs of connection between the individual and all those factors that constitute the multiple fields of his or her environment.

In this regard it may be helpful to consider two analogies. The first is that of a networked computer system in which the various information processing tasks are distributed throughout the whole system. As Rowlands argues, “In any specification of what a computer can do, the features of the network in which it is embedded must be taken into account” (1999, 143). Similarly, wisdom is not the property of the individual sage or messianic

figure but can only be understood in reference to the network of vital processes in which the sage is inscribed. Even though wisdom may appear to be embedded in a person such as a sage or messiah, this does not mean that it is in a New-Age sense a “personal” or “private” wisdom. It is rather an ecosystemic, holographic wisdom.

The second analogy is based on a Wittgenstein’s view of language, that the meaning of a linguistic item depends upon the capacity of the speaker to use it in the context of social conventions (Rowlands 1999, 178; Wittgenstein 1953). This is the very simple point that language is not the property of the individual but a shared set of conventions. These shared conventions include environmental aspects such as patterns of sound and symbols that encode meaning, but more importantly can be cashed out in terms of human behaviour. A similar analogy could be the fact that the manipulation of geometric symbols can be cashed out in our ability to design buildings that withstand earthquakes. The language that wisdom speaks is thus a social or environmental wisdom.

Within the Chinese traditions, I am persuaded that Xunzi developed the most sophisticated understanding of the way in which wisdom functions in terms of the shared codes of ritual behaviour. This wing of the Confucian project, continued to this day in the so-called Boston Confucianism holds that wisdom is ineluctably instituted wisdom; that it is culturally encoded wisdom; that it is powerfully effective wisdom when it knows how to employ the sedimented layers of meaning in ritual acts or to play the complex harmonies of ritual compositions. From the Daoist perspective, this view of wisdom is an excellent view, but is flawed if it is not ultimately rooted in the language of ontogenetic insistence, or Dao. This Daoist language may be understood as the “deep grammar” of evolution, that is, the codes that define and make possible the transformations of things within the myriad processes of Dao. This language may be encoded symbolically and recorded in texts, but is, fundamentally a somatic/vital language, not a symbolic/mental language.⁸ One American Daoist practitioner has termed this the alchemical language for communicating with nature’s intelligence (Winn 2001).

Daoist theology claims, therefore, that this language of nature (*dao* – in both its senses) is accessible to us chiefly through the connection between our bodies and their cosmic environments.

As I have argued elsewhere, it is a wisdom predicated upon a “hermeneutics of the body”:

Daoists engage in what might be termed a critical hermeneutics of the body. It is through the body that Daoists interpret the self-revelation of the world in nature and scripture; it is through the cultivation of the body that Daoists achieve the highest state of perfected being (*zhen*), which is a dynamic, spontaneous identity or transparency between the body and its cosmic environment. Daoist cultivation is thus intrinsically somatic: the cognitive and the spiritual aspects of Daoist cultivation are distributed throughout the whole body and are not the function of specific fields within the body such as the mind or the soul. The entire Daoist tradition may legitimately be viewed as a continuously unfolding history of a critical hermeneutics of the body in which human beings have cultivated a “fusion of horizons” between the conditions of bodily existence (*xing*; nature) and the constellated powers (*ming*; fate) within which individual lives are circumscribed. (Miller 2002, 18)

Thus Daoist wisdom is, by definition, a kind of somatic process in which the communicative, ontogenetic power of the Dao insists within the body, generating transformative connections within the fields of engagement in which it is located. Whereas Confucians focus on the power of conventional language and symbolic ritual discourse to effect these transformations, Daoists insist that all symbolic communications are, if they are to be strategically effective, embedded within in the deeper language of our evolving environment. It is the task of Daoist theology to articulate the fundamental parameters within which this wisdom may be appropriated and manifested.⁹ I have argued that this wisdom should take the form of a “holographic manifesto” rather than a responsive or responsible communication. It is my hope, therefore, that such wisdom, embodied by sagely figures and reflected by contemporary intellectuals, will supersede the disjunctive ethics of alterity that is predicated on a foundational dichotomy of self/other,

and may function instead as an “injunctive” environmental wisdom of being-within.

NOTES

1. This is not to say in some post-structuralist sense that these terms are pure symbolic conventions with no real referent, for, as is argued below, language itself is embedded environmentally in the evolving dao. The mistake is to argue that one of these dyadic terms, in and of itself, captures an essential element of reality which is, in one sense, evolving, plural and reproductive, and in another sense unitary and ultimate.

2. An example of the way in which the revelation of texts takes place in grottos can be seen in the two mythic explanations for the revelation of the *Scriptures of the Cavern-Divine*. One legend tells of how a Daoist named Bo He was instructed by his master to stare at the north wall of a cave in Mount Emei. Three years later he was able to see writings form on the rock-face. According to the second explanation, the texts carved themselves on the wall of a grotto in Mount Song while a Daoist was meditating there (Benn 2000, 316).

3. As Thomas Hahn writes: “Despite a singular solidity, their physical permeability in terms of air-and water-flow reflects the inner workings of the human body. Blood equals water; air equals breath. Spermatic liquids form pools; walls constitute shapes like inner organs or viscera. Their resident, left windowless and in an enclosed void, experiences the dignity of complete independence and autarky” (Hahn 2000, 695).

4. The most mundane level of Daoist cultivation thus consists in ensuring that the physical environment has room to breathe. The early Celestial Masters movement, for instance, included in its list of 180 precepts injunctions against sealing off pools and wells and drying up marshes (Schipper 2001, 81). Ge Hong’s (283-343) biography of Zhang Daoling, the first Celestial Master, also relates how the community was instructed to keep the roads and bridges clear and puddles drained of water.

5. The number following DZ refers to the title index of the Ming *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 that can be found in Schipper (1975). For a comprehensive, cross-referenced index of the most important Daoist collections and compendia, consult Komjathy (2003).

6. Note that what Hall takes to be the radical multiplicity of the Daoist “pluriverse” I prefer to see as the recursive patterning that defies the traditional categories of one and many.

7. *C.f.* Zhu Xi’s “investigation of things” (*gewu* 格物).

8. For this reason the transmission of Daoist texts is accompanied by oral instructions on how to perform the texts. The meaning of the texts is thus activated or employed, rather than construed in the mind.

9. A preliminary comparative sketch of some of these contours can be found in Miller (2000).

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CHAPTER XVI

DAOIST WISDOM AND POPULAR WISDOM: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL MAXIMS IN THE *DAODE JING* AND THEIR PROVERBIAL EQUIVALENTS

HELEN XIAOYAN WU

INTRODUCTION

Chinese literature and history have always made the distinction between *ya* 雅 and *su* 俗, whereas Chinese philosophy has not done so. The saying, "Let philosophy go to the public", advocates expressing philosophy in simple language, not fundamentally changing the philosophical system. As for *ya* or *gaoya* 高雅, *su* or *tongsu* 俗, an implicit judgment exists when people use these terms. *Ya* is defined as standard, orthodox, proper, correct, or refined, polished and elegant, while *su* is related to the popular, common, ordinary or even vulgar and boorish. The former was considered superior, indicating elitist art and literature (*yangchun-baixue* 陽春白雪), while the latter was considered inferior, since it referred to works such as the songs of the rustic poor country people (*xiali-baren* 下里巴人).

The *Laozi* or *Daode Jing* (*The Classic of the Way of Virtue*), the most important Daoist classic, is typical of the refined philosophy. It is a book characterized by a unique way of thinking and witty, deeply meaningful expressions which still radiate great wisdom in the present age. Many of its philosophical maxims have already reached far and wide around the world. It thus exemplifies the saying that "A good maxim is never out of season" (Stevenson 1948, 1906). The message explicit in the entirety of Chapter Twenty of the *Daode Jing* is to regard the masses as popular, to affirm that the masses and "I" are opposites, and to overcome worldly desire and attain refinement. No doubt, the last sentence in the chapter, "I alone differ from others, essentially because I have acquired Tao" (*Wo du yi yu ren, er gui shi mu* 我獨異於人，而貴食母) (Ren 1985, 103, trans. He 1993, 35),¹ is the full development

of Laozi's subjective consciousness and reflects the core spirit of his philosophy, which seeks to be free from vulgarity.

As concerns *su*, the opposite of *ya*, proverbs are usually described as the abridgments of the collective wisdom of the masses, with experience being the mother of wisdom. Chinese proverbs, as the salt of language, are not only philosophically profound with vivid images and metaphors, they also often employ harmony, metre, and rhyme, as well as rhythmic and resonant features. A proverb may sometimes be confused or equated with a maxim. If what a proverb expresses is a well-known truth, for instance, "Live and learn," "Pride goes before a fall," then this reflects exactly what the great German poet and thinker Goethe (1749-1832) said, "Wisdom is only in truth" (Stevenson, 1948, 2531). Therefore, it is not inappropriate to regard some proverbs as maxims. Yet when we compare proverbs with maxims on the whole, there exist obvious differences other than those mentioned immediately above.

First, a maxim is usually created by a single sage, a person of virtue or an outstanding member of society. This is exactly what is described by Ge Hong (fl. 281-341) in the Jin dynasty (265-420), "Maxims do not come from mediocre people" (Pang 1997, 335). Second, a maxim can be spread among the populace and thus become a general rule of conduct. Su Shi (1037-1101), one of the foremost figures of Chinese letters in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), once said that a sentence produced by Han Yu (768-824), a great man of letters and philosopher of the Tang dynasty (618-907), could become a rule under heaven because of the plain truth and succinct style of what he wrote (Deng 1997, 359). In English, a maxim is also defined as a "widely accepted rule of conduct or general truth briefly expressed" (Hornbay 1974, 525).

Finally, a maxim is usually written in elegant language, whereas a proverb is popular, easily understood, and spread by word of mouth. As Yang Wanli (1127-1206), one of the most famous poets of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), said, "There are lost books of the past, but there are no lost words" (*Yang Chengzhai Ji*, 667). The words that cannot be lost are indeed the proverbs that are alive in a nation's language. As long as the nation exists, its proverbs exist. However, language always evolves along with the development of society. A vernacular style of ancient times may well become today's formal style. We will elaborate this perspective in the third part of this study.

Philosophical maxims and proverbs are different embodiments of wisdom. Using the sociolinguistic concept of “sociolect,” this research constitutes a paradigmatic study and comparison of seven categories of expressions involving the same ideas and matters in the two types of wisdom. In order to do this, a number of philosophical maxims from the *Daode Jing* concerning certain aspects of the philosophy of life and the ways of the world will be selected in the second part of this study. These maxims are listed at the top of each category, labeled as the [A1] or [B1] series, the standard being highlighted. In addition to these maxims, a number of proverbial equivalents and corresponding expressions of various peoples – the well-known, the noted and the ordinary – will be examined. The next series in the numerical arrangement will come from orthodox historical works such as *Shi Ji (Records of the Historian)*, *Hou Han Shu (Book of the Later Han)*, as well as various sayings or lines from poems demonstrating a distinct influence from Confucianism. Sayings from other schools of thought follow. As there are many vernacular sayings and proverbs found in fiction and dramas from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1206-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1616-1911) dynasties, such expressions are grouped together in the next series. Two books, *Caigen Tan (Tending the Roots of Wisdom)*² and *Zengguang Xianwen (Social Wisdom)*,³ will be of constant reference in this study and, thus, will be listed independently. These two books have played an important role in promoting and popularizing classical maxims and proverbs involving Chinese outlooks on life and worldly-wise experience. Present-day and Taiwanese proverbs will be listed at the end of the category. The above classification may change: some sayings and proverbs may be arranged in the same series, or next to each other, depending on the relationship between them. Other than the sources of existing translations indicated, whether modified or not, the remaining translations in this study are mine.

In selecting corresponding sayings and proverbs, this study will trace their origins and arrange them chronologically where possible. For example, if a saying appears on many occasions during the Ming dynasty, the earliest occurrence will be selected. This method is meant to allow for an examination of the relationship between origin and development, thereby providing the evidence for the analysis in the third part of this study and for the drawing of conclusions.

TWO TYPES OF WISDOM WITH IDENTICAL THEMES*A. Wisdom on Trifles and Abundance*

[A1]

He bao zhi mu, sheng yu hao mo; 合抱之木，生於毫末；*Jiu ceng zhi tai, qi yu lei tu;* 九層之臺，起於累土；*Qianli zhi xing, shi yu zuxia.* 千里之行，始於足下。

A huge tree which fills one's arms grows from a tiny seedling;
A high terrace which has nine storeys rises from a small heap
of earth;

A journey of a thousand *li* begins with the first step.⁴ (*The Book of Laozi*, Chap. 64)

The well-known maxim in the third line of [A1] above is condensed the lines written by the Tang dynasty poets Bai Juyi (772-846) in [A1-1] and Quan Deyu (761 or 759-818) in [A1-2] below. However, the meaning, "A journey of a thousand *li* begins with the first step," remains the same:

[A1-1] *Qianli shi zuxia.* 千里始足下。(Liu Mingjie 1996, 718)[A1-2] *Qianli qi zuxia.* 千里起足下。(Quan 1994, 84)[A2-1] *Ruo sheng gao, bizi xia;* 若陟遐，必自邇。

Ruo zhi xia, bi zi er. 若陟遐，必自邇。(Wang Yunwu et al., *Shu Jing Daquan*, 49)

Ruo sheng gao, bizi xia; 若陟遐，必自邇。

Ruo zhi xia, bi zi er. 若陟遐，必自邇。(Wang Yunwu et al., *Shu Jing Daquan*, 49)

If one wants to ascend, one must start from below;

If one wants to climb far, one must start from near.

Wang Bo (649 or 650-76), a well-known Tang dynasty writer, condensed the original maxim of six Chinese characters (second line above) in *Shu Jing (The Book of Documents)* into a four-character expression in a poem, which keeps the same meaning:

[A2-2] *Zhi xia zi er.* 陟遐自邇。(He 1990, 167)

Moreover, similar expressions are also found in *Zhongyong (The Doctrine of the Mean)*, one of the four major Confucian classics:

[A3-1] *Xing yuan bi zi er, deng gao bi zi bei.* 行遠必自邇，登高必自卑。(Zhu 1960, 10)

To walk afar, one must start from near;
To climb high, one must start from low.

The above ten-Chinese-character saying is condensed into an eight-character expression by Li Baiyao (565-648), a historian of the early Tang dynasty:

[A3-2] *Xing yuan zi er, deng gao zi bei.* 行遠自邇，登高自卑。(Li Baiyao 1972, 494)

Finally, a common four-character set phrase was established:

[A3-3] *Xing yuan zi er.* 行遠自邇。(Northwest Teachers College 1987, 692)

A proverb of the same theme is that below:

[A4-1] *Wan zhang gaolou ping di qi,* 萬丈高樓平地起，
Cantian dashu shou zhong gen. 參天大樹手中根。(Cui and Wang 1997, 116-117)

Lofty towers are all built up from the ground;
Tall trees, reaching to the sky, grow from roots in the hand

Summary of A: The *Daode Jing* in [A1] and *The Complete Book of Documents* in [A2-1] have similar ideas, but the proverb in [A4-1] is obviously influenced by the first two sentences in the *Daode Jing* shown in [A1].

B. Wisdom on What Is Soft and Hard

[A4-1] *Wan zhang gaolou ping di qi,* 萬丈高樓平地起，
Cantian dashu shou zhong gen. 參天大樹手中根。(Cui and Wang 1997, 116-117)

Lofty towers are all built up from the ground;
Tall trees, reaching to the sky, grow from roots in the hand.

[B1-1] *Rouruo sheng gangqiang*. 柔弱勝剛強。 (*Laozi*, chap. 36)
The soft and weak overcome the hard and strong.

[B1-2] *Tianxia zhi zhirou* 天下之至柔
Chicheng tianxia zhi zhijian. 馳聘天下之至堅。 (*Laozi*,
chap. 43)

The softest thing under Heaven is able to run in and out of
the hardest.

[B1-3] *Tianxia mo rouruo yu shui*, 天下莫柔弱於水 ,
Er gong jianqiang zhe mo zhi neng sheng. 而攻堅強者莫之
能勝。 (*Laozi*, chap. 78)

Nothing under Heaven is softer and weaker than water,
But in attacking the hard and strong, no force can compare
with it.

The above maxim was later condensed into the four-character
combination below; and a set phrase, shown in [B1-3-2], was
further derived.

[B1-3-1] *Roushui gongjian*. 柔水攻堅。 (Xin 1987, 669)
Soft water can attack the hard.

[B1-3-2] *Dishui chuanshi*. 滴水穿石。 (Northwest
Teachers College 1987, 140)

Dripping water wears holes in stone.

The sayings below are largely identical despite minor
differences. [B2-1] by Fan Ye (398-445) is found in the orthodox
history of the *Book of the Later Han*; [B3-1] is quoted from a
Ming dynasty novel and [B3-2] from a poetic drama of the Qing
dynasty, all of which lead to the formation of the four-character set
phrase in [B3-3]:

[B2-1] *Rou neng zhi gang, ruo neng zhi qiang*. 柔能制剛，弱能
制強。 (Fan 1965, 695)

The soft can suppress the hard; the weak can control the
strong.

[B3-1] *Rou neng sheng gang, ruo neng sheng qiang.* 柔能勝剛，弱能勝強。(Luo1985, 537)

The soft can surpass the hard; the weak can surpass the strong.

[B3-2] *Rou sheng gang, ruo sheng qiang.* 柔勝剛，弱勝強。(Yang 1963, 23)

The soft is superior to the hard; the weak is superior to the strong.

[B3-3] *Rou neng ke gang.* 柔能克剛。(Li Yutang 1981, 153)

The soft can overcome the hard.

A different edition of *Caigen Tan (On Vegetable Roots)* gives an alternate interpretation of the above through an analogy involving the tongue and the teeth:

[B4-1] *She cun chang jian chi wang,* 舌存常見齒亡，

Gangqiang zhong bu sheng rouruo. 剛強終不勝柔弱。

(Hong 2000, 32)

The tongue always exists, while the teeth are often seen missing.

All in all, the hard and strong do not defeat the soft and weak.

Below is a proverb:

[B5-1] *Daochai keyi fulao yingchai.* 稻柴可以縛牢硬柴。⁵

Rice straw can fasten firewood.

Summary of B: Of all the corresponding expressions given in [B2-1] to [B5-1], none is divorced from the *Daode Jing* shown in [B1-1].

C. Wisdom on Illness and Longevity

[C1] *Wanwu caomu zhi sheng ye roucui,* 萬物草木之生也柔脆，

Qi si ye kugao. 其死也枯槁。

Gu jianqiang zhe si zhi tu, 故堅強者死之徒，

Rouruo zhe sheng zhi tu. 柔弱生之徒。

All things, grasses and trees, have tender twigs and branches when they are alive,

Whereas they become dry and withered when they are dead.

Therefore the hard and strong belong to death,
Whereas the soft and weak belong to life. (*Laozi*, chap. 76)

[C2-1] *Chang you xiaobing de ren changming*. 常有小病的人長命。⁶

A person with constant ailments will live a long life.

[C2-2] *Jiu ji cheng yi*. 久疾成醫。(Wu et al. 1995, 161)
Prolonged illness turns a sick person into a doctor.

[C2-3] *Dai bing yannian*. 帶病延年。⁷

With illness, one will prolong his/her life.

Summary of C: It should be pointed out that various schools of thought had surprisingly no response to the philosophical maxim of "the soft and weak belong to life" in the *Daode Jing*. Only folk proverbs, shown in the [C2] series, provide several specific examples of what was expressed by the *Daodejing*.

D. Wisdom on Time and Achievement

[D1] *Dafang wuyu, daqi wancheng*. 大方無隅，大器晚成。
The great square has no corners;
The valuable vessel is always completed last.⁸ (*Laozi*, chap. 41)

[D2-1] *Daqi wancheng*. 大器晚成。
Great instruments are forged slowly.⁹ (*Zengguang Xianwen* 2001, 34-35)

[D3-1] *Pangzi bu shi yikou chi de*. 胖子不是一口吃的。(Cai 1996, 876-877)

A fat person does not become fat by eating one mouthful.

[D3-2] *Yi qiao wa bu chu jing lai*. 一鍬挖不出井來。(Cai 1996, 876-877)

To dig a spadeful of earth does not create a well.

[D3-3] *San jin ban de lao muji*, 三斤半的老母雞,
Bu shi yi ba mi yangcheng de. 不是一把米養成的。¹⁰ (Cai 1996, 876-877)

A hen of three and a half *jin* is not grown by a handful of rice.

[D3-4] *Qianqiu daye, fei yiri zhi gong.* 千秋大業非一日之功。
(Cui and Wang 1997, 150, note 1)

It takes a long time to accomplish a great undertaking throughout the ages.

Summary of D: The saying in [D2-1] simply repeats the essence of part of [D1]. The four proverbs in the [D3] series exemplify the message in the *Daode Jing*. The philosophical maxim in [D1], "The valuable vessel is always completed last," could be what was refined by the *Daode Jing* based on existing ancient proverbs or folk songs (Ren 1985, 150, n.1), which we will further discuss in the third part of this study.

E. Wisdom on the Outside and the Inside

[E1] *Da zhi ruo qu, da qiao ruo zhuo.* 大直若屈，大巧若拙。
(Laozi, Chap. 45)

The most straight seems to be crooked, the greatest skill seems to be clumsy.

Su Shi of the Northern Song dynasty had this to say about wisdom and foolishness:

[E2-1] *Da yong ruo qie, da zhi ruo yu.* 大勇若怯，大智如愚。
(Deng 1997, Bk. II, 199)

Those with great bravery seem to be cowardly;
Those with great wisdom seem to be foolish.

A novel of the Ming dynasty skillfully mingled the Daoist and Confucianist by taking a half of each of the above:

[E3-1] *Da zhi ruo yu, da qiao ruo zhuo.* 大智如愚，大巧若拙。
(Gu 1956, 93)

A person with great wisdom appears foolish;
A person of great skill appears clumsy.

Li Zhi (1527-1602), a Ming-dynasty "unorthodox" thinker who was the first in Chinese history to belittle Confucius, simply said:

[E3-2] *Da zhi ruo yu*. 大智若愚。(Li 1998, 150)

A person of great wisdom often seems to be slow-witted.

Zheng Banqiao (1693-1765), one of the noted "Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou" of the Qing dynasty, penned the following famous saying:

[E4-1] *Nande hutu*. 難得糊塗。(Wu Ke 1997, n.p.)

It is difficult to be muddle-headed.

Below are two proverbs:

[E5-1] *Yuzhe zizuo congming, zhizhe dazhi ruo yu*. 愚者自作聰明，智者大智若愚。

A fool does think he is wise, but the wise man sometimes seems as though he were stupid (Cui and Wang 1997, 246-7)¹¹

[E5-2] *Zhencai bu wailu*. 真才不外露。

Genuine talent often lies concealed (Cui and Wang 1997, 248).

Both *Tending the Roots of Wisdom* and *Social Wisdom* emphasize the importance of hiding one's talent:

[E6-1] *Junzi zhi caihua, yu yun zhu cang*, 君子之才華，玉韞珠藏，

buke shi ren yi zhi. 不可使人易知。

Virtuous people's talents should be carefully locked away like precious jewels,

so that others may not lightly ascertain them (Hong 2000, 3).¹²

[E6-2] *Congming ren yi liancang, er fan xuanyao*, 聰明人宜斂藏，而反炫耀，

shi congming er yumeng qi bing yi! 是聰明而愚懵其病矣！

Ruhe bubai? 如何不敗？

A person of learning should keep his talents concealed. If he makes a dazzling show of them, then he will be acting like a dunderhead. How could he not come to perdition? (Hong 2000, 31)

[E6-3] *Cang qiao yu zhuo, yong hui er ming*, 藏巧於拙，用晦而明，

Yu qing yu zhuo, yi qu wei shen, 寓清於拙，以屈為伸，
Zhen sheshi zhi yi hu, cangshen zhi san ku. 真涉世之一壺，藏身之三窟。

Adopt a semblance of stupidity in order to disguise your real talents.

Display real cleverness by exercising your abilities in such a way that they remain undetected.

Put on a mask of muddiness in order to conceal your real clarity.

Use the method of temporary retreat to make later advance. These are invaluable tactics for self-preservation—just like a rabbit who has three bolt-holes (Hong 2000, 117)

[E7-1] *Caihua ru yu yun zhu han*, 才華如玉韞珠含，
Buke shi ren yi ce. 不可使人易測。

Capabilities should be concealed as valuables,
 Do keep them from being known about easily (Zengguang Xianwen 2001, 362-3).

[E7-2] *Congming ren, yi liancang*, 聰明人，宜斂藏，
Er fan xuanyao, ruhe bu bai! 而反炫耀，如何不敗！

A clever person should hide his talents and capabilities instead of parading them,
 Or else he only comes across failure (Zengguang Xianwen 2001, 298-300).

[E7-3] *Nei yao lingli, wai yao chidai*. 內要伶俐，外要癡呆。

.....

Guai li fang xie dai. 乖裏放些呆。

Be clever at home,
 Appear foolish in society.

...

Dilute your cleverness with some false stupidity (Zengguang Xianwen 2001, 138-141).

[E8-1] *Da jian si zhong*. 大奸似忠。

Da ning si xin, 大佞似信，
Wai shi puye, 外視樸野，

Zhong cang qiaozha. 中藏巧詐。 (Liu and Li1983, 185).
 A treacherous courtier appears to be faithful.
 A sycophant appears to be trustworthy.
 He looks simple and unaffected,
 Yet he hides cunning and wiles inside.

[E8-2] *Da jian si zhong,* 大奸似忠,
Da zha si xin, 大詐似信,
Da qiao si yu. 大巧似愚。 (Zhang1974, Bk. 15, 4441)
 A treacherous court official appears to be loyal;
 A crafty traitor appears to be reliable;
 A skillful person appears to be foolish.

[E9-1] *Dai li jian, zhi li wan.* 呆裏奸，直裏彎。 (Wen et al. 1989, 183)
 Stupidity conceals craftiness while the straight conceals the crooked.

[E9-1-1] *Dai li sa jian.* 呆裏撒奸。 (Wang 1978, 107)
 Dilute your craftiness with a dull look.

[E10] *Dai li cang guai.* 呆裏藏乖。 (Jinmu 1985, 254)
 Dilute your cleverness with stupidity.

Summary of E: Of the various expressions involving being faithful versus treacherous, crafty versus reliable, and stupid versus clever, they all seem to be the elaboration and imitation of the original in the *Daode Jing* shown in [E1].

F. Wisdom on Wealth and Poverty

[F1-1] *Jinyu mantang, mo zhi neng shou.* 金玉滿堂，莫之能守。
Fugui er jiao, zi yi qi jiu. 富貴而驕，自遺其咎。 (Laozi, Chap. 9)
 If your hall is filled with gold and jade, whoever could keep them safe?
 To be proud with honour and wealth will bring misfortune.

[F1-2] *Piaofeng bu zhong zhao,* 飄風不終朝，
Zhouyu bu zhong ri. 驟雨不終日。 (Laozi, Chap. 23)
 A whirlwind does not last a whole morning.

Nor does a rainstorm last a whole day.

- [F2-1] *Fugui ronghua neng ji shi*. 富貴榮華能幾時。¹³
How long can high position and great wealth last?
- [F2-2] *Fugui ruhe caotou lu*. 富貴何如草頭露。(Du 1972, Bk. 1, 8)
Wealth and honour are like dew on the grass.
- [F2-2-1] *Fugui caotou lu*. 富貴草頭露。(Zhang 1993, 101)
Wealth and honour are dewdrops on the grass.
- [F2-3] *Fugui caotou shuang*. 富貴草頭霜。(Li 1982, 8)
Wealth and honour are frost on the grass.
- [F2-4] *Fugui huajian lu*. 富貴花間露。(Zhang 1993, 101)
Wealth and honour are like dew on flowers.
- [F3-1] *Gongming fugui, zhushi zhuanyi*, 功名富貴，逐世轉移，
Er qijie qianzai ru si. 而氣節千載如斯。
Your integrity can continue over time,
Although your honour and wealth, to your descendants,
are exhaustible (Zheng guang xianwen 2001, 86-87).
- [F3-2] *Gongming fugui ruo chang zai*, 功名富貴若長在，
Hanshui yi ying xibei liu. 漢水亦應西北流。
If honour and wealth could exist for ever,
Rivers would flow in the opposite direction. (Zengguang
xianwen 2001, 226-227).
- [F4-1] *Fu'er gengti zuo*. 富兒更替做。(Wang, Yuan Shi Shi Fan,
Bk. 3, 23)
People may have riches and honour alternatively.
- [F4-2] *Fu wu sandai xiang*. 富無三代享。
Riches of a family will not last for three generations.
(Huang 1984, 1)
- [F4-3] *Fugui wu sanbei*. 富貴無三輩。(Zhang 1986, 93)
Riches and honour do not last for three generations.

The following are three present-day proverbs:

[F5-1] *Ren wu sandai qiong.* 人無三代窮。 (Wen 1989, 715)
 Nobody is poor for three generations.

[F5-2] *Wu nian er run, haodai zhao lun.* 五年二閏，好歹照輪。
 (Cai 1996, 365)
 There are two leap years within five years.
 Good or bad, they come anyway.

[F5-2-1] *San nian yi run, haodai zhao lun.* 三年一閏，好歹照輪。 (Chen 2000, 20)
 There is a leap year within three years.
 Good or bad, it comes anyway.

[F6-1] *Ren wuyou qianri hao,* 人無有千日好，
Hua wuyou bairi hong. 花無有百日紅。 (Sui 1981, Bk. 2,
 382)
 No one can have a good life of a thousand days;
 No flower can be in blossom for a hundred days.

[F7-1] *Weiren mo zuo qiannian ji,* 為人莫作千年計，
Sanshi he dong sishi xi. 三十河東四十四。
 Do not make any plans for a thousand years;
 The east of a river is dominant for thirty years
 And then the west of a river is dominant for forty years.
 (Zengguang Xianwen 2001, 92-93)

[F8-1] *Sanshi nian hedong, sanshi nian hexi.* 三十年河東，三十年河西。 (Wu 1958, 449)
 For thirty years people east of the river prosper,
 then for thirty years it is those on the west.

The following are two present-day proverbs:

[F9-1] *Sanshi nian fengshui lunliu zhuan.* 三十年風水輪流轉。
 (Wen, *Zhong-Ying Yanyu Cidian*, 759)
 Fortune and misfortune take turns every thirty years.

[F9-2] *Yuanren hui bian, bianren hui yuan.* 圓人會扁，扁人會圓。(Cai 1996, 365)

A fat person may become thin, and a thin person may become fat.

Summary for F: Through the sayings of wisdom on wealth and poverty above, we can see the similarities in all three of the major teachings of China: Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Using the Daoist maxim in [F1] as the standard, the sayings involving "three generations" can be traced back to the *Mencius*, in which Mencius maintained that "Any property and power of a man of virtue may be cut off after five generations" (*Junzi zhi ze, wushi er zhan* 君子之澤，五世而斬) (Zhu 1960, 117). As concerns the sayings in [F8-1] and [F9-1], they show a deep influence of Buddhism which emphasizes *samsara*, that is, the transmigration of life and death.

G. Wisdom on What is Easy and Difficult

[G1] *Tianxia nanshi, bi zuo yu yi.* 天下難事，必作於易；
Tianxia dashi, bi zuo yu xi. 天下大事，必作於細。(Laozi, Chap. 63)

All the difficult things under Heaven necessarily arise from the state in which they were easy;

All the great tasks under Heaven arise from the state in which they were small.

[G2] *Sheng da xichu duan.* 繩打細處斷。(Cai 1996, 732)
A rope breaks at its thinnest point.

Summary of G: It seems common practice to handle things starting with the easiest part and then gradually dealing with the more challenging aspects. It was the *Daode Jing* which first brought this general knowledge to light and made it a philosophical maxim. This means that truth is often contained in ordinary things, and that the finding of truth is one of the most important symbols of wisdom.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on a careful comparison between the maxims concerning philosophy of life and the ways of the world in the *Daode Jing* and their corresponding proverbs and expressions in other sources, we can make the following observations:⁷

Transformation from Maxims to Proverbs

First, most of the so-called proverbs are no more than the retelling, imitating, explaining, interpreting, annotating, elaborating or practicing of the philosophical maxims of the *Daode Jing*. Some philosophical maxims have been repeated, slightly altered in wording or embellished; some have been influenced by Buddhism (e.g., some of those in category F above) and other schools of thought.

Second, the history of the Chinese language may be divided roughly into three stages: i) *Gudai Hanyu* (Classical Chinese); ii) *Jindai Hanyu* (older Modern Chinese) from the late Tang dynasty around the 10th century until the late Qing dynasty in the early 20th century, during which popular literature appeared and developed; and iii) *Xiandai Hanyu* (contemporary Modern Chinese) beginning with the early Republican times in the 1910s. Some of the maxims have undergone linguistic evolution from ancient to modern vernacular, from written to spoken language, and from elegant to colloquial language, during which time they have been popularized, e.g., category D above. While "The valuable vessel is always completed last" (*Daqi wancheng*) in [D1] may well be an ancient vernacular that the *Daode Jing* adopted and/or adapted, and that therefore became presented in the elegant language of Daoist wisdom, the proverb "A hen of three and a half jin is not grown by a handful of rice" (*San jin ban de lao muji, bu shi yi ba mi yangcheng de*) in [D3-3] is certainly a colloquialism of present-day farmers.

Third, while on the one hand, relatively wordy colloquialisms may be characteristic of a tendency of the later period after the *Daode Jing*, on the other hand, many expressions were actually condensed and became even terser than those of the past. Such examples are seen in [A1-1], [A1-2], [B1-3-1], [E3-2] and [F2-2-1], among others. This may be explained with reference to the fact that the clarity and concision of the philosophical

maxims in the *Daode Jing* and other works had been used, perhaps, and, consequently, given the high level of concision, the same or similar expressions could still be well understood when they were cut short. This is especially true when one deals with one's mother tongue which is inseparable from one's culture. The expressions may vary in format from one period to the next. However, the intrinsic philosophical ideas expressed in the *Daode Jing* at a much earlier time remain the same.

The linguistic evolution provides much food for thought from the perspective of sociolinguistics. It is well known that varieties of expressions or language styles are highly stratified in terms of social divisions, such as those based on class, professional status, gender and age. The individual manifestations of this phenomenon are often referred to as "sociolects," which is "a term used by some sociolinguists to refer to a linguistic variety (or lect) defined on social (as opposed to regional) grounds, e.g., correlating with a particular social class, or occupational group" (Crystal 1985, 281). According to David Crystal, "'dialect' is also sometimes applied to the linguistically distinct historical stages through which a language has passed, and here the term 'historical' or 'temporal dialect' might be used, e.g., Elizabethan English, seventeenth-century British English" (Crystal 1985, 93).

Crystal's definition of "sociolect" serves the purpose of this study well. The linguistic variety in question here indeed involves the use of different languages by different social classes for the understanding and expression of the same ideas and matters at different periods in history, e.g., the Tang and Ming dynasties. Such linguistic differences or deviations made a variety of interpretations possible for the philosophical maxims in the *Daode Jing*. The differences are considered language variation in a broad sense. Various corresponding expressions, including proverbial equivalents, can all be regarded as variations of the standard philosophical maxims.

As indicated in the first part of this study, proverbs, which often reflect some profound truths of life, are traditionally spread by word of mouth. Therefore, as long as the maxims are succinct, with classical elegance, or, even better still, are rhyming and rhythmic - all characteristics of the *Daode Jing* - they can be the sources of proverbs and may eventually become proverbs with or without alterations of the original maxims. This is very similar

to what Burton Stevenson, compiler of *The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and Familiar Phrases*, assumes,

[A] maxim is the sententious expression of some general truth or rule of conduct ... [I]t is a proverb in the caterpillar stage, ... and ... it becomes a proverb when it gets its wings by winning popular acceptance, and flutters out into the highways and byways of the world (Stevenson 1948, v).

Obtaining the Dao at Different Times

Due to limited transportation and widespread illiteracy in ancient China, the dissemination of information in this vast land was extremely difficult. It is reasonable to believe that many Chinese proverbs were produced in localities cut off from outside areas. The themes expressed in proverbs may well be irrelevant to or hardly influenced by the philosophical maxims in the *Daode Jing*, but rather based independently on individuals' experience of local life. This argument sounds plausible, as indeed "Great minds think alike" or "Good wits jump." However, even if the proverbs which appeared much later than the maxims have the same content without any deviation from the *Daode Jing*, there still exists a difference in the way which the *Dao* (the Way or the truth) was obtained at different times. In other words, it is a matter of foresight and hindsight in the realization of the truth. Whereas generation after generation of ordinary people contended with the difficulties of understanding their life experience without success, the philosophical maxims in the *Daode Jing* had already provided the answer with the wisdom of foresight. Those who believe in the maxims in the *Daode Jing* seem to have discernment, be carefree and enjoy freedom.

How big is the time difference in question? It is not a matter of a year or a decade, but rather of centuries or a millennium or even two millennia! Speaking very conservatively, the latest that the *Daode Jing* could have been written was the last years of the period of the Warring States (475-221 BCE), that is at least twenty-two hundred years ago. By the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), a millennium had already passed. By late Qing and early Republican China, the period during which many proverbs were created, a second millennium had passed. Thus by

the time a proverb is coined or summarized through the accumulated wisdom of numerous generations' life experience, tremendous energy and resources had been expended. These proverbs can truly be considered the popular wisdom of hindsight.

Three Cobblers v. the Mastermind

Through the survey and comparisons in the second part of this study, we discover that the points of reference of proverbs reflecting popular and collective wisdom are often limited to daily life and general inference and judgment,¹⁴ most of which are empirical, local, random, and unsystematic. By contrast, the philosophical maxims in the *Daode Jing*, in addition to having all of these features, reflect high-level thinking in which corresponding proverbs can hardly be found. The two types of wisdom on various topics in categories C, D, E and G exemplify these. The popular wisdom shown in the Yuan- and Ming-dynasty fiction and dramas (e.g., [E9-1], [E9-1-1] and [E10]), that is wisdom written down more than fifteen hundred years after the *Daode Jing*, does not develop the philosophical thought in the *Daode Jing*. Rather, it simply rephrases and paraphrases the abstraction expressed succinctly, as shown in [E1]: "The most straight seems to be crooked, the greatest skill seems to be clumsy" (*Da zhi ruo qu, da qiao ruo zhuo*). Therefore, in recognizing the wisdom and creativity of the people, we have to admit the great wisdom or the sagacity contained in the *Daode Jing*.

While the author of the *Daode Jing* and the exact time at which the book was finished are still controversial, it is not unreasonable to believe the view put forward by the great Chinese orthodox historian Sima Qian (145-86 BCE). In his view, the author of the *Daode Jing* or *Laozi*, called Li Er, was in charge of the government archives (Sima Qian 1997, 500) and was thus the curator of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 BCE). Being immersed himself in all sorts of dossiers and records, he was an old man of great learning and knew well the ways of the world, and through his assimilating, discernment, refinement and development of this learning, he developed new thoughts that ordinary people could hardly have imagined. A popular Chinese proverb best reveals the relationship between the wise and the ordinary in this way: "Three stinking cobblers combined equal

Zhuge Liang the mastermind" (*San ge chou pijiang, ding ge Zhuge Liang* 三個臭皮匠，頂個諸葛亮) (*Wen Hanyu Yanyu Xiao Cidian*, 201-211).¹⁵ In other words, the wisdom of the mastermind equals the collective wisdom of countless cobblers, or ordinary people.

The Idea of the Wise May Be Amiss Once Every Thousand Times

Confucius said: "Only the wise of the highest class and the stupid of the lowest class cannot be changed" (*Wei shangzhi yu xiayu bu yi* 唯上智與下愚不移) (Zhu 1960, 117). This judgment may be basically true and convincing at times, but is not without its exceptions. The uncertainty in question can be attributed to an annotation by Mencius who confirms that "Everyone can be like Yao and Shun" (*Ren jie keyi wei Yao Shun* 人皆可以為堯舜) (Zhu 1960, 174), two legendary sages of the remote past. "The stupid of the lowest class," through accumulation of knowledge, education, and tremendous effort may reach the status of the high class which presumably possesses more wisdom. Let us again consider "The valuable vessel is always completed last" (*Daqi wancheng*) in [D1] as an illustration. According to Ren Jiyu, a contemporary Chinese philosopher, this maxim could have been refined in the *Daode Jing* based on an ancient proverb or folk song that predated Laosi (1985, 149 and 150). Stated alternatively, the wise of the highest class also draw wisdom, inspiration and even language from the so-called stupid of the lowest class. Daoist wisdom and popular wisdom may well be mutually complementary instead of mutually exclusive.

However, what is amazing is that there has hardly been any proverb that corresponds linguistically to "The valuable vessel is always completed last" in [D1]. There have been no philosophical maxims of any of the three teachings – Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism – with identical content or similar wording. Therefore, the ancient popular wisdom "*Daqi wancheng*" in [D1], which shows unusual insight and judgment, once accepted in the Daoist classic, has come to enjoy a high reputation in Daoist wisdom. This may prove what Sima Qian indicated: "The ideas of the wise may be amiss once every thousand times; even the ignorant occasionally hit on a good idea" (*Zhi zhe qian lü, bi you yi shi; yu zhe qian lü, bi you yi de* 智者千慮，必有一失；愚者千慮，必有一得) (Sima Qian 1997, 500). Nevertheless, based on this study, one finds that the *Daodejing* altogether adapted and/or

adopted twenty-six ancient sayings, proverbs or folk songs or 128 Chinese characters in the book, which only accounts for about 2.5 per cent of the whole book of 5,000 plus characters.¹⁶ That is to say, most of the proverbs and other equivalents have been inspired by the philosophical maxims of the *Daodejing*. In other words, popular wisdom has been led and brought about by great wisdom.

The Writing Style of the Daodejing

The philosophical maxims in the *Daodejing* – whether they concern the universal rules generalized out of numerous complexities or profound revelations refined out of everyday matters to which people turn a blind eye – are brief, to the point, and have a lasting and agreeable aftertaste. From beginning to end, none of the eighty-one chapters is long; abstract *xuzi* (function words; form words) are rarely used, but the 5000 character plus book is full of pithy and vigorous sentences and assertions that press on confidently. By contrast, the writing of the *Lunyu* (*The Analects of Confucius*) and the *Mengzi* (*Mencius*), two important representative works of Confucianism written in the vernacular of the time, is not as succinct and the style is indeed very different. The great English playwright and poet William Shakespeare (1564-1616) said, "Brevity is the soul of wit" (*Hamlet* 1948, Act II, 250). This study finds that such brevity is at the heart of the *Daodejing*.

Based on the paradigmatic study of the *Daodejing* and their proverbial equivalents undertaken here, we may draw the following conclusions. First, in the understanding of many things, different views, maxims and proverbs offered by different people are characterized by different types of wisdom – the sage with far-seeing great wisdom versus the popular wisdom of hindsight. And second, brevity in writing style as embodied in the *Daodejing* is itself a kind of wisdom.

NOTES

1. In this study, all of the English translations of the *Daode Jing* or *Laozi* come from He's version, which uses Ren Jiyu's revised Chinese. Chapter numbers will be indicated in the text, after the translation, in the second part of this study.

2. *Caigen Tan* was compiled by Hong Yingming and was published in his late years during the reign of Wanli (1573-1620) of the Ming dynasty. Late in life, Hong was converted to Buddhism but the maxims in the book bare the essence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Rikizan Ishikawa, one of the two translators for the Japanese version, maintains that "As far as *Caigen Tan* is concerned, it is more the original thought advocated in the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi* rather than Daoism" (Hong 2000, 209). The Chinese-English bilingual version of *Caigen Tan* quoted in this study is edited by Han Zhong and translated by Paul White as *Tending the Roots of Wisdom*, unless otherwise indicated.

3. *Zengguang Xianwen (Social Wisdom)* is said to be compiled by a Confucian scholar during the mid-Ming dynasty. It was enlarged by other scholars during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. The book has been very popular across China since the mid- and late Qing dynasty. The maxims and proverbs are selected from ancient classics and from the people, reflecting the combination of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism; however, Daoism seems more dominant. The style of *Social Wisdom* is similar to that of *Tending the Roots of Wisdom*. Yet, as the former is closer to the people's life and the language is simpler, its influence reaches far beyond the latter. The English version quoted in this study is by Hu Xiaoyang (*Zengguang Xianwen* 2001).

4. The word *li* is a unit of length; 1 *li* = 500 metres.

5. A proverb of Songjiang, Shanghai.

6. The original "*Bingren duo changming*" (A patient usually lives long) is found in Cai 1996, 187. The proverb is slightly modified in order to make it more accurate.

7. A popular proverb in traditional Chinese medicine and among the folks south of the Yangtze River, meaning one can recuperate under the treatment of Chinese herbal medicine.

8. The original translation "The valuable vessel is always completed lastly" is modified slightly.

9. Since the four characters in [D2-1] are the same as those in the second part of [D1], my own translation is: Great vessels are built slowly.

10. The English translation of D3-1 to D3-3 is mine. 1 *jin* = 500 grams.

11. Modifications have been made to the translation.

12. With minor modifications in translation.
13. A line in "Fenyin Xing" ("Travelling to Fenyin"), poem by Li Qiao (fl. 645-fl. 714), in Chen et al. 1986, 633.
14. There are proverbs about natural and social laws which do not fall into the scope of this study.
15. Zhuge Liang (181-234), a statesman and military strategist of the Three Kingdoms (220-80), is well-known for being wise and resourceful. He is generally acclaimed as the embodiment of wisdom.
16. Based on Ren 1985, there are six old sayings or eighteen characters in Chap. 22, twelve ready-made ancient proverbs and folk songs or forty-nine characters in Chap. 41, four old sayings or twenty-eight characters in Chap. 57, two old sayings or fifteen characters in Chap. 69, and two old sayings or eighteen characters in Chap. 78.

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CHAPTER XVII

HOW IS ABSOLUTE WISDOM POSSIBLE? WANG YANGMING AND BUDDHISM

WING-CHEUK CHAN

When one speaks of the connection between Wang Yangming and Buddhism, one might immediately think of his relationship with Zen Buddhism. As is well-known, there might be some influences from Zen Buddhism upon his famous "doctrine of four maxims." However, it has been overlooked that there is a more fundamental affinity between Wang Yangming and the *tathagatagarbha* system, especially regarding their philosophical accounts for the very possibility of absolute wisdom. This paper aims at a thematization of such an important parallel between Wang Yangming and the *tathagatagarbha* system. First of all, we will show in what way the essential difference between Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi can be explicated in terms of the different systems of Buddha-nature. Second, we will work out the similarities between Wang Yangming's subjective idealism and the doctrine of the *pratityasamutpada* of the *tatha* in *The Awakening of Faith* (Hakeda 1967). In particular, it will be shown that both commit to a methodology of transcendental grounding. Exactly here one can discover Wang Yangming's original contribution to the development of Confucianism as a whole. As a consequence, it also shows in what way Wang Yangming has even gone beyond Lu Xiangshan. Finally, in terms of their respective doctrines of the original purity of our mind, one can discover the basic procedural pattern common to Wang Yangming's and the *tathagatagarbha* doctrine of praxis. Indeed, one could argue that from the standpoint of the *Ekayana*, there is no formal distinction between Wang Yangming and the *tathagatagarbha* system.

In the history of Chinese philosophy, the debate between Zhu Xi, on the one hand, and Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming, on the other hand, is perhaps the most significant as well as the most controversial. In fact, even the modern scholarship on this important debate has hardly reached any consensus. For example, Tang Junyi, one of the major founders of Contemporary Neo-Confucianism, maintains that Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming merely differ in the ways of praxis. In other words, according to Tang

Junyi, there is no essential distinction between their philosophical doctrines (Tang 1967, 535 ff.). However, such a hermeneutical thesis could be challenged when we focus on the problem of the possibility of absolute wisdom. To see how this is the case, let us start with an analysis of Wang Yangming's critique of Zhu Xi.

WANG YANGMING VS. ZHU XI

As is well-known, at first Wang Yangming was a follower of Zhu Xi. In particular, Wang Yangming had tried to "put into application Zhu Xi's advice about a thorough 'investigation of things,' of every plant and every blade of grass, as a means toward attaining their inherent principle, and with the view of attaining final enlightenment concerning man's life in the universe" (Ching 1976, 29). But after seven days of exhaustive practice, Wang Yangming could only end up with feelings of despair. Negatively, such an experience help Wang Yangming to discover that sagehood can never be attained by Zhu Xi's approach. After his own enlightenment in *Longzang, Gueizhou*, Wang Yangming was in a position to launch an attack upon Zhu Xi's approach. According to Wang Yangming, Zhu Xi is basically wrong "to regard *li* as abstract principles, albeit principles of virtue, but separate from and outside of *xin*" (Ching 1976, 84). Namely, Zhu Xi's separation of *xin* and *li* into two things would make the criterion of righteousness something external. This would make a moral agent lose his/her autonomy. In addition, this would give rise to "people who only strive to make their action look good on the outside, while separating them completely from *xin*" (Ching 1976, 84). In the eyes of Wang Yangming, "the Way of the sage-kings was lost when *xin* and *li* were divorced from each other, giving scholars an excuse to seek external and fragmentary knowledge regarding 'laws, useful things, and numbers,' for the sake of understanding the 'principles of things' (*wuli*). By doing so, they deserted *xin*, which was in reality identical with true *li*" (Ching 1976, 122). Clearly, mind in Zhu Xi's sense is primarily understood as a subject of cognition. That is to say, for Zhu Xi, it is only in terms of the process of the investigation of things that one is able to internalize principles. Accordingly, it is no wonder for him to emphasize the indispensable role of learning in the quest for the Confucian ideal of sagehood. As Mou Zongsan points out, here one can discern the "intellectualistic" character of Zhu Xi's approach (Mou 1968, 97).

However, according to Wang Yangming, such an approach only points to an undermining of *xin* (mind). As Julia Ching noted: “For Yangming, *xin*, the mind-and-heart, which is one with all things, is in itself independent and sufficient, without necessarily requiring the help of the Classics in its quest for wisdom” (Ching 1976, 86). Indeed, Wang Yangming categorically affirmed the essential identity of principle (*li*) and mind (*xin*). He wrote: “There is only one *li* (principle of being). When concentrated in an individual, it is known as *xing* (nature). As master [or moving principle] of this nature, it is known as *xin* (mind-and-heart). In terms of the operation of this [*xin*], it is known as *yi* (intention or thought). In terms of the clear consciousness [one had] of this intention, it is known as *zhi* (knowledge). And, from the point of view of [the object of] experience of this [knowledge] it is known as *wu* (act or ‘thing’)” (Ching 1976, 83). As a consequence, *gewu* (investigation of things) in Wang Yangming’s sense finally means rather to rectify this *xin*. In claiming *xin ji li* (the identity of mind and principle) Wang Yangming clearly grants that “In things, *xin* is called *li*” (Ching 1976, 84). Moreover, Wang Yangming insisted that “Our capacity to know the good (*liangzhi*) is in human nature...It is the ‘capacity for knowledge which does not depend on reflective thinking.’...It is ‘the ability for action which does not depend on learning’” (Ching 1976, 108). Therefore, he accused Zhu Xi of misplacing the criterion of righteousness outside our mind. In resuming *xin* as a self-determining principle, Wang Yangming reaffirmed: “Your *liangzhi* is your own criterion. As your thoughts and intentions arise, it knows what is right and what is wrong” (Ching 1976, 108).

Accordingly, “the extension of knowledge” can only refer to extending *liangzhi*, namely, extending the knowledge of the good. In order to show the fallacious character of Zhu Xi’s intellectualistic approach, he wrote: “There is no knowledge outside of his knowledge of the good (*liangzhi*), and no work outside that of extending this knowledge (*zhiliangzhi*). He who seeks knowledge outside of this knowledge, finds only vain knowledge. He who seeks to perfect himself without extending this knowledge, falls into error” (Ching 1976, 108).

Thus far we have seen that according to Wang Yangming, within the realm of ethics, Zhu Xi fails to recognize the existence of *liangzhi*. As a result, Zhu Xi can only search for *li* by the investigation of things outside our mind. This clearly points to a belittling of *xin* (mind). For our mind would therefore be bereft of its innate capacity to know the good. Indeed, though Zhu Xi

assigned to *xin* both an epistemological and a moral function, he failed to recognize *xin* as a self-determining principle.

Generally speaking, as Julia Ching rightly remarks, “[Wang] Yangming discovered *liangzhi* through an experience of inner enlightenment, and made of it the core of his entire philosophy: both ethics and metaphysics” (Ching 1976, 108). Indeed, for Wang Yangming, *liangzhi* is the “heavenly principle” (*Tianli*). In order to stress the metaphysical significance of *liangzhi*, Wang Yangming coined the term: “*liangzhi bentì*.” In contrast, in so far as Zhu Xi failed to recognize the existence of *liangzhi*, he was unable to overcome the limitation of his picture of *xin*. As a result, Zhu Xi must suffer from an inadequate understanding of ultimate reality. In the eyes of Wang Yangming, there are at least two major mistakes in Zhu Xi’s view of ultimate reality.

First of all, since Zhu Xi separates *xin* and *li* into two things, it is impossible for him to establish any real unity between *xin* and ultimate reality. It is true that Zhu Xi also speaks of *Daoxin*. But “*Daoxin*” in Zhu Xi’s sense can at best point to a mind which “properly cognizes” *li*. That is to say, for Zhu Xi, there is always an unbridgeable gap between *xin* and ultimate reality. Accordingly, Zhu Xi’s approach can never lead to a view of *xin* as ultimate reality.

Secondly, for Wang Yangming, “*xin* is a dynamic principle of moral activity” (Ching 1976, 117). So, given the identity between *xin* and the “heavenly principle,” one has to admit the “dynamic” character of ultimate reality. However, since Zhu Xi regards *li* as an abstract principle completely separate from *xin*, he can only develop a “static” view of ultimate reality.

Interestingly enough, this critique of Zhu Xi raised by Wang Yangming reminds us of the tension between the *tathagatagarbha* and the Faxiang doctrines of Buddha-nature. Indeed, in terms of an articulation of such a structural similarity between them, one can achieve a better understanding of the motivation as well as the justification of Wang Yangming’s critique of Zhu Xi.

On the one hand, as Mou Zongsan points out, the Faxiang School made a distinction between the rational Buddha-nature (*lixing foxing*) and the practical Buddha-nature (*xingxing foxing*) (Mou 1977, 315-316). While the rational Buddha-nature is *asamskṛta* and *anasrava*, the practical Buddha-nature as the naturally inherent seeds can be *samskṛta* and *asrava*. Moreover,

the rational Buddha-nature is to be understood in terms of the *tatha* as the principle of the *sunyata*, whereas the practical Buddha-nature refers to the mind of resolution and developmental actualization. The Faxiang School maintains: "The holy wisdom (*jnana*) can at best include the pure *paratantra*, but not the *parinispanna*" (Mou 1977, 321-322). In other words, here the *parinispanna* refers to the *tatha* as the principle of the *sunyata*, rather than to pure mind. This implies that there is no real identity between pure mind and the *tatha*. That is to say, the rational Buddha-nature in the sense of the Faxiang School is not a mind of the *tatha*. For the essential function of pure mind is merely to "cognize" the *tatha*. Clearly, according to the Faxiang School, there is a subject-object dichotomy between the *prajna* (wisdom) and the *tatha*. As a consequence, the rational Buddha-nature belongs to the objective side, while the practical Buddha-nature belongs to the subjective side. Here the rational Buddha-nature should be sought in external things and affairs. Moreover, as pointed out by Fazang---the founder of Huayan Buddhism, the rational Buddha-nature in the sense of the Faxiang School is fundamentally inactive. That is, the rational Buddha-nature in the sense of the Faxiang School is only a "static" principle (Mou 1977, 410).

On the other hand, with the introduction of the concept of the originally pure mind, the *tathagatagarbha* system is able to claim its identification with Buddha-nature. Here "the mind of the *tatha*" is identical with "the *tatha* of the mind." That is to say, for the *tathagatagarbha* system, the relationship between mind and Buddha-nature transcends the subject-object dichotomy. Moreover, in so far as pure mind is fundamentally an activity, Buddha-nature must be "dynamic" as well. In this sense, the *tathagatagarbha* system insists on a "dynamic" view of the *tatha*.

Historically speaking, Fazang might also be the first Buddhist who criticized the Faxiang doctrine of Buddha-nature from the perspective of the *tathagatagarbha* system. But regardless of the historical connections, one could simply focus on the theoretical grounds *why* and *how* the upholders of the *tathagatagarbha* system refute the Faxiang doctrine of Buddha-nature. Philosophically, this involves at least two major problems. The first one is concerned with the possibility of becoming a Buddha, while the second one deals with the possibility of absolute wisdom in the Buddhist sense.

First of all, as is well-known, the Faxiang School does not grant an egalitarian position regarding the distribution of

inherently natural seeds. Namely, it admits that there is a class of sentient beings who are not sure whether they have inherited such natural seeds and also there is a class of sentient beings who are lacked of such natural seeds. That is to say, it admits that a certain class of sentient beings can never attain Buddhahood. As a consequence, this school commits to the *Triyana* rather than the *Ekayana*. However, such an approach suffers not only from failing to do justice to the equalitarian spirit of Buddhism, but also from generating no absolute guarantee for becoming a Buddha. In sum, the Faxiang School does not produce any satisfactory solution for the problem of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. From the perspective of the *tathagatagarbha* system, the major cause for such a difficulty lies in its improper separation of the rational Buddha-nature and the practical Buddha-nature into two things. Accordingly, the way to overcome such a difficulty is to give up its *Triyana* position and admit the essential identity between the rational and the practical Buddha-nature. In other words, it is only when the essential identity between mind and the *tatha* is recognized that one can produce a perfect solution for the problem of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. Exactly in terms of its admission of the identity between mind and the *tatha* that the *tathagatagarbha* system is able to claim superiority over the Faxiang School.

More seriously, given its separation of the rational from the practical Buddha-nature, it is impossible for the Faxiang School to ground the very possibility of absolute wisdom. Generally, Yogacara Buddhism has developed its concept of absolute wisdom in the form of non-discriminative wisdom (*nirvikalpajñana*). By its very essence, such non-discriminative wisdom should transcend the subject-object dichotomy. However, due to its separation of the rational from the practical Buddha-nature, the Faxiang School fails to establish the real identity between mind and the *tatha*. Rather, in conceiving the relationship between the rational and the practical Buddha-nature in terms of the subject-object dichotomy, it blocks the possibility of developing a genuine kind of non-discriminative wisdom. Accordingly, there is no way for it to find a transcendental ground for absolute wisdom.

Now one can see that Zhu Xi suffers from a limitation similar to that of the Faxiang School. First of all, in separating *xin* (mind) and *li* (principle) into two things, Zhu Xi ends up in a position which fails to supply any absolute guarantee for

becoming a sage. It is true that Zhu Xi emphasizes the role played by *gewu* (investigation of things) and learning the classics. But all this merely indicates that he adopts a contingent approach to attaining sagehood. However, in contrast to the Faxiang School's commitment to the *Triyana*, Zhu Xi explicitly "recognized the universal capacity for sagehood and wisdom" (Ching 1976, 169). Namely, for Zhu Xi, everybody can become a sage. So this failure to address the possibility of an absolute guarantee for attaining sagehood has even produced an internal difficulty for Zhu Xi. Secondly, when Zhu Xi speaks of *Daoxin*, he clearly aims at a concept of absolute wisdom in the form of "perfect wisdom." As Julia Ching remarks: "He also said that perfect wisdom and virtue (*ren*) lies in 'remaining singled-minded regardless of whether one's life will be long and short.' In other words, he envisaged such perfection as the crowning achievement of a long life of investigating things and extending knowledge" (Ching 1976, 75). However, despite his emphasis on "the accumulation of encyclopedic knowledge" and "the permeation of the spirit of 'reverence,'" Zhu Xi's approach remains to be imprisoned within the subject-object dichotomy. As a result, it can never lead to any proper development of absolute wisdom.

Indeed, when one presses the parallel between Zhu Xi and the Faxiang School further, then one can better understand in what sense they grant the universal capacity for sagehood or Buddhahood. The Faxiang School admits that the rational Buddha-nature is common to all sentient beings, whereas the practical Buddha-nature is merely specific to some sentient beings. Likewise, in recognizing the universal capacity for sagehood, Zhu Xi only means that in accordance with *xing* (nature) of human beings, everyone can become a sage. However, for Zhu Xi, *xing* (nature) is nothing but a static principle, though it is shared by all humans. And due to its inactive and external character, *xing* (nature) cannot function as the *Bewegungsgrund* for moral actions. In addition, as Julia Ching points out, Zhu Xi never clearly demonstrated that "the sage's *xin* ... was seminally present in man's *xin*" (Ching 1976, 172). That is to say, the sage's mind for Zhu Xi is only a result rather than a cause of attaining sagehood. Accordingly, there is no absolute guarantee of attaining sagehood which can be developed along such a route. Moreover, given the impossibility of developing absolute wisdom in Zhu Xi's approach, it is highly doubtful whether his concept of the sage's *xin* can possess any ultimate truth. In short, all this results from Zhu Xi's separation of *li* (principle) from *xin* (mind).

Now in terms of the above difficulties common to the Faxiang School and Zhu Xi, one can understand the reason why Wang Yangming has to raise his critique. Indeed, since the controversy between Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi is fundamentally concerned with the problems of the possibility of the absolute guarantee of attaining sagehood as well as of the possibility of absolute wisdom, one has to correct Tang Junyi's thesis which tries to reduce their differences to only those found on the level of praxis.

But more importantly, drawing from the lessons of the Faxiang School and Zhu Xi, one has at least some ideas about what must be avoided, in order to make absolute wisdom possible. Interestingly enough, regarding the positive conditions for the very possibility of absolute wisdom, one can discover some further significant similarities between the *tathagatagarbha* system and Wang Yangming.

The justification of the shift from the Faxiang School to the *tathagatagarbha* system can be shown in terms of the following methodological weakness of the former school in dealing with the problem of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. First, this school mainly emphasizes the role of external observation. Second, this school lacks the idea of a self-arising cause in its account of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. On the other hand, in order to overcome such an erroneous approach, the *tathagatagarbha* system turns to the idea of a self-arising cause in attaining Buddhahood (Wu 1978, 97-100).

WANG YANGMING AND THE TATHAGATAGARBHA SYSTEM

Interestingly enough, one can discover the same logic of development underlying Wang Yangming's way of thinking towards his great discovery of the identity between *xin* and *li*. The mature Wang Yangming is able to declare "that every man not only *can* be a sage, but possesses within himself all the *means* necessary to become one, and that sagehood is not a remote, impersonal ideal, but a concrete goal, well within reach, a state of mind, self-transcending and yet to be made immanent, to become internalized" (Ching 1976, 53). In concretizing the "assertion of the entire adequacy of human nature itself as the agent and cause of sagehood," Wang Yangming is able to identify *xin* (mind) as the starting point (Ching 1976, 53). Clearly, for Wang Yangming,

“*xin* was itself adequate as an instrument in the pursuit of sagehood” (Ching 1976, 57).

Negatively speaking, Wang Yangming is now able to discover the limitation of Zhu Xi’s approach. From a methodological standpoint, Zhu Xi’s approach has the following two major characteristics. First, it emphasizes the role of observation. According to Zhu Xi, it is only in terms of observation of things that one is able to discover the external principle. Second, it emphasizes the role of learning. For Zhu Xi, without the accumulation of knowledge, it is impossible to attain sagehood. However, according to Wang Yangming, in terms of observation one can at best search for something empirical and contingent. As a consequence, Zhu Xi’s approach fails to discover any necessary and universal condition for the possibility of attaining sagehood. In addition, due to the subject-object dichotomy governing the observing and the observed, following Zhu Xi’s approach one can hardly achieve any true unity of them. But Wang Yangming insists that the absolute must be One and should embrace the whole universe. More importantly, Wang Yangming is now able to recognize that it is because Zhu Xi does not grant any self-arising function to *xin* that he can only appeal to learning. So, for Zhu Xi, in order to attain sagehood, one has to depend upon external conditions. And among these conditions one finds investigation of things and learning.

Interestingly enough, when one looks at the major causes of the difficulty in the Faxiang School, one can discover that Zhu Xi in fact shares the same methodological weakness. First, his doctrine of investigation of things merely stresses the role of external observation. Second, his concept of mind as the subtle form of the material force (*qi*) prevents him from developing the idea of a self-arising cause in his account of the possibility of attaining sagehood. As Mou Zongsan rightly observes, to this extent Zhu Xi is quite similar to this school in Yogacara Buddhism (Mou 1968, 288). That is to say, both fail to develop a concept of transcendental mind.

On the other hand, Wang Yangming’s thesis that “Everyone can become a sage” certainly reminds us of the following axiom of the *tathagatagarbha* system: “All sentient beings have Buddha-nature.” But more strikingly, one can discern that the tactics taken by Wang Yangming in overcoming Zhu Xi’s approach looks like a Confucian counterpart of the *tathagatagarbha* system’s correction of the Faxiang School. First of all, in order to search for an absolute foundation for the very

possibility of attaining sagehood, Wang Yangming abolishes the approach of external observation. Instead, like the masters of the *tathagatagarbha* system, he now opts for an inward direction.

As is well-known, stressing the merits of faith is a prominent position in the *tathagatagarbha* system. For example, the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* devotes a whole chapter in expounding the superiority of faith to the other virtues. Besides, "The Awakening of Faith" even becomes a title for the most important work in the *tathagatagarbha* tradition. More importantly, in the *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* it is written:

So in him the mind intent on Enlightenment
 Being a receptacle of virtues like zeal, energy,
 Memory, contemplation, transcendental intellect, etc.,
 Comes to exist always.
 As this mind constantly exists. (Takasaki 1966, 383)

Correlatively, already in his youth, Wang Yangming was able to stress the importance of "establishing intent." In reflecting upon the origin of such a determination in the pursuit of sagehood, the mature Wang Yangming realized that it points to self-awareness. How do I resolve to become a sage? This can only be an outcome of self-determination. That is to say, it is only in myself that I can find the origin of such a determination to attain sagehood. Furthermore, such an upward intent has already been operative implicitly from the very beginning of my life. To be sure, it is due to my ignorance that I have failed to realize its existence. "But enlightenment, and wisdom is present seminally in *liangzhi* itself" (Ching 1976, 153). Namely, in reality this kind of determination for sagehood is always operative. Certainly, such a determination can never be an "object" of any "external observation." It is rather one with my subjectivity. So the relationship between such a determination and its self-awareness is beyond the subject-object dichotomy. But its "non-objective" status rather shows that such self-determination is an *a priori* being. That is to say, it is symbolic of a transcendental mind. For Wang Yangming, it is here that one can recognize the source of absolute wisdom.

Moreover, in contrast to the Faxiang School, in accounting for the possibility of attaining Buddhahood, the *tathagatagarbha* system does not turn to a theory of pure seeds. Instead, it identifies mind as a self-arising cause for the attainment of Buddhahood. In

particular, *The Awakening of Faith* articulates such an idea in terms of a mirror metaphor. It states:

[The essence of enlightenment is like] a mirror, influencing (*vasana*) [all men to advance toward enlightenment], serving as the primary cause [for their attaining enlightenment]. That is to say, truly nonempty; appearing in it are all the objects of the world which neither go out nor come in; which are neither lost nor destroyed. It is eternally abiding One Mind. [All things appear in it] because all things are real. And none of the defiled things are able to defile it, for the essence of wisdom [original enlightenment] is unaffected [by defilements], being furnished with unaffected [by defilements], being furnished with an unsoiled quality and influencing all men [to advance toward enlightenment] (Hakeda 1967, 42).

Analogically, for Wang Yangming, the resolution for sagehood also manifests its “unconditional” character. That is to say, such resolution is self-arising without dependence upon any external conditions. Moreover, even when it actualizes itself, such intent awaits for no other conditions. Certainly, the mature Wang Yangming is able to promote such intent towards sagehood to be *xin*. Now for him, “*xin* is the source of all goodness as well as the principle of all conscious and moral activity, possessing within itself the power of conducting the human person to the highest goals of sagehood” (Ching 1976, 56). More importantly, Wang Yangming developed during his enlightenment a new insight: “*xin* is capable of improving and restoring itself without requiring any outside help” (Ching 1976, 57). In this sense, Wang Yangming’s *xin* plays a key role comparable to the originally pure mind in the *tathagatagarbha* system. Especially, in parallel to the Buddhist stress on faith which ends up with a doctrine of “pure mind of the *tathagatagarbha*,” now Wang Yangming can claim that “once united with ultimate reality, this *xin* becomes also its own authority, the reason for its having faith in itself, because it is the cause of its own attainment of sagehood and wisdom” (Ching 1976, 153). Furthermore, similar to the *tathagatagarbha* concept of the “dynamic” *tatha*, it is logical for Wang Yang-ming to assign an “active” character to *li* (principle). For, “*liangzhi* and *Tianli* are one and the same thing” (Ching 1976, 113).

All in all, Wang Yang-ming's thesis that *xin ji li* (*xin* and *li* are identical with each other), like the thesis of the identity of mind and the *tatha* in the *tathagatagarbha* system, is the first condition of the possibility of absolute wisdom. While for the *tathagatagarbha* system, "All sentient beings have *tathagatagarbha*" (*sarvasattvas tathagatagarbhah*), for Wang Yangming: "All men have *liangzhi*" (Ching 1976, 111). So, going beyond Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming is able to declare that "one can become a sage because he already carries within himself the seeds of sagehood, and self-realization is what brings the seeds to their full development" (Ching 1976, 137). Furthermore, in clarifying the absolute status of the Mind of the *tatha*, *The Awakening of Faith* writes: "The Mind in terms of the Absolute is the one World of Reality (*dharmadhatu*) and the essence of all phases of existence in the reality" (Hakeda 1967, 32). In a sense, this means that such a mind is the source of all beings and virtues. That is to say, the Mind of the Absolute is not only the transcendental ground of attaining Buddhahood, but also the foundation of the world. Likewise, in addressing the absolute status of *liangzhi*, Wang Yangming becomes a subjective idealist. In a famous poem he writes:

The soundless, odorless moment of solitary, self-knowledge

Contains the ground of Heaven, Earth, and all things.
(Ching 1976, 164)

As "the absolute, the ground of being," *liangzhi* "is symbolic of a higher order of ontological reality" (Ching 1976, 140). In this sense, Wang Yangming speaks of *liangzhi bentu*. Indeed, he wrote: "There is no *li* (principle), no *wu* (thing), outside of *xin* (mind)" (Ching 1976, 77). It is only with such a subjective idealism that Wang Yang-ming is able to find a metaphysical ground for the very possibility of absolute wisdom. As Julia Ching points out: "The proposition that 'the source of all beings and virtues lies in the *xin*,' laid the foundation for Yang-ming's affirmation of the universal capacity for acquiring wisdom" (Ching 1976, 66). More importantly, such an ontological position "provides also the basis for his practical doctrine, his method, since *xin* is capable of determining itself through a process of knowledge that involves experience and action" (Ching 1976, 66). Therefore, it is not accidental for us to discover that "[Wang] Yang-ming's

understanding of sagehood as culminating in an experience of oneness with Heaven and Earth and all things” has a striking similarity with the articulation of Buddhahood as culminating in an experience of oneness with the whole *Dharmadhatu* in the text like *The Awakening of Faith* (Ching 1976, 126).

To be sure, for both the *tathagatagarbha* system and Wang Yangming, the mind of the absolute must be full of virtues. In particular, according to the *tathagatagarbha* system, the mind of the absolute is mainly characterized as “Eternality,” “Joy,” “Self” and “Purity.” Likewise, one can discover the corresponding characteristics of the mind in Wang Yangming’s sense. First, *liangzhi benti* “can neither be augmented nor diminished” (Ching 1976, 128). Second, “the joy of the sage is characteristic of *xin*-in-itself” (Ching 1976, 135). Third, returning to one’s *liangzhi* means “to discover one’s True Self” (Ching 1976, 157). Finally, “the mind and heart of the sage cannot tolerate the least particle of dust and has naturally no need of polishing” (Ching 1976, 63). As a consequence, “There is nothing of the virtue of *xin* that is not originally bright” (Ching 1976, 56).

In sum, for Wang Yangming and the *tathagatagarbha* system the originally pure mind is universal to all human beings and hence functions as the *a priori* ground for the very possibility of becoming a sage or Buddha. And it is the origin of absolute wisdom. However, we have thus far mainly discussed their respective doctrines of the “theoretical” possibility of absolute wisdom. Now let us focus on how they deal with the problem of the “practical” possibility of absolute wisdom. Here again we will see a striking similarity between their solutions.

First, both Wang Yangming and the *tathagatagarbha* system claim that “returning to the original purity of mind” constitutes the essential characteristics of their respective doctrines of praxis. *The Awakening of Faith* thereby made an important distinction among “original enlightenment,” “nonenlightenment,” and “the process of actualization of enlightenment.” On the one hand, “‘original enlightenment’ indicates [the essence of Mind (*a priori*)] in contradistinction to [the essence of Mind in] the process of actualization of enlightenment; the process of actualization of enlightenment is none other than [the process of integrating] the identity with the original enlightenment” (Hakeda 1967, 37). On the other hand, “Grounded on the original enlightenment is nonenlightenment. And because of nonenlightenment, the process of actualization can be spoken” (Hakeda 1967, 38). Here one can clearly see that there is circularity between the “original

enlightenment” and “the process of actualization of enlightenment.” What the latter does is nothing but to make explicit what is already implicitly operative in the former. But only then would the obstruction be removed.

Wang Yangming developed a parallel approach in his practical philosophy. He said: “For *xin*, the mind-and-heart, is the same time the starting point as well as the goal to be achieved and realized. It is the given; it is also to be created, discovered, realized” (Ching 1976, 76). Indeed, for Wang Yangming it is axiomatic to recognize: “All men have this moral ability to judge between right and wrong. This is what we call *liangzhi*” (Ching 1976, 114). As Julia Ching also notes: “It is important, therefore, to find out how to ‘extend’ or ‘realize’ this capacity for goodness, which is at once inborn and acquired” (Ching 1976, 114). Accordingly, purely in terms of the “extension of *liangzhi*” alone, one is able to attain sagehood. At this juncture, one can also see that the circularity involved is harmless, for “the quest of sagehood lies in the ‘recovery’ of one’s original nature” (Ching 1976, 132).

Clearly, the *tathagatagarbha* system and Wang Yangming share the same basic procedural pattern in their theories of praxis: “After all, the quest is for that which one already possess, if only in potentiality. The discovery will come as a revelation of that which is hidden within oneself” (Ching 1976, 171). Moreover, for both of them, the original dynamic of praxis is to be found within the mind. At this juncture, one can also discover that both the *tathatagatagarbha* Buddhist and Wang Yangming make a distinction between two kinds of mind. In the case of the former, there is a distinction between the originally pure mind (= the *tathagatagarbha*) and the *alayavijnana*. In the case of the latter, there is a distinction between *Daoxin* and *renxin* (Cf. Ching 1976, 123). Furthermore, for both of them, there is a primacy of the originally pure mind or *liangzhi*.

More importantly, Wang Yangming’s doctrine of unity of knowledge and action also reminds us of the *tathagatagarbha* doctrine of the identity of the rational and the practical Buddha-nature. Indeed, as is shown in the *Foxing lun*, the practical Buddha-nature essentially involves the action of saving the other sentient beings (Takakusu 1961-78, 31: 794). In this way, the *tathagatagarbha* system put forward the Mahayana spirit of the unity of wisdom and compassion in a most radical manner. Similarly, for Wang Yangming, “‘manifesting clear virtue’ and

'loving the people' are basically two aspects of one same task" (Ching 1976, 134).

Finally, for Wang Yangming and the *tathagatagarbha* system, the metaphysical and ethical character of absolute wisdom can be shown in terms of the identity between ultimate reality and effort. In contrast to the "static" status of ultimate reality respectively maintained by the Faxiang School and Zhu Xi, ultimate reality in the sense of the *tathagatagarbha* system and Wang Yangming are fundamentally "dynamic." Moreover, given the separation between ultimate reality and human effort, both the Faxiang School and Zhu Xi fail to secure any real possibility of absolute wisdom. On the other hand, such a difficulty does not occur in the *tathagatagarbha* system and Wang Yangming. For, according to them, the *tathagatagarbha* or "*liangzhi* is always conscious, or rather, is always capable of consciousness, even when the person is asleep," "reality is always dynamic, related to man's *xin*" (Ching 1976, 134). Namely, in terms of a perfection of pure mind which is in principle a self-perfection, both the *tathagatagarbha* system and Wang Yangming can provide a transcendental ground for the practical possibility of absolute wisdom.

Historically, there is so far no philological evidence showing any influence of the *tathagatagarbha* system upon Wang Yangming. Philosophically, in terms of their affinities, one is able to see to what extent Wang Yangming has advanced beyond Lu Xiangshan. Indeed, in committing to a methodology of transcendental grounding which is similarly taken by the *tathagatagarbha* system, Wang Yangming is able to develop a systematic framework for the *xinxue* (School of Mind) and hence grounds for the very possibility of a Confucian doctrine of absolute wisdom. This constitutes his unique contribution in promoting the development of Sung-Ming Confucianism, in general, and the *xinxue* (School of Mind), in particular.

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CHAPTER XVIII

“GRADUAL” AND “SUDDEN” IN THE LHASA DEBATE – A STUDY OF MO-HO-YEN’S TEACHING

SIMON MAN HO WONG

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Tibetan Buddhism, a significant event took place in Lhasa around 792 A.D.¹ This event, known as “The Council of Lhasa,” was a debate between Mo-ho-yen, a Chinese Chan master, and his followers on the one side, and a group of Indian and Tibetan monks represented by Kamalawila, a Yogacara-Svatantrika-Madhyamaka from India on the other. Mo-ho-yen was made a teacher of meditation at the Tibetan court when some other Indian monks and later Kamalawila were invited to the country. The two sides held conflicting opinions on Buddhist doctrines and practices, and an official debate had to be arranged under the auspices of the King of Tibet to decide which one reflected the correct doctrine of Buddhism.

This event was recorded in Tibetan works such as Bu ston’s (1290-1364) *History of Buddhism* of 1323, which attracted the attention of western scholars in the late 19th century. It was not until the early 20th century, with the appearance of the purported actual minutes of the debate in a Chinese manuscript from Dunhuang entitled *Dunwu dacheng zhengli jue*² (hereafter cited as *Zhengli jue*), that the actuality of the event was firmly established. These two works present differing accounts of the result of the debate. In Bu ston’s account, Mo-ho-yen lost the debate, whereas in the *Zhengli jue*, he was declared the final victor. Even though a number of Tibetan historical sources contain records of the event similar to that of Bu ston, it seems inappropriate to give a conclusive statement on which account is more authentic for the time being.³ The result of the debate is actually not the main concern of this article, because the winner did not necessarily have the superior theory. Nor are we interested in accessing the impact of this event on the development of Tibetan Buddhism. Our focus is on Mo-ho-yen and the fact that his viewpoint was criticized by scholars of different schools throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism. With the help of the *Zhengli jue* and some fragments of the teachings of Mo-ho-

yen, I consider if these criticisms are justified. I argue that the real issue behind the debate is "gradual" versus "sudden" enlightenment, as some scholars have proposed. We shall see that Mo-ho-yen actually had provided an answer to the dilemma of gradual or sudden enlightenment that comes out of this debate.⁴

THE TEACHING OF MO-HO-YEN AND ITS CRITICISM

It should first be pointed out that not all scholars in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition were critical of Mo-ho-yen. For instance, Klong chen rab 'byams pa (1308-1364), in his *sDe gsum snying po'i don 'grel gnas lugs rin po che'i mdzod ces bya ba'i grel pa*, regarded what Mo-ho-yen said at the debate as a factual statement (see Guenther 1977, 140).⁵ Nevertheless, it has been observed by Herbert V. Guenther that on the whole "all schools of Buddhism in Tibet are unanimous in rejecting the teaching of the Chinese Hva-shang [i.e., Mo-ho-yen]" (Guenther 1977, 140). We can at least be certain that Mo-ho-yen was continuously criticized throughout the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

Apart from Kamalawila, who was directly involved in the debate and whose criticism I shall discuss later, sBa gsal snan, a chief minister of the King of Tibet in the late 8th century, wrote a historical work titled *sBa bzed*, which concisely presented Mo-ho-yen's teaching from the Tibetan viewpoint:

My [Mo-ho-yen's] Buddhist theory is that ... after practicing non-distinction, [one] can become a Buddha through enlightenment ... To practice good acts and speeches cannot [enable oneself to] become a Buddha. To become a Buddha, [one] should not have any memory or thought. Only by practicing like this can [one] become a Buddha.⁶

sBa gsal snan was a disciple of Wantarakshita. It is obvious that his description here reflects Wantarakshita's reading of Mo-ho-yen's theory, which is definitely not positive. Wantarakshita was the teacher of Kamalawila, and they held similar opinions.

It is in Bu ston's *History of Buddhism* of 1323 that "The Council of Lhasa" and Mo-ho-yen are first described in detail. Bu ston reported:

These [i.e. the pupils of Mo-ho-yen] favoured nihilistic views and did not exert themselves in the practice of virtue, saying: “By acting according to the Doctrine, by virtuous acts of body and speech, one cannot become a Buddha. One attains the state of the latter by abiding in perfect inactivity”...And, seeing that the *Sajdhinirmocana-sutra* disagreed with his views and conduct, (the Hva-can [i.e. Mo-ho-yen]) cast it away with a kick... [T]he Hva-can spoke: “If one commits virtuous or sinful deeds, one comes to blissful or to evil births (respectively). In such a way the deliverance from the Samsara is impossible, and there will be always impediments to the attainment of Buddhahood. (The virtuous and the sinful deeds) are just like white and black clouds which alike obscure the sky. But he who has no thoughts and inclinations at all, can be fully delivered from Phenomenal Life. The absence of any thought, search, or investigation brings about the non-perception of the reality of separate entities. In such a manner one can attain (Buddhahood) at once, like (a Bodhisattva) who has attained the 10th Stage. (Bu-ston 1986, 191-3)

Compared with the words of sBa gsal snan, Bu ston's seems stronger in his criticism of Mo-ho-yen, especially in his comment that Mo-ho-yen and his disciples held a nihilistic view and cast the sutra away with a kick. As for the content of the criticism, we notice that Bu ston's version, though more detailed, corresponds exactly with that of the *sBa bzed*. Both texts assert that (1) One cannot become a Buddha by practicing good acts and speeches; and (2) the only way to become a Buddha is by no-thought and no-examination. We should bear in mind that, according to Bu ston, these are nihilistic views.

With all these as background, we may come back to Kamalawila. In his *Third Bhavanakrama*, Kamalawila said:

Some claim: “By dint of the good and bad *karma* generated by discursive thought of the mind, sentient beings circle in the cyclical flow, experiencing the fruits of heaven and the other destinies. Those, however, who do not

think of anything at all, and do not do anything, are liberated from the cyclical flow. Therefore, one must not imagine anything. One should not engage in such virtuous practices as giving (*dana*). The practice of giving, and so forth, was taught only on behalf of stupid persons (*murkha-jana*)" (Demieville 1994, 417-418)⁷

For Kamalawila this "some" probably refers to Mo-ho-yen, since the view described here is more or less the same as that recorded in the *sBa bzed* and later sources, and they are all attributed to Mo-ho-yen.⁸ Thus, we have reason to believe that the general view of Mo-ho-yen can be traced back even further to Kamalawila, who participated in "The Council of Lhasa" as Mo-ho-yen's direct opponent. His *Third Bhavanakrama* becomes the origin of the general characterization of Mo-ho-yen's teaching perpetuated throughout the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

By reading the passage in the *Third Bhavanakrama* we can observe again that the two theses that make up the general view concerning Mo-ho-yen are: (1) Those who do not think and do anything at all are liberated from sajsara; and (2) One should not engage in virtuous practices, which will keep one in the cycle of sajsara. These two points are of course closely related. The first point seems to be more fundamental since the second one may be implied from it. Kamalawila obviously does not agree with these points of view. Immediately after his description of the claim, he said:

Now those who talk this way will reject all of the Mahayana. As the Mahayana is the root of all vehicles, if one rejects it, he will reject all vehicles. When one says, "Therefore, one should not imagine anything," he will reject the insight (*prajña*) with the character of right discrimination (*bhūta-pratyaveksana-laksana*). The root of right knowledge is right discrimination; so if one rejects this, one destroys the root, wherefore one rejects the supramundane insight. (Demieville 1994, 418)⁹

The reason of Kamalawila's disagreement is that if one engages oneself in a state of "no-thought" at all, he or she will not practice right discrimination (or correct examination),

which is the prerequisite for obtaining the “supramundane insight” into the reality of all existences. For him, right discrimination is necessary for all Buddhist practitioners. As for the point of not engaging in virtuous practices, he also has a strong opinion:

When one says, “One should not engage in such virtuous practices as giving,” he rejects the giving, etc., which constitute the means (*upaya*), the major portion of the perfections (*paramita*). (Demieville 1994, 418)¹⁰

He thinks that a virtuous practice like giving is the means of the Bodhisattvas and is the major portion of the “six perfections,” which should be followed by all Buddhist practitioners. To reject virtuous practices implies the repudiation of what the Buddhist sutras say. He believes that in short “insight and means are the Mahayana” (Demieville 1994, 418).¹¹ The teaching of Mo-ho-yen rejects insight and means, and this produces the serious result of diverging from the Mahayana:

For that reason, the rejection of the Mahayana produces a great karmic obscuration. That being the case, the one who rejects the Mahayana has heard little, overweeningly values his own views, has not given due deference to wise men, has not understood the way of the Tathagata’s good teachings (*pravacana*), himself ruined brings others to ruin; whose words, being infected with the poison of contradiction with reason and scripture, are like poisonous food to be cast away far off by a wise man who wishes well for himself. (Demieville 1994, 418-419).¹²

It seems natural to find oneself sympathetic towards Kamalawila’s criticism of the teaching ascribed to Mo-ho-yen. To ignore virtuous practices would simply lead to a total negation of Buddhist ethics, no matter how well the idea is disguised by metaphors such as “all clouds, regardless of black or white, obscure the sky.” And to have no discursive thinking and abide in the state of “no-thought” would easily be compared to remaining in the state of a dead person or even a stone. It is certainly no surprise to see that these doctrines have been criticized as an extreme form of quietism and nihilism.

To be attached to a state of "no-thought" would never enable one to attain insight, whereas refuting virtuous practices would imply the rejection of the means, which is a necessary outcome of the compassion of Bodhisattvas. Because "insight" and "means" are the essential elements of Mahayana Buddhism, the absence of them will produce disastrous effect on the way towards becoming Buddha. This is why Kamalawila describes the teaching ascribed to Mo-ho-yen as poison and rebuts it, and it is seldom evaluated favorably by subsequent Tibetan scholars.

It seems natural or understandable why Mo-ho-yen's teachings were assessed unfavorably during the development of Tibetan Buddhism, given that he advocates the repudiation of virtuous practices and all thoughts in the mind. However, we should now ask an important question that may problematize the idea we have just formulated: Does the doctrine ascribed to Mo-ho-yen truly represent his teaching? So far, we have looked only at sources that describe Mo-ho-yen's teachings in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the content of which can be traced back to Kamalawila's *Third Bhavanakrana*. We have not yet heard Mo-ho-yen's own voice about his teachings. Thanks to the appearance of the *Zhengli jue* and the fragments of Mo-ho-yen's teaching from Dunhuang,¹³ we are able to compare Mo-ho-yen's works with the descriptions of his teachings by others and see if the latter made a fair judgement of him. After looking at Mo-ho-yen's works, we should first of all admit that he does seem to bear an opinion that is similar to what his opponents have criticized. He said:

From without beginning, all sentient beings have false thoughts and conceptualizations. [They are] attached to false thoughts, good and evil dharmas, [so that they] develop good and evil [activities]. It is because of these causes and conditions [that they] wander in transmigration and cannot be liberated. Therefore in the sutra [it is said that] all thoughts are illusive. If [one] sees that every thought is no thought, [one] sees the Tathagata. (Rao 1979, 340)

Mo-ho-yen argues that not only false thoughts and conceptualizations but all thoughts are illusive. The problem of having illusive thoughts is that one is bound to the cycle of transmigration. This is stated more clearly in the following:

Question: What is so wrong with conceptual thought? Reply: The problem with it is that it carries omniscience away from all living beings, and obscures it. It is also a problem in many other ways, such as being the cause for rebirth in the three evil destinies, and for prolonged transmigration. The *Vajracchedika* also says: "Abandon conceptual thought." (Gómez 1983b, 125-6)

Falling into the state of rebirth and transmigration is of course related to omniscience being carried away, and these are the results of having conceptual thought. In his works Mo-ho-yen repeatedly emphasizes that his argument is based upon various Buddhist sutras. According to him, "[t]o abide in no-mind by giving up all states of conceptualization is in fact the only means of entering the conceptualization of the Great Vehicle" (Gómez 1983b, 110). How can one abandon conceptual thought and give up all states of contemplation? In reply to a similar question, he said:

Whatever thoughts arise, one does not examine [to see] whether they have arisen or not, whether they exist or not, whether they are good or bad, afflicted or purified. He does not examine any dharma whatsoever. (Gómez 1983b, 108)

Thus no-thought and no-examination are really the central teachings of Mo-ho-yen. He explicitly declares that, as a Chan Buddhist, his belief is that discerning reality is to abandon all forms of speech and conceptualizations of the mind (Rao 1979, 356).

As for the rejection of virtuous practices, Mo-ho-yen argues:

The Buddha said: If a Bodhisattva does not practice any conditioned dharma, nor [does he or she] practice any unconditioned dharma, nor any unvirtuous dharma, nor any mundane dharma, nor any supra-mundane dharma, nor any dharma that carries sin, nor any dharma that does not carry sin, nor any impure dharma, nor any pure dharma, nor any causative dharma, nor any non-causative dharma, nor

the dharma of nirvana, nor the dharma of seeing, nor the dharma of hearing, nor the dharma of awareness, nor the dharma of knowing, nor the dharma of giving, nor the dharma of indifference, nor the dharma of discipline... [He or she does] not practice patience, nor goodness, nor dharma, nor will-power, nor meditation, nor samadhi, nor wisdom, nor practice, nor knowing, nor attainment. If a Bodhisattva practices in this way, the Buddhas will predict [the future of him or her becoming Buddha.]. (Rao 1979, 352)

In sum, "not to practice any dharma is the true practice" (Rao 1979, 352), and this kind of "practice" certainly excludes all virtuous deeds. As I have already indicated, this is a natural corollary of the idea of the repudiation of all thoughts in the mind.

Therefore, Kamalawila is not without basis when he describes and criticizes Mo-ho-yen's teachings. But we should remember that Mo-ho-yen claims that his teaching is based on Buddhist sutras. The passage I have just quoted, for example, is an extract from the *Vivesacintabrahma-pariprccha* sutra. What is more important is that how Mo-ho-yen understands the sutras may not correspond to Kamalawila's description of his teachings. Let us consider another passage in which Mo-ho-yen criticizes the non-Buddhists:

...As they rely on their own great teachers, they hold views such as the rejection of causality, and they are grieved and terrified by their own preconceptions. They find joy in nothingness, so that they practice a contemplation which is nothing whatsoever. In this way they create the view that there is no form. Therefore, even after spending many kalpas [practicing this type of contemplation], still there arises in them the idea that they have not reached nirvana, so that they fall into hell like any common mortal and suffer greatly. (Gómez 1983b, 110)

This is exactly how Kamalawila and others criticize Mo-ho-yen, but we find the same criticism in Mo-ho-yen's own work!

Not only does Mo-ho-yen argue against the non-Buddhists, he is also dissatisfied with the vision of some Buddhists:

The same [master] [i.e., Mo-ho-yen] states that one should not fall into the extreme of the peace of *wravakas* and *pratyakabuddhas*, which is attained by the practice of no apprehension and by visualizing an image of light.

However, he [i.e., Mo-ho-yen] does not apprehend this knowledge, he does not fall into [the extreme of] the non-existence of conceptualization. When these do not arise, he will not examine with an absence of examination that conceives of perfect clarity. He will not fall into the [extreme of] dying away by abstaining from thoughts, he does not apprehend even the non-apprehension of a substantial reality of dharmas. (Gómez 1983b, 120)

Here Mo-ho-yen denounces the absence of thoughts and conceptualizations as well as the practice of no apprehension and no examination, saying that these are only the states of “peace” of *wravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, which are not the ideal of Mahayana Buddhism. Elsewhere he quotes a Buddhist sutra and says that the *wravakas* are like people who are drunk, being attached to calmness, extinction and the meditative state of no form, and therefore cannot enter into Mahayana (Rao 1979, 338). So Mo-ho-yen himself is well aware of the extreme of quietism and nihilism.

The materials we have just examined seem to contradict our original impression of Mo-ho-yen, because it seems that he advocates the absence of thoughts and at the same time criticizes such an absence in his teachings. However, I tend not to view Mo-ho-yen’s teaching as self-contradictory, nor do I regard the fragments of his teachings as partly obscure so that we cannot be sure to have a complete picture of his theory. What I believe is that like Kamalawila and others, Mo-ho-yen does not accept the mere absence of thoughts as a true Buddhist doctrine. In fact, his teaching of no-thought and no-examination bears a meaning that should be differentiated from the state of mere absence of thoughts. He said:

If illusive thoughts and thoughts of the mind are abandoned, the thirty-seven conditions leading to Buddhahood [*Bodhipaksika*] will spontaneously be complete, and all merits will also be perfectly accomplished. (Rao 1979, 336)

If all sentient beings abandon the three poisons, the illusive thoughts of their own minds, afflictions, habitual tendencies and discriminations, [they will] clearly understand the absolute principle, and have all dharmas and merits completed. (Rao 1979, 353)

If Mo-ho-yen’s idea of “no-thoughts” simply means absence of thoughts in the mind or the mind being blanked out, it will be unreasonable to find him saying that once the state of “no-thought” is attained all dharmas and merits will be accomplished. In the extreme state of “nothingness” not even a dharma is supposed to be perceived. Besides, there should not be any mental conceptualization or discrimination in this state of “nothingness;” however, we find that Mo-ho-yen argued:

Since numerous kalpas, the Buddhas abandon the three poisons, illusive thoughts, afflictions and discriminations, therefore [they are] enlightened and obtain the non-dual and unconditioned wisdom. Because of this non-dual and unconditioned wisdom, [they] can skillfully discriminate all forms of dharmas, [which] is not discrimination of ignorance and illusive thoughts. According to this truth, insight and means are not separate from each other. If [one] considers grasping or abandoning, in the dharma of non-duality, how can there be any grasping or abandoning? (Rao 1979, 350)

According to this passage, all discriminations are abandoned in the Buddha’s mind. Paradoxically, it is through the abandonment of all discriminations that the Buddhas can truly discriminate all forms of dharmas. So the ultimate goal is not the abandonment of discrimination (or thought or conceptualization), but rather a kind of discrimination that has no form or being, and this may therefore be conveniently termed as a “discrimination that has no form of

discrimination,” or simply “no discrimination.” Since this discrimination is the discrimination of all forms of dharmas, through which sentient beings may be benefited, it is the means (*upaya*) of the Buddhas. On the other hand, unlike the ordinary, impure discrimination, this discrimination has no own being and is pure. Therefore, it is the insight of the Buddhas. This is why Mo-ho-yen said insight and means are not separate. Here we find that insight and means are present in Mo-ho-yen’s teaching, contrary to what Kamalawila criticizes. In this state of no discrimination, the relativity of grasping and abandoning has been transcended, so “how can there be any grasping or abandoning?” This last sentence clearly shows that Mo-ho-yen’s idea of no-thought does not really mean abandoning all thoughts and conceptualizations in the mind. In his own words, the practice of no-thought is:

Therefore, one should not repress conceptualizations. Whenever they arise, if one does not contrive any [new thoughts], but rather lets them go by, as one lets them go, though they may remain, they come to rest by themselves, and one no longer pursues them.
(Gómez 1983b, 113)

Here Mo-ho-yen proposes that one should not deliberately abandon thoughts and conceptualizations by raising another thought to abandon thoughts, since this will not stop the flow of thoughts and conceptualizations. All one should do is to be aware of those thoughts and let them go by, and they will come to rest by themselves. Thus thoughts are not to be repressed; they are to remain and come to rest by themselves. Mo-ho-yen has an even more clear explanation of no-thought:

Question: If one removes conceptualization and the habitual tendencies, by what sort of means does one do so? Reply: If one is aware of false conceptualizations when they arise, being aware of birth and death, one does not carry out actions in agreement with those conceptualizations, one does not abandon them, nor does one remain attached to them. The mind is free at every instant of thought. In the *Vajracchedika*, the *Maharatnakuta*, and other sutras it is said: “If one has no apprehension of even the minutest dharma,

that is the unsurpassable awakening." (Gómez 1983b, 126)

For Mo-ho-yen, the true practice of no-thought is not to abandon thoughts and at the same time not to be attached to them. In this way, thoughts remain, but the mind is always free from them. This is what the sutras are meant for in teaching "no apprehension of even the minutest dharma," "not examining any dharma whatsoever" (Gómez 1983b, 108) or "abandon conceptual thought" (Gómez 1983b, 125-6). We may summarize Mo-ho-yen's teaching of no-thought by using his own words: "If [one] sees that every thought is no thought, [one] sees the Tathagata" (Rao 1979, 340).

Given that Mo-ho-yen's idea of no-thought does not imply not thinking anything at all, it becomes natural to understand that his rejection of virtuous practices does not really mean to discourage the engagement in virtuous activities. He describes a practitioner who has attained the state of possessing means and wisdom and is free from impurity and afflictions:

He accumulates the double equipment of merit and knowledge and also perfects a variety of attainments for the benefit of himself and others. This is the body of merit. In the second level he obtains the body of dharma, after which he enters supportless nirvana, and until the end of sajsara remains active for the sake of living beings. (Gómez 1983b, 118)

Since he "remains active for the sake of living beings," virtuous deeds are not ignored. The point is that the way that virtuous deeds are accomplished is different from that of an ordinary person, who is bound to the cycle of transmigration. Mo-ho-yen said:

The supra-mundane perfections are devoid of apperception, devoid of examination. A mind that is free from examination accomplishes the six perfections simultaneously in an instant. (Gómez 1983b, 114)

The fact that the six perfections are accomplished shows that to be devoid of apperception and examination does not really mean there is no apperception or examination at all. It is an apperception or examination that has no form of apperception

or examination. And it is through this apperception or examination without form that the six perfections are truly accomplished. Mo-ho-yen argues that this idea comes from the Buddhist sutras:

As to these means [which are] the practice [of the perfections], in the *Perfection of Wisdom*, the *Lavkavatara*, and the *Vivesacinta*, it is said that if one does not examine or consider any dharma at all in the practice of the six perfections and other [virtues], then the triple sphere is purified, and one acts without thinking or appropriating anything, regarding [all dharmas] as a mirage. (Gómez 1983b, 127-8; cf. Rao 1979, 342)

By now, the saying “to regard all dharmas as a mirage” will not mislead us to interpret Mo-ho-yen as falling into nihilism. It is a metaphor to represent the insight into the emptiness of all dharmas, through which everything is accomplished. We are certainly not surprised to find him say that:

How can one act for the sake of living beings when one is free from reflection and examination has also been explained in full detail in the *Tathagatacintyagunavatara*. It is said that it is like the sun or the moon shining everywhere, or the wish-fulfilling jewel that grants everything, or the vast earth from which everything is born. (Gómez 1983b, 130)

To be free from reflection and examination is the state in which one sees into the emptiness of every instant of thought. In this state of awakening, the mind is like the sun or moon that shines on everything, the wish-fulfilling jewel that grants everything, or the earth that gives birth to everything. Being the origin of all virtuous deeds, it encompasses and accomplishes everything.

“GRADUAL” VS. “SUDDEN” AND THEIR SYNTHESIS

I have already proved that Kamalawila and the tradition originating from his criticism do not impose a fair judgement on Mo-ho-yen’s teaching. What is more interesting is that we find Kamalawila actually holds a view similar to that of Mo-ho-yen. Like Mo-ho-yen, he espouses entering a state of

forgetting all thoughts, saying that it is the goal of the practice of the Bodhisattvas. He explains that this state of forgetting thoughts is a supreme state that should be distinguished from the state of mere absence of thoughts and memory.¹⁴ This fact has been observed and explained in more detail by Luis O. Gómez:

[Kamalawila said,] "Now, here not applying the mind does not mean mere absence of mental application [or activity]. Because [the mere] absence [of something], lacking as it does any reality is not fit to be the real cause of anything." In other words, absence of mental application cannot in itself be the cause for such an absence. Otherwise the process would be circular, therefore logically and practically impossible. The nature of this "non-application" is conceived by the gradualists in terms that could be paraphrased thusly: When we speak of the thought process moving spontaneously upon its object, free from any strenuous or purposeful bending of the mind towards its object, we refer only to the highest stage of signlessness. This condition, in the first place, is attained by the development of very specific mental states, which may be described as "non-application of mind" only in the sense that they are antidotes or counteragents to the unwholesome and misdirected fixing of the mind upon mental representations or imprints of the own-being of the aggregates of grasping. In the second place, the signless condition itself may be considered a state of non-application of mind but not in the sense of a mere mental void, rather in the sense that the mind is free from the habit of obstinately mooring in signs, free from the dictates of attachment of false representations of reality. (Gómez 1983a, 413)

In short, "one uses the word 'non-application' [of the mind] to refer to correct examination [in its perfection]" (Gómez 1983a, 414), but not mere absence of mental activity.

Thus, comparing Mo-ho-yen's teaching with that of Kamalawila, we should admit that, at least from the aspect of

the idea of no-thought, their theories are very close to each other. However, such a conclusion would lead us to a serious problem: Why did Kamalawila criticize Mo-ho-yen if they actually had almost the same point of view? Kamalawila is well aware that the ideas of no-thought and no-examination may be explained in terms of “thought having no entity” and “examination in its perfection,” but he does not apply this to his interpretation of Mo-ho-yen’s doctrine. It is possible, as suggested by Luis O. Gómez, that communication between them during the debate may not have been very effective. Neither of the two understood the other’s language, and the way their arguments were translated might not have been accurate (Gómez 1983a, 396). But, in spite of the factor of bad communication, I believe that there should be a theoretical reason that led Kamalawila to judge Mo-ho-yen in the manner he did. I think that an appropriate answer to the question I just raised is that the actual difference between Kamalawila and Mo-ho-yen does not lie in their different interpretations of the idea of no-thought – their interpretations are in fact similar, but in their different approaches or methods towards the state of no-thought. Kamalawila’s method is “gradual,” whereas Mo-ho-yen’s approach is “sudden.” Tibetan historical records have characterized the two debaters as belonged respectively to the Gradual and Sudden schools,¹⁵ and I believe that this characterization has captured the salient features of the two speakers in the context of the Lhasa debate. Being a gradualist, Kamalawila said:

[I]f one wishes to produce the supreme knowledge, which is free from all discrimination, one must first cultivate insight which is characterized by correct examination. Only in this way is one able to abandon all signs. (Gómez 1983a, 415)

This means that in order to attain the supreme state of no-thought, one should go through the process of the practice of correct examination, without which the abandonment of afflictions becomes impossible. It is only through such a procedure until correct examination reaches its perfection that true liberation can be obtained. While Kamalawila emphasizes the necessity of the process of correct examination, Mo-ho-yen proposes an immediate access to the state of awakening:

Although there are many texts on meditation in the Great Vehicle, the highest of all

methods taught is that of the immediate access to the Middle Way. In immediate access there are no means of approach. One meditates [directly] on the true nature of dharmas.

In this connection, "dharma" means the mind, and the mind is without origination. What has no origination is empty, like space. This emptiness is called "direct awareness," because it is not the object of the six senses.

By practicing direct awareness, direct awareness itself ceases. Therefore, one should not dwell on the wisdom of study and reflection, but rather meditate directly on the sameness of all dharmas. (Gómez 1983b, 123-4)

He also said:

Since numerous kalpas, all sentient beings, because of the three poisons and illusive thoughts and discriminations of their own minds, are not awakened and do not know [the reality], [so they] wander in [the cycle of] life and death. Now, at one time they are enlightened. When illusive thoughts arise in every instant, [they] do not produce karma in agreement with illusive thoughts, [and they are] liberated in every instant of thought. (Rao 1979, 354)

Supported by the last quotation, we can confidently claim that the enlightenment "at one time" here implies a suddenness or immediacy of the experience. Unlike Kamalawila, Mo-ho-yen does not emphasize the process of correct examination that one should go through; for him the supreme state of awakening can theoretically be attained in an instant.

Obviously, Kamalawila is not satisfied with Mo-ho-yen's view. He cannot accept the notion of sudden enlightenment, and this leads him to the judgement that there is a lack of correct examination in Mo-ho-yen's teaching. Without the process of correct examination, how can one attain the perfect state of no-thought, which is enlightenment? It becomes natural for Kamalawila to reach the conclusion that Mo-ho-yen's concept of no-thought and no-examination can

only imply a total negation or absence of thought and mental activity, not to mention any virtuous practice that is derived from it. It is only a state of complete cessation of consciousness, like a stone, and is never the liberation from sajsara.

Now, the focus of our discussion seems to shift to the possibility of an immediate or sudden approach to the state of no-thought (in the positive sense) or enlightenment. If a sudden approach towards enlightenment is not possible, Kamalawila's criticism of Mo-ho-yen may still persist. Kamalawila's gradualism insists that a path or procedure or stages of correct examination have to be gone through before one can attain enlightenment. His opinion corresponds to Buddhist tradition like that of the Yogacara, and seems to be more appealing to us because immediate or sudden enlightenment may imply that no practice is necessary. But we should also acknowledge that "sudden enlightenment" has been the doctrine of Chan Buddhism for centuries and is still a living tradition (cf. Gómez 1983a, 423). Furthermore, the doctrine of sudden enlightenment can be traced back to Nagarjuna and even to some Mahayana sutras from India (cf. Yinshun 1983, 312-3). It does have a place in the Buddhist tradition. In Buddhism, there is a saying that those who are keen may enter into the realm of enlightenment immediately, whereas those who are of dull capacity are subject to stages and gradations of practice before they fully acquire the fruit of awakening. Although this point of view may throw some light on the gradual-sudden dilemma we are discussing, we can overlook the complexity of this problem if we think that it can be resolved just by resorting to the fact that people have high and low capacities. Kamalawila would argue that those who are "keen" and attain enlightenment immediately have actually undergone a long process of self-examination and effort and have almost reached maturity. In other words, the fruit of sudden enlightenment actually comes from the accumulation of gradual practice over a long period of time. As for Mo-ho-yen, inheriting the tradition of Chan Buddhism, he would say that for all sentient beings, a gradual process of self-cultivation is necessary only when we speak from the mundane and conventional level; in the realm of absolute truth, no gradual process can be discerned (cf. Rao 1979, 356-7).

Thus, the Lhasa debate in the 8th century has presented us with the gradual-sudden dilemma, which is the result of the meeting of two conflicting currents in the Buddhist tradition. We may go further and say that both currents have their sources in Indian Buddhism, but, generally speaking from a

comparative perspective, the gradual school is preserved and prevails in India, while the sudden school is developed and more emphasized in China, especially in the mainstream of Chan Buddhism.¹⁶ However, I believe that it is possible to reconcile the conflict of these two currents, and this can be done by fully exploring the sudden teaching of Chan. Before returning to this last point, we can first see that recent scholars have already expressed their conciliatory views on this issue. Luis O. Gómez suggests:

My proposal...is partly inspired by the statement in the *Platform Sutra* (secs. 16, 39) to the effect that ultimately there are no gradual or sudden path in the dharma. The absolute is that point of view from which it is possible to transcend not just the gradual (time, multiplicity, goal and processes) but also the sudden (eternity, innate Buddhahood, oneness). But one wonders if it is not equally true, at least as an outsider's interpretation of the doctrinal statements, that in the absolute the duality remains, and words are different from silence, realities always are particulars, minutes and hours always occur in sequence, so that there is both sudden and gradual in the dharma. (1991, 135)

According to Luis O. Gómez, the duality of gradual and sudden can be transcended, but the transcendence does not refer to a third reality. Instead, it is a dialectical synthesis of gradual and sudden in which duality remains; it is the absolute in duality. Tu Wei-ming offers a more concrete exposition:

We might ask, why is there any need for self-transformation if human nature is already endowed with sufficient spirituality? The answer could be that the person, who is not only the body but also mind-heart, soul, and spirit, is a process of becoming rather than a static structure. To the extent that the person is becoming, and thus an activity, a path for self-transformation is necessarily involved. A person cannot but transform. Any static notion of the self, as in the case of unchanging selfhood, fails to accommodate the dynamic

process of growth as a defining characteristic of the person. (Tu 1991, 448-9)

Tu Wei-ming sees that human nature is a process of becoming rather than a static structure; therefore, a gradual process of self-transformation is necessarily involved. From this he affirms the gradualist standpoint. But for him, the unity of human nature is never weakened by the continuous dynamic change brought about by the creative transformation of the self. He writes:

Our nature, an anthropocosmic reality, is not only our ground of being but also the creative and transformation activity that makes us dynamic, living, and growing persons....We do not become what we are incrementally; we become, therefore we are. In the becoming process, suddenly and simultaneously, we see our true nature face to face. (Tu 1991, 454)

Here, to be a dynamic, growing person one is aware of one's own nature immediately and simultaneously. It is a sudden awareness of being in the gradual process of becoming. The clause "we become, therefore we are" best expresses the dialectical unity of the gradual and sudden polarity.

We can observe that what Gómez and Tu propose does not make any difference essentially, except that, in his article, Tu states that the insight of unity of gradual and sudden is already present in Chinese philosophy including the "subitist Chan" (Tu 1991, 454). Tu's claim is not without basis. Apart from the *Platform Sutra* that Gómez has alluded to, we notice that Mo-ho-yen has also conveyed the same message:

...Talking about "gradual" and "sudden," they are views [produced from] the illusive thoughts of the mind of the sentient beings. Therefore it is said in the sutra, "Mahamati, this is why [one] should abandon the views of gradual and sudden that arise from the thoughts, which are dependently originated." If [one] abandons all thoughts [that are] illusive thoughts, gradual and sudden are nowhere to be obtained. (Rao 1979, 339)

Given that Mo-ho-yen's teaching of no-thought does not imply mere absence of thoughts, our reading of these statements

allows us to discern the same message proposed by the former two scholars. In Mo-ho-yen's system, gradual and sudden are transcended. He does emphasize being awakened to the reality immediately and suddenly, since everything is originally empty, but he does not preclude the gradual and infinite process of self-transformation, which, for him, is embodied in the sudden awakening of oneself. It is in this sense that even though I characterize his teaching as "sudden," ultimately speaking, it should not be applied as a fixed label, and, together with "gradual," should also be transcended.

In conclusion, we may still use "sudden" to describe Mo-ho-yen's teaching, as has been done traditionally, and as followers of the mainstream of Chan would like to describe themselves, but we should at the same time be aware of the richness and complexity of the concept's meanings when viewed from different levels and contexts. As for Kamalawila, I have no difficulty in accepting his gradualist viewpoint, but I think that he does not move a step further to acquire a sympathetic understanding of Mo-ho-yen's doctrine of sudden enlightenment. It seems that due to ineffective communication during the debate, he fails to have a full comprehension of the whole picture of Mo-ho-yen's teaching, and in refuting the possibility of a sudden approach towards enlightenment, he tends to interpret Mo-ho-yen's doctrine of no-thought as a total negation of thoughts and virtuous deeds. This criticism of Mo-ho-yen produces a great effect and develops into a tradition throughout Tibetan Buddhist history in which Mo-ho-yen is stereotyped as the representative of the extreme views of quietism and nihilism. In this article, I have shown that this critique of Mo-ho-yen originates from Kamalawila's misinterpretations. Far from putting the study of the Lhasa debate to rest, what I have done is to try to provide another perspective on this complex issue, the various aspects of which are still open for discussion.

NOTES

1. There is another argument that this event happened in bSam yas around 781 A.D. See Pachow 1992, 160-161.
2. Pelliot, No. P.4646. This work was studied in great detail by Paul Demieville. See Paul Demieville, *Le Concile de Lhasa*.
3. For a detailed account of some earlier Tibetan sources on the event, see David Seyfort Rugg 1992, 63-92.
4. The transliterations of the Tibetan terms and names in this article are largely consistent; however, for the reason

that there are terms that appear in quotations, slight inconsistencies become inevitable. The author is also grateful for his research assistant, Mr. Lawrence Y. K. Lau, for his help in confirming the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms in this essay.

5. According to Guenther, 'Jigs med gling pa (1729-1798), in his *Kun mkhyen zhal lung bdud rtsi'i thigs pa*, also defended Mo-ho-yen and said that what was alleged to be the defect of the Hva-shang's teaching is actually the quintessence of the *Prajaparamita* works. But it is reported by Tulku Thondup that 'Jigs med gling pa distinguished the view of Mo-ho-yen from *Dzog pa chen po*, and described the former negatively. Yet he wondered if the popular allegations about the nature of Mo-ho-yen's view were fair (See Rabjampa 1996, 117).

6. *sBa gsal snan*, *sBa bzed*. The author's translation here is based on the Chinese version of the book. See Tong and Huang 1990, 32. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Chinese are original to this article.

7. Translation borrowed from Wayman 1978, 392.

8. Luis O. Gómez states that "Kamalawila's treatment of the issues of the 'council' cannot be understood as a review of specific questions raised in a direct encounter with specific opponents." Apart from the teaching of the Chan master, Kamalawila must have other Indian or Tibetan sources which he regards as erroneous in his mind. See Gómez 1983a, 406-407. Even if Luis O. Gómez's observation is correct, we can still hold that Kamalawila did have Mo-ho-yen in mind when he wrote the *Third Bhavanakrama*, which was a direct outcome of "The Council of Lhasa."

9. Translation from Wayman 1978, 392.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. The *Zhengli jue* that is quoted in this article is based on Rao Zongyi, "Wang Xi *Dunwu dacheng zhengli jue* xushuo bing jiaoji." It should be noted that although the *Zengli jue* is written by Wang Xi, according to his preface, the text is a faithful record of Mo-ho-yen's responses to criticisms in the Lhasa debate. The fragments of Mo-ho-yen's teachings have been edited and translated by Luis O. Gómez (Gómez 1983b). Although Luis O. Gómez claims that his translations of the fragments is of a provisional value and many passages remain obscure, the author finds that the teaching reflected in the fragments is basically compatible with that of the *Zhengli jue*.

14. The *Third Bhavanakrama*, in Demieville 1994, 420.

15. For example, Bu ston uses *Tgn mün pa* (the sudden school) and *Tsen min pa* (the gradual school) to characterize the two sides. See Bu ston 1986, 192.

16. It should be noted that there is also a gradual-sudden controversy within Chan Buddhism in China. See McRae 1986. Nevertheless, suffice it to say that "sudden enlightenment" is the main stream of thought in Chan Buddhism.

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CHAPTER XIX

**FORGETTING TO RETURN:
WISDOM IN
CHINESE ECSTATIC RELIGION**

ALISON R. MARSHALL

FORGETTING TO RETURN

In this paper I examine what I am going to call a process of wisdom found in ecstatic experience in the past and present, in both public/formal and more private/folk contexts. I started thinking about what constituted wisdom in the Chinese context when I was beginning my research on *lingji* (diviners of the spirit) performance on Taiwan. As I was transcribing my fieldwork notes from Chinese to English I repeatedly came across references to a knowledge that was not learned in books or from spiritual masters. It was a wisdom that came from the experience of being moved by the spirit (*lingdong*). I also noticed that these accounts often mentioned the importance of forgetting a former way of being in order to discover one's true nature and spirit during journeys of self-discovery.¹ There was a pattern emerging that reminded me of a phrase in the *Nine Songs* (*Jiuge*) about ecstatic experience in which *ling* (spirit mediums) forgot themselves during trance and forgot to return (*dan xi wanggui*).

The wisdom that I discuss in this paper is not new information or a skill or talent. It is derived from experience that becomes a new way of being enabling coexistence, harmony, cooperation and diversity. It is the outcome of a fluid process in which human beings come together with the divine through forgetting themselves, only to return to a new awareness after that experience. I begin with Julia Ching's concept of wisdom and how this relates to the manner by which shaman kings (later known as *wu*) united with the divine in public/formal rituals in Chinese antiquity. Much of the way I understand Julia's work is influenced by my own interest in ecstatic experience and what she taught me about shamanism and mediumism in early Chinese texts. Where others see a discussion of mysticism, messianic wisdom, or Confucianism in her work, I see the manner in which she was probing early Chinese ecstatic experience to reveal the vestiges of

later doctrinal developments. Where others see her as a former Catholic nun, as one who was engaged in a Christian-Confucian discourse, I see Julia as someone who was acutely interested in spirituality. Here I am recalling the time she invited a Daoist shaman to the University of Toronto and encouraged all of her students to join her in a group meditation session in which the shaman might be able to heal illnesses he saw emerging in all of us. I am also recalling one afternoon in January at Julia's house during the last month of the writing process of my dissertation. She spent over two hours trying to help me develop my understanding of the experience of ecstasy, which I later wrote in the preface to my dissertation. Understanding the experience of ecstasy has become my primary interest in the study of Chinese religion and in the paragraphs that follow I build on what I believe Ching was attempting to offer in her analysis of the experience of the sage kings of Chinese antiquity.

After I have provided the background for Ching's understanding of the concept of wisdom, I then look to the *Zhuangzi* and examine passages in that text that illuminate the nature of more private/folk ecstatic experiences and to the *Yijing* to understand the nature of intuitive wisdom. To develop my argument that ecstatic experience can be seen as a process of wisdom, I examine the *Nine Songs* and the language it uses to describe the ecstatic, here defined as a *ling*, and the process of forgetting that takes place when individual identity is displaced during possession or temporarily left behind during the spirit journey. Finally, I examine the private/folk new ecstatic practice of the *lingji* who continues to invoke the process of wisdom to reduce world suffering, and to promote harmony and diversity.

In her book, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, Julia Ching organized the discussion around the concept of wisdom that came to the sage from the divine. Here, as in other works, Ching defined the sage (*sheng*) through the analysis of the radicals of the character. A sage is one who hears the wisdom that has been spoken from the spirit world, communicates what has been heard and because of this is the ruler (Ching 1997, 54). Ching envisioned this wisdom as a matrix, writing: "There is something about the concept 'wisdom' that makes it the representation of an integrated whole, an all-encompassing unity that cannot be divided, a seamless web, if we wish to use the metaphor" (Ching 1997, x). A whole, unity, web – to Ching wisdom defined the foundation of the Chinese tradition. Ching goes on to express that wisdom

enables "...the harmony underlining Chinese thought and civilisation" (Ching 1997, xi). It is through this matrix and the efforts of those known as shamans or ecstasies that the earthly and heavenly realms harmonized.

For Ching the end result of ecstatic union was the matrix of wisdom known as harmony. But Ching's line of reasoning might be taken one step further to consider the process by which the wisdom and its concomitant of harmony was achieved. Ching's analysis of this early form of wisdom also considered the experience of the shaman king as ruler who created a link between heaven and earth. Many scholars in addition to Julia Ching, such as Chen Mengjia and K.C. Chang, posited that the kings of the Shang dynasty were shamans (Chen 1937, 91-155; Chang 1983, 3; Ching 1997, 15), though this theory is not without its critics, most vocally David Keightley and Donald Harper (Keightley 1983; Harper 1995, 152-158). Ching often buttressed the claim that kings were shamans in Chinese antiquity by expounding on the ecstatic qualities of the sage kings, referring to the experiences of Yu and Tang who performed miracles to end floods and drought respectively. According to Ching and others, following the Shang dynasty shamans were no longer the kings but had important roles at court, acting as exorcists, rain dancers, diviners, and healers. I propose that before these shamans or ecstasies (those who experienced trances and altered states of consciousness with varying degrees of contact with the divine) created what Ching called the matrix of wisdom and harmony, it was necessary that they had to behave irrationally, forget, and embrace disorder.

At this point, my discussion of wisdom departs from Ching's, and instead the focus of the paper that follows is on the outcome of the process and how it encourages cooperation and collectivity and at the same fosters diversity in Chinese religion. What is the process of wisdom of which I speak? It begins with the displacement of the individual identity – the forgetting of who one is in everyday life, and the forgetting of knowledge. It continues with ecstatic rituals designed to break down order: discordant music, or dancing, or heady aromas produced by the dividing of incense burned to produce ash and smoke (*fenxiang*). All of these chaotic elements enable the shaman to enter a state of ecstasy that allows spirit possession or a spirit journey, and ultimately results in a new way of seeing things. In the contemporary ecstatic practice that I discuss later, this new way of seeing is a new understanding of the self, and one's mission in life. Like Ching's concept of wisdom, this ecstatic wisdom also results

in a period of harmony and cooperation, except that autonomy and diversity remains intact.

The link between forgetting and wisdom is forged in many early Daoist texts, notably in the *Zhuangzi*, where there are numerous references to the relationship between forgetting or going against what is rational in order to have an inward experience of *dao* (Chinn 1997, 207-220).² Here, the process is one that necessitates embracing chaos, the diversity of things, the disorder of the natural state of the world, and rediscovering the human ability to intuitively know something. In bringing balance to the rational, knowable, the orderly, Daoist exemplars such as the ideal man, the great man, the holy man, to name a few, are able to have transcendent knowledge of *dao* in an immanent experience of it.

Such Daoist exemplars include Ziqi of the south wall, who “sat leaning on his armrest, staring up at the sky and breathing – vacant and far away, as though he’s lost his companion” (Watson 1968, 36). Ziqi in this moment of ecstasy exemplified the act of sitting and forgetting (*zuowang*) – a process in which he had to lose himself in order to understand how the 10,000 things came into existence. Ziqi’s experience is one in which he has travelled to a distant destination and returned with new understanding. Livia Knaul summarizes Fukunaga’s discussion of the journey back to *dao* as a flow: “In the Chuang-tzu, the concept is more abstract, Dao is not an entity underlying existence, but the very flow of being as such, the principle of the universe. The aim consequently is to become one with this flow, to float along within the rhythm of the world (*yuxin*)” (Knaul 1985, 72). In Daoist and other texts associated with ecstatic practice, wisdom is a journey, often expressed figuratively with a destination that you go to and realize that you have forgotten to return from. As a result of this process or journey, one becomes permanently changed with new self-understanding.

Another example of a Daoist exemplar who has dispensed with thinking, knowledge and ordinary forms of wisdom is Cook Ding, the master butcher following the spirit when he cuts up an ox. Here the distinction is between skill and the wisdom of the way. A.C. Graham translates:

What your servant cares about is the Way, I have left skill behind me. When I first began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but oxen wherever I looked.

Three years more and I never saw an ox as a whole. Nowadays, I am in touch through the *spirit* in me, and do not look with the eye. ... I rely on Heaven's structuring, cleave along the main seams, let myself be guided by the main cavities, go by what is inherently so. ... (Graham 1981, 63-64)

This process he uses when he cuts is also an example of *wuwei* - non-assertive action - of harmonizing with all things. The manner in which Cook Ding knows how to cut up an Ox is not something learned in books or something derived from reason or logic. It is a type of knowledge that comes from bodily experience and practice, much like the contemporary *lingji* dances and movements that I discuss later in this paper. Robert Eno explains, "Practical knowing is portrayed as dynamic, responsive, and improvisatory, providing access to a natural world that is simultaneously dynamic and free of fixed rules" (Eno 1996, 127).

Zhuangzi³ might answer that this new understanding of the world is required because perception is flawed – all that we know is permeated by distinctions, and oppositions. There is a this and a that. There is the lived experience and the dreamed experience. Zhuangzi is challenging our perception of what is real and what is not real. Zhuangzi says that these perceptions lead to misunderstanding, such as in our approach to death. Here the story of how Zhuangzi dealt with the death of his wife in Chapter 18 is instructive. Huizi, Zhuangzi's Confucian friend, was alarmed to discover Zhuangzi celebrating the death of his wife. Zhuangzi used this moment of "alarm" to explain that Huizi had misunderstood. Zhuangzi had paused to reflect on the death of his wife but realized that the flow from life to death had been temporary and that she had simply been transformed again. Lee H. Yearly says that this type of understanding, "...involves the acuity and courage continually to query cherished beliefs about the seemingly obvious" (Yearley 1996, 157). In the *Zhuangzi*, the process by which wisdom is acquired depends on chaos, disorder, or forgetting. But what I have yet to discuss is whether the process of forgetting elicits any sense of a matrix of wisdom – an all-encompassing unity. One can also understand what might be implied by the concept of Daoist intuitive wisdom through an examination of the *Yijing* and its system of divination.

The *Yijing* is a model of the ineffable in which one is encouraged to suspend beliefs about what is rational and logical

and put one's faith in a system that reveals the state of the natural world at the one moment in time when the divination is performed. Carl G. Jung in his influential foreword to the *Yijing* referred to this process as synchronicity that helped one rediscover one's place in the matrix of the world (Wilhelm and Baynes 1967, xxiv). In ancient China, the Yi oracle was used by rulers to decide whether to hunt, go to war, or who to marry, for example. It began from the individual perspective in "the form of a 'charge,' a statement indicating a desire on behalf of the person for whom the divination was being performed" (Shaughnessy 1996, 8). The Yi oracle would provide an answer to that charge with a positive or negative comment that could be understood through the analysis of the outcome of the divination. The result from the process of wisdom took the form of one hexagram and or hexagrams, if there were lines of change. In effect, the *Yijing* (as the Yi oracle was later called when it was written down as a text) functioned to restore an individual to a position within a collective framework for one moment in time.

What this model contributes to the present discussion is that all beings, and things, are in a constant state of flux – of being and non-being, of forgetting and returning. By performing the *Yijing* we can rediscover, by forgetting our old position within that system, our place in the world, and how we should act to ensure harmony. As such the *Yijing* clarifies the idea that all beings and things coexist like the 64 hexagrams and the eight trigrams that are constantly in a state of becoming and unbecoming. Here the relationship of the hexagrams is not united from the top down. Rather, the *Yijing* is a system that provides divine insights for one moment in time creating what seems more like a diverse system than one that is unified.

To develop what is meant by a process of ecstatic experience that delivers wisdom and harmony, this paper shifts to focus on the fluctuating positionality of shamans who are multi-valent agents of deities, and communities in the *Nine Songs* and in contemporary Taiwanese performance. Shamans and ecstasies exist in a world that is characterized by change and flow as mediums one minute and ordinary people the next. Steven Sangren explains that such multi-valence is made possible by the presence and movement of *ling*, translated as magical power or efficacy, during pilgrimages where *ling* flows between state and local temples:

Sometimes likened by observers to the once widely discussed idea of mana, *ling* is one of the key concepts uniting Chinese culture and religion. In brief, *ling* is a kind of magical efficacy attributed to supernatural entities of all sorts – gods, ghosts, ancestors, and so forth. Moreover, it is a relative quality: Some gods and ghosts are more *ling* than others. ... It is this *ling* quality, like a kind of electrical charge, or more literally, a fire, that can be split from the incense burner at one temple and transferred to another. *Ling* can change over time; some deities lose their *ling* while that of others increases. (Sangren 1988, 684)

When shamans are in trance, *ling* fills them and this *ling* is often described as having a magnetic or an electric charge that causes entranced shamans to tremble.⁴ One can literally see the *ling* or magical power begin to change the ecstatic who becomes filled with it. Not only do shamans tremble, they talk, walk and behave differently. Steven Sangren, in several works about the Mazu cult on Taiwan and its links to Han or ethnic Chinese culture, discusses the process by which diverse local village temples travel to originating temples during pilgrimages. In a sense processions and pilgrimages make evident the manner in which the *ling* is in a constant state of flux, moving from the entranced ecstasies in the processions, and the images of the deities seated on the sedan chairs that the ecstasies escort, to the original temple and back again (see Sangren 1991, 67-86 and 1993, 264-282). These pilgrimages or journeys from village to originating temple serve to promote diverse local deities and at the same recognize the power of the originating temple and its deities. In essence, the pilgrimages mirror the interior experience of the ecstatic by mapping the ebb and flow of magical power that facilitates the co-existence of state and local, deity and ecstatic, collective and individual.

In the *Nine Songs*, a text describing rituals and practices in southern China, shamans or ecstasies are called *ling*. Steven Sangren talked about *ling* as being the magical power that moved between the deity and the ecstatic. Here the *ling* as incarnations of magical power or efficacy move back and forth between the realm of the deities and that of human beings. The *ling*'s ecstatic experience is sometimes described as a process by the phrase

“transfixed I forget to return” to describe the manner in which *ling* forget themselves when they become multi-valent agents of the deity. This phrase appears four times in the songs – once in the “Lord of the East,” once in the “River Earl,” and twice in “Mountain Spirit.”⁵ Forgetting is preceded by becoming transfixed and often followed by a place, such as to the watery otherworld of the deity named the River Earl. In the songs “Lady of Xiang River” and “Lord of the Clouds,” the concept of forgetting is omitted and the reference is only to becoming transfixed and then travelling somewhere. In “Lady of the Xiang River,” the ecstatic who is *huanghu*, or in a state of trance, contemplates the murky destination in the distance beyond the water. In the *Nine Songs*, the expression “transfixed I forget to return” communicates how the *ling* forgets himself or herself during the moment in which he or she is transfixed during possession. Like the Daoist exemplar, in order to achieve this temporary union between the one ecstatic and any one of a number of different gods, there is a necessary renunciation of personal identity of body and of mind by the ecstatic, likely enabled by the magical power. It is only when the trance state of possession or journey has ended that the *ling* remembers that she or he has forgotten, returning to her former state of individual being with a new awareness. Taiwanese ecstatic practice of the *lingji* (diviners of the spirit) also involves forgetting in order to move the magical power within through burping, singing and dancing.

*Lingji*⁶ are both male and female, come from a variety of backgrounds, and range in age from early teens to late 70’s. They may be found in mostly urban temples, praying, meditating, burping, singing, and dancing moving⁷ any number of spirits (*lingdong*) such as the Taiwanese goddess Mazu, the Buddhist Guanyin, Jigong Bodhisattva, and even Mao Zedong, God, and the Virgin Mary. Sometimes *lingji* are known by other names, all of which begin with *ling*, or magical power. *Lingji* performance, like the fluid practice of Cook Ding in the *Zhuangzi*, emphasizes spontaneity, and individual transformation.⁸ Many *lingji* themselves claim that what they do is a new phenomenon on Taiwan, having only emerged within the last 50 years.⁹ However, the underlying beliefs about *lingji* training and performance such as the importance of self-cultivation, creating harmony and ending suffering have their origins in Confucianism, Daoism (including the practices of *taiji* and *qigong*) and Buddhism. *Lingji* express a desire to end personal suffering and the suffering of others.

Moreover, they hold the belief that the practice, although it has roots in the remote past, is a new and revolutionary movement. One *lingji* remarked that, “this is a new 21st century phenomenon.”¹⁰ Much of *lingji* practice is also informal involving unstructured meditation, singing, and dancing inside and outside of temples as opposed to more formal types of practice and rituals such as those performed by Daoist ritual masters and priests on specific days of the lunar calendar. Although groups of *lingji* when they are moved by the spirit appear to be affiliated with each other, as one *lingji* who had been practicing for over ten years, noted “[they] can’t be lumped together as one group.”¹¹ In addition, *lingji* eschew traditional forms of authority, in favour of spiritual guides and masters, such as the *zhencai* or *jitong* (the true talent or divining youth).

Lingji insist that the practice is driven by individual desires to end suffering but the empirical data suggests that the practice is fundamentally collective.¹² It begins as an individual mission (*ming*) during which *lingji* seek to discover what they call original spirit (*benling*), and nature (*zixing*), which is more like an original soul. *Lingji* also refer to this discovery of personal *benling* as a journey, but here the destination is back in time and is expressed as past life regression. Like other ecstasies, *lingji* almost always return from this journey with a new understanding of themselves; those who never return from the journey and are said to go insane.¹³ *Lingji* performance is founded in the need to foster cooperation among all people, and is done in response to the chaos and suffering *lingji* see around them.

To *lingji*, the personal and individual discovery of the original spirit and original nature facilitate later cooperative aspects of the practice. There are similarities between the original spirit and original nature that *lingji* seek, and Daoist and Buddhist spiritual tenets. Daoists use the terms primordial breath (*yuanqi*), and primordial spirit (*yuanshen*), a term which is somewhat like the *lingji* concept of original spirit, in discussions about how to cultivate and purify one’s nature (Qiu 1997, 17-23). The term original nature and its cultivation is also common in popular Buddhist works on the subject of meditation and cultivation of the spirit (Song 1998, 182-183).

The *lingji* believe that in order to become a *lingji* one has to travel back in time and “get in touch” with one’s original spirit and original nature. This discovery seems to be one of the formal requirements for becoming a *lingji*. Spiritual masters who are mediums (such as the *zhencaijitong*) can assist *lingji* with the

discovery of the original spirit, the original nature, past lives, and a person's mission in life. Once these things have been revealed to the *lingji* by the *zhencai/jitong*, the *lingji* may begin her practice of spiritual cultivation and cooperate with others. When asked if the ultimate goal of *lingji* practice is to reach enlightenment or to attain personal salvation, a *lingji* responds that, "it depends on whether he is fated for enlightenment. Not everyone has the mission to become enlightened."¹⁴ During a personal consultation with a possessed *zhencai*, the deity through the medium asked me about my research and whether I had any questions that he could answer. I asked him why *lingji* performed in so many different ways. He responded that "*lingji* have different cultivation levels, such as, university, high school, elementary school and pre-school."¹⁵ Finding out about one's past lives is such a large part of the *lingji* tradition that when one is visiting spiritual masters for healing one must initially answer the question "how many years since your last life?"

Although the *lingji*'s singing and dancing may be done out of a desire to end suffering, and may be perceived to indirectly contribute to the prosperity of a religious community or temple, what the *lingji* does is determined by her individual mission in life, the purity of her original spirit and original nature, and whether or not she or he feels the spirit working through her that day. Ultimately, the practice has little to do with unity and is not normative. *Lingji* do not belong to formal groups or temples and new songs, dances, and places for practice are being created all the time. The songs and body phrases of the dance movements performed in groups and in duets show to all that allowing a spirit to inspire you to dance has the reciprocal effect of creating social harmony. *Lingji* become inspired to meditate, burp, dance or sing in the presence of others and together they cooperate with one another to produce duets, dances, mimes, and conversations of the spirit, feeding off the contagion generated by the performance. In this diversity and discord one sees the *lingji* repeatedly attain a new self-awareness, a new wisdom about themselves and their spiritual being that is made possible by opening oneself up to the flow of *ling*. Like the Chinese sage, the Daoist exemplar, and the *ling* of the *Nine Songs*, Taiwanese *lingji* build on the tradition of wisdom.

In this paper I have attempted to develop an understanding of Chinese wisdom from the perspective of ecstatic experience in the past and present. This wisdom is more of a process in which

ling or magical power moves from ecstatic to deity, from individual to group, and back again, allowing for collectivity and diversity in Chinese religion. Julia Ching had a perceptive analysis of wisdom that came to the sage from the divine and we as her students continue to build on her life's work.

NOTES

1. Craig Quintero offers similar observations about "forgetting" in the discourses of those on Mazu pilgrimages: "Pilgrims 'forget themselves,' and by forgetting themselves they are able to reencounter the Life in everyday life. This heightened awareness leaves residual traces in the pilgrims' bodies" (Quintero 2002, 139).

2. See Chinn's discussion of Zhuangzi as an anti-rationalist.

3. Although it is likely no single author named Zhuang Zhou or Zhuangzi wrote the text, themes regularly appear throughout it such as the ideal person, ecstatic flight, outer appearance, and religious transformation suggesting that the text may be treated as a whole. On this subject, Victor Mair writes:

Aside from the numerous and difficult compositional, textual, and transmissive complications attendant upon the *Zhuangzi*, if we accept the received text as a whole, it does present us with an analyzable and interpretable body of thought that we identify with the corporate personality who is known as Master Zhuang and whose dominant component (at least in spirit) was probably Zhuang Zhou (Mair 200, 43).

4. Peter Nickerson explains the correlation between *trembling* and the onset of trance: "Rhythmic trembling and shaking is more often than not the principal marker of entry into trance climaxed by larger bodily motions and postures and punctuated with (usually unintelligible) speech and other sounds" (Nickerson 2001, 194).

5. For a discussion of the relationship of this phrase to trance experience, see Alison R. Marshall, "From the Chinese religious ecstatic to the Taiwanese Theatre of Ecstasy: A Study of the Wu" (2000).

6. The *lingji* discussed here are very different from those *lingji* who belong to a formal association. For a discussion of institutionalized *lingji* see Jordan Paper, "Mediums and Modernity: the Institutionalization of Ecstatic Religious Functionaries in Taiwan" (1996).

7. For a discussion of the Daoist equivalent of this practice see Qiu 1997, 17-23.

8. In this respect, *lingji* practice resembles other new religious movements (see Heelas 1996, 16).

9. Qigong movements also arose in the 1950's and emphasized self-cultivation, and spontaneous individual action (see Jian 1999, 961-991; and Chen 1995, 347-361).

10. Interview with female 35 year old *lingji*.

11. Interview with female 49 year old *lingji*.

12. In this respect, *lingji* performance resembles what Blumer calls "joint action" (Blumer 1969).

13. These individuals may be found at temples where *lingji* practice. Informants say that they were not able to return from their journeys (in which they discovered their original spirits), because their original spirits were too impure.

14. Interview with male 47 year old *jitong*.

15. Interview with male 35 year old *zhencai*. Falungong members also describe cultivation in terms of primary, elementary, high school and university levels.

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CHAPTER XX

WISDOM IN WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND EXISTENTIAL CHOICE

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INTRODUCTION

Professor Julia Ching left some questions for us to speculate on: What is wisdom? What is the meaning or wisdom of her existence as a woman? Was she a mystic? ...? In attempting to understand the concept of gender in Chinese thought, this paper addresses these questions through an understanding of wisdom and through an analysis of women's religious experience and existential choice. In this paper, the concepts of *wisdom*, *religious experience* and the nature of the *mystic* will be clarified first. Then the paper will focus on Julia Ching and three kinds of wisdom – being a woman and the wisdom of the ordinary; being an interpreter and the wisdom of the unknown; and being a “non-dualistic qualified mystic” and the wisdom of consciousness transformation. Two kinds of immortality will also be discussed: transcendent immortality and physical immortality. For the purpose of comparison, the last part of the paper will deal with a woman mystic of the Song Dynasty, Lady Wang, and her ecstatic journey described in the newly recognized “longest Chinese classical poem.”

WISDOM, RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES AND MYSTICISM

Let me define some terms for the convenience of discussion.

Wisdom. The concept of wisdom in Eastern, as in Western traditions, is of course multiform. Generally, though, it has ranged from a capacity for good judgment in the practical affairs of life, including moral issues, to a spiritual discernment which transcends earthly understandings altogether. What both of these have in common, however, is a radical uncodifiability, an irreducibility to any combination of mere information, however extensive, and rules, however sound as far as they go.

The relation between wisdom, on the one hand, and religion and philosophy, on the other hand naturally varies. Religion has been conceived as one of the ways of coping, theoretically and practically, with the problems of the world, nature and society, while wisdom has been seen as an important part of such an effort. A Western commentator writes: "The heart of religion is and always has been experiential. Encounters with the supernatural, a transcendent dimension, the Wholly Other at the base of every great religion" (Pojman 1994, 145). However contentious such a claim, it arguably fits the religious experiences to be considered here. As regards religious experience, philosophers and theologians have concentrated on different forms, but "mystical types of religious experience seem to be found in all religious traditions" (Stewart 1992, 7). At any rate in many cases, the central part of "the content of religious experience is alleged knowledge or well-grounded belief about the nature of reality" (Stewart 1992, 197). It is about "a certain objective aspect of reality" (Broad 1953, 197). Apprehension of the nature of reality in world religions has been regarded as at least one kind of wisdom, though different terms are used in different traditions. In ancient Indian thought wisdom was characteristically regarded as knowledge or insight (*Jñāna*) "Knowledge is the eye of the World, and knowledge, the foundation. *Brahman* is knowing" (*Upanishads*, 199). It is a matter of experience, and it is different from intelligence or knowledge of the arts, science and technology. In Buddhist tradition the Tathāgata "sees with the clear eyes of wisdom" and "he does not even seek the qualities of *nirvāṇa*. Because he enters the middle path with signlessness (*animitta*), wishlessness (*aprahīṭa*), and emptiness (*śūnyatā*), he arrives at the abode of the non-abiding *nirvāṇa* (*apratīṣṭhitanirvāṇa*)" (Prasastrasena, 257). William James' definition of "mystical states of consciousness" has been widely cited to describe this kind of wisdom. The special terms he used for this are: "Ineffability, Noetic quality, Transiency and Passivity" (James 1902).

A different kind of wisdom has often appeared in Eastern traditions such as the Chinese tradition. In the Confucian classics *zhì* (wisdom) was also written as *zhī* (to know). For example, in the *Analects*, *zhī* (to know) appeared 116 times. Of these appearances, the term appeared 25 times as wisdom (*zhì*) meaning intelligence;¹ and twice meaning "knowledge."² So in the Chinese tradition wisdom has been understood as knowledge and intelligence. Such knowledge and intelligence are possessed by the

Confucian “wise man” (*junzi*) as one of the five cardinal virtues – zhi (wisdom) (Ching 2000, 24, 106 and 139; Fung 1952-53, 1:121). This knowledge and intelligence must be extraordinary, though at the same time based on an accumulation and learning of ordinary knowledge, like the skillfulness or the excellence of the Dao/the Way of the Cook Ding in the *Zhuangzi* (“Yangsheng Zhu”: 3). After sixteen years’ practice Cook Ding is in touch with the spirit in himself (*shen* or *benxing*, the original mind/nature (Ching 2000, 142-43),³ and does not look with his eyes when he uses his chopper to cut up an ox. With his spirit he knows where his chopper must go and where it must stop, and he allows the spirit to run its course. This is the key story in “Yangshen Zhu” of the *Zhuangzi*. The chapter begins with an anthropological statement that the essence of human nature (*renxing*) is to know things in the world and the principle of things (*wuli*). Cook Ding’s Dao is said to have achieved a realm that frees his “original nature” (*benxing*) and has exceeded the conceptualizing of *youdai* (expectation) and *youji* (*self*) (Jin 1997, 60). It is a realm of wisdom. There may also be something like this in “the heart of the Confucian quest that concerns reason and intuition” (Ching 2000, 134). The focus of this paper will be to discuss forms of “wisdom” having something to do with religious experiences.

Religious Experience. Not every religious experience is mystical. For the convenience of discussion, I have to define three kinds of religious experiences: absolutely mystical religious experiences, qualifiedly mystical religious experience and ordinary religious experience. In the strict sense of the term, the *absolutely mystical religious experience* refers to one of the following mystical experiences. The first form of this experience is experience of the unity of all realities or the unity of the subject with its object, the transcendent God or a sacred being, where “the mystic is absorbed in God, becomes one with God” (Broad 1953, 101). The second form of absolutely mystical religious experience is a numinal experience, where the practitioner or the believer encounters or experiences the presence of a being or beings from the other world, but the subject and the object do not become one. *Qualifiedly mystical religious experience* refers to experience with mystical elements but not in the absolutely strict sense of the term. The expression, *ordinary religious experience* refers here to experience that is related to one religion or religions without conspicuous mystical elements of the kinds described above. In

other words, it is a simple or common religious experience. These three kinds of experiences are not exclusive of one another, but at a given time one of them may dominate the situation.

Mystic. Following these definitions, there are *mystics* in the strict sense of the term, *mystics* in a qualified sense or *qualified mystics* and *ordinary religious believers* and participants in religious practices. Mystics can be men or women. In attempting to construct or form the concept of gender in Chinese thought, I will discuss only women's religious experience here.

The examples I will discuss in this paper are Julia Ching (1934-2001) and Lady Wang of Nan Song (who lived shortly before the period 1190-1224). Fortunately, we have first-hand data from the writings of Julia Ching and from Lady Wang's narrative poem of her ecstatic journey. Julia and Lady Wang were seekers traveling among the religions of East and West to learn the meaning or reality of their existence and their future and thereby attain wisdom. They lived in different historical periods, accepted different religious beliefs, received radically differing education and held different social status. But, for different reasons, they both declined physical immortality.

Julia Ching, as we know, was a University Professor at the University of Toronto, the highest rank given to those who have made a significant contribution to worldwide science or scholarship. She was also inducted into the Order of Canada, Canada's special mark of distinction for its most illustrious citizens. She was a Professor of East Asian Philosophy and Religion at the University of Toronto and the author of fourteen books. Based on my research, I define her as a woman, an interpreter and a "non-dualistic qualified mystic" with three kinds of great wisdom. "The calling from God" (Ching 1998, 20-25)⁴ made her spend about 20 years in Catholic monastic life as a nun. That religious experience made her feel herself a traitor to her family and, in a sense, to her culture (Ching 1998, 25).⁵ The crisis her body experienced and the suffering caused by the conflict between her body and her soul made her rethink her existential choice. She dreamed of offering herself to God by dying early when she was in the Catholic order (Ching 1998, 34), but she never desired physical immortality in her later life. Her learning and research gave her a deeper insight into transcendent immortality. This has brought her to a non-dualistic interpretation of reality in her writings on Wang Yangming and other topics such

as Chan's *yogacara* and Huayan philosophy. The wisdom which I believe we can see in Julia's thought is, at least, of three kinds: the wisdom of the ordinary, the wisdom of the unknown and the wisdom of transformation of the consciousness.

Lady Wang is a figure in a newly recognized religious narrative poem, *The Plaint of Lady Wang*,⁶ the so-called "longest classical Chinese poem in Chinese history." What interests me is not its length but its significance in Chinese thought. Lady Wang was a *qie* (concubine) who lived in Nan Song. A family crisis led her to become a Daoist nun. She sought for answers concerning her existence from Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism and became involved in a Shangqing-like ecstatic journey. Confucian teachings both tortured and supported her body and soul in this world; the Daoist Oneness and ecstatic journey emancipated her soul and body, but denied her erotic love and family duties in this world; the role of Buddhism was to reveal the law of *karma*, making her unable to choose either to die or to live. During her ecstatic journey she met the Queen mother of the West, many immortal sisters in Heaven and, eventually, the goddess Chang E who offered her the elixir of immortality. But she declined.

Mystical experience and social existence mutually influence each other to some extent. A person's existential choices are often supported by her reason or faith as reflected in her religious experience. Between reason and faith there is hardly a wide gap or sharp divide. In this aspect men and women are alike. My arguments in this paper are as follows:

1. Crisis in a woman's life often precipitates a religious experience with or without mystical experience. It happens that some women have been extremely good at introspection and at describing their own religious or mystical experiences, which gives us first-hand data to examine.

2. The interpretations of women's religious or mystical experiences are heavily dependent on the traditional religious beliefs in which these various mystics have been brought up and how familiar the woman believer or thinker's education has made her with them. Women are more likely than men to imagine being humble or helpless during their religious experience, and their explanations often relate to their gender identity. The tradition from which a mystic comes no doubt affects the theoretical interpretation of her experience, although it would have taken

place even if the woman had been brought up in a different tradition.⁷

3. Traditional beliefs and traditional attitudes toward gender also determine the details of women's religious and mystical experiences. Being women may make them look for the traditional roles of their existence in their religious or mystical experience, an approach that is not conspicuous in men's religious experience. I agree that "tradition in its mystical dimension still points towards an existential grounding of the individual" (Phillips 1996, 209).

JULIA CHING AND THREE KINDS OF WISDOM

A Woman: Wisdom of the Ordinary

First, I will analyze Julia Ching. Let me use Padmasambhava's instructions to start: "The basis for realizing enlightenment is a human body. Male or female – there is no great difference. But if she develops the mind bent on enlightenment, the woman's body is better" (Gross 1993, 79).

As mentioned earlier, Julia left some questions for us to speculate on: Who was she? What was the meaning or wisdom of her existence as a woman? Was she a mystic? ...? First and foremost, I daresay, she sought the meaning of being a healthy, normal and ordinary woman, not the bookworm that she was (Ching 1998, 193) or not having as she did a physical form "like a bundle of match sticks" (Ching 1998, 105).⁸ She knew that her experience as a woman had been different from that of most women, and she desired to be ordinary (Ching 1998, 147 and 203).

What is the ordinary or ordinariness? Ordinariness (Tib. *Thun mong nyid*), a concept in Tantric Buddhism, merits attention. On the one hand, "ordinary" is used non-dually for the ultimate reality; on the other hand, it is understood that whereas the world perceived by the unenlightened is "ordinary," maintained by delusion, and filled with suffering, the real world, revealed through wisdom and perceived through the enlightened sense, is considered "extraordinary" (Thurman 1994, 268). Therefore the "extraordinary" is ordinary.

Julia made a point everywhere of the ordinary woman's perspective and emphasized the value of ordinary women's femininity and sexuality. Her self-image regarding gender is very clear. She wanted to present a healthy and feminine appearance on

the television (Ching 1998, 192). She dedicated her last book - *Butterfly Healing* - to "the men" in her life (Ching 1998, v), a dedication that included her step-father, her husband, who came to her late and brought her great pleasure, her brothers, her adopted son, and her special male friend, Hans. In this way, she announced that she was a cherished daughter, a loving wife, a caring sister, an attentive parent, and a good friend - roles for an ordinary woman appreciated by both Eastern and Western traditions. She valued these roles not because they are traditional but because they represent the meaning/wisdom of her existence. She made a vigorous effort to perform, enjoy, and perfect her delayed functions and duties as a woman. She appreciated being called "Little Jade" in her family and imagined herself as a "small piece of stone" loosened and dropped from heaven to earth (Ching 1998, x). Here Julia was putting herself into the Chinese creation myth. She chose one of the Chinese creation myths, in which a woman, Nü Wa, was the creator and mother of humankind, rather than the one about a male creator, Pan Ku (See Birrell 1993, 163-165, 190-191; see also Yuan 1954). The perception of being little and beloved was favored by traditional Chinese women. This has been standard women's psychology in China - though women's roles are nowadays changing there as in the rest of the world.

Julia was seeking the meaning of who she was. She was proud of being young and charming, and had a young girl's spontaneous response when her boyfriend held her hand, in spite of her plans to enter the order as a novice (Ching 1998, 24). Later she condemned her monastic life and bitterly lamented, "It's made its mark over and over again on my body and my health. It's nearly desexed me" (Ching 1998, 108). It was as if her woman's body through her cancerous breasts was taking a stand against her religious life and cried out their objection to her soul's pursuit;⁹ her woman's body led her to question her existence and reconsider the value of Chinese tradition, it led her to want to live an ordinary secular life, to reunite with her family, to be a wife and mother. Her "enlightenment" as a woman makes me recall a statement on Dzokchen - the Tantric Buddhist Great Perfection of Wisdom: "Dzokchen tradition takes the most ordinary and common reality of our human existence as its basis, and this accounts for its simple, blunt, almost primitive approach" (Ray 2001, 297).¹⁰

In her study of the *Platform Sutra* of the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, Julia stressed the *Chan* wisdom of the importance of ordinary life and the possibility of finding enlightenment outside

of meditation (Amore and Ching 2001, 270). She was an "ordinary" woman. Without being an ordinary and common woman, what meaning or wisdom could Julia find within herself? This is a far cry from Tantric Buddhism, which stresses the complementarity of wisdom and method, and portrays women as the embodiment of *prajna*, meaning "wisdom" or "right knowledge". It holds that all the powers of the universe flow through and from women (Shaw 1994, 44). This elevated role of woman as embodying wisdom may give us a sort of insight into the relation between gender and wisdom in some branches of religious thought.

An Interpreter: Wisdom of Being Unknown

There are three ways of being unknown. In the *Zhuangzi* we read: "Nothing in the world is bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount Tai is small" (2: "Qiwulun"). In this paradox, the objective "bigness" of Mt. Tai is unknown from a limited subjective point of view. Another way of being unknown is through ignorance. For example, when Gautama, the Buddha, first preached the metaphysical concepts of *anatman* (no-self) and the Five *khandhas/skandhas* (See Walshe 1995, 342 and 344-350), these concepts were unknown to monks and lay people. They could not accept them due to their ignorance. They considered that Gautama was denying the physical body of life. The third way of being unknown we can find in the first chapter of the *Analects*. Here are two popular translations for the last sentence of the chapter (人不知而不愠不亦君子乎?): "Is it not gentlemanly not to take office when others fail to appreciate your abilities?" (Lau 1979, 59); and, alternatively, "Is one not a superior man if he does not feel hurt even though he is not recognized?" (Chan 1963, 18); yet, here is the third - Yang Bojun's interpretation: "Isn't he a wise virtuous man if people don't know his teaching and he does not complain?" (Yang 1979, 1). This idea is consistent with the idea in another chapter (14: 3): "A wise virtuous man does not worry that people don't know him but that he has no capability and knowledge [to serve the people]." In Chapter 7:19 of the *Analects*, someone asks Zilu, one of Confucius' students, what kind of person Confucius is. Zilu declines to answer. Confucius says: "I am the sort of person who forgets to eat when trying to solve a problem driving me to distraction, who is so full of joy that I forget my worries and don't notice the onset of old age" (Yang

1979, 71). Chinese intellectuals pass this spirit from generation to generation. Julia took this seriously and thought that she was helping to shape other people's lives every day as a professor, an author or an editor (Ching 1998, 200).

As a thinker she considered herself to be not an innovator but an interpreter who helped others to understand different spiritual traditions (Ching 1998, 217). In completing her previous spiritual experience in the Catholic order and in searching for her roots in Chinese tradition, Julia found that Chinese thought was just like Mt. Tai because it was unknown in certain ways in the Western world. One product of her thinking is her interpretation of Chinese religion. She affirmed the Swiss theologian Hans Küng's classification of the religions of the world as three river systems. Among them, Chinese religion is the third and the youngest system, one which sets great value on a wisdom tradition.¹¹ According to Hans Küng, the central images in Chinese culture and tradition are not prophets or mystics but sages. Chinese religion is a religion of philosophers (Küng and Ching 1990, 3). Julia interpreted previous scholars' ideas and named Chinese religion "the religion of harmony" because of the known Chinese effort to direct attention to harmony between the human and the cosmic as well as harmony within society and within the self (Ching 1993, 4). She interpreted the concepts of transcendence and immanence in Chinese religion, a clarification which could be of benefit to some Western scholars who have seemed at times to consider that the expression "Chinese religion" might create a "somewhat artificial" impression (Sommer 1995, vii). This fruition of her thinking appeared during a period in which the field of Chinese religion as an area in the history of religions (comparative religion) had grown, and the once radical approach of considering "Chinese religion" in the singular rather than in the plural had, to a degree, become normative (Paper 1998, xiii).

In her late academic career, Julia explored "the heart of Chinese wisdom" in her book *Mysticism and Kingship in China*. Her thesis identifies mysticism as being at the heart of Chinese wisdom and focuses on what "wisdom" means (Ching 1997, xix). Confucius did not discuss his mystical experience (*Analects* 7:21). But Julia interpreted one of Confucius' images as revealing him to be a sage in a transcendent sense: he was conscious of how his own possession of wisdom represents sageliness, which came to him from Heaven (Ching 1997, 79). The expression "ethical wisdom" was also used by Julia to make the point that Confucius'

relationship with Heaven was grounded in an awareness of his own participation in an *ethical wisdom* that related human beings to Heaven (Ching 1997, 149). That is an activity of Confucius' pure consciousness, I believe.

Julia discussed wisdom in religious and political authority – in shamanic kingship, wisdom in royal priesthood, ethical prophecy and in classical and scriptural exegesis. She thought that “oneness between Heaven and humanity” had been a troubling idea for Western philosophers. This may be regarded as a kind of “ignorance” on their part. Confucian sayings such as “Myriad things are within me” and “A man who knows his own nature will know Heaven,” deny the separation of the transcendent object and the subject, of spirit and matter, of self and the other, of the human and nature (*Mencius* 7A:4 and 7A:1). What interests me is Julia's explanation that the fact that “the transcendent is also immanent does not necessarily destroy the meaning of transcendence” (Ching 1997, 100-101), taking this thought from the writings of a fourteenth-century Western thinker, Nicolas of Cusa. According to Nicolas of Cusa's insight it is possible to experience the divine within the human heart - what he called a “coincidence of opposites.” Actually, it is a non-dualistic concept popular in Asian philosophies, found, for example, in the relation of *Atman* and *Braman* in the *Upanishads* (see, for instance, “Chandogya” at 154-155) and in Sankara's Advita Vedanta (Prabhavandanda and Isherwood 1970, 103-104), in the theories of Buddha Nature in *Yogacara*, or the Mahamudra or the Dzokchen in Tantric Buddhism, not to mention the *Mencius*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the Oneness in Daoism or the experience of Mimi Nakayama (1798-1887), the founder of the Japanese new religion Tenrikyo.

Originally, Julia was an unknown person. She started her academic life when she was about 40. But she successfully made herself known, at least in academic circles. Maybe Wang Yangming's teaching, “The wise virtuous man does not seek the confidence of others; for if he has confidence in himself, it is enough. He does not seek notoriety or popularity: if he knows himself, that is enough” (“A Letter to Shu Guoyung”; see also Henke 1916, 262)¹² was her watchword. Julia's experience was marked not only by her three bouts with cancer but also by the struggles in the academy faced by those of us who are not white, not men, not completely able-bodied or not very young. Her experience has been encouraging to those who are included in the by-laws of Affirmative Actions and Equity of Employment in

academic job advertisements and “those who are often welcomed in theory but not in practice” (Hussain 2002) to take in the shining and beautiful aspect of the world we face. Julia addressed the tough, difficult questions of racism, ageism and discrimination, both in the academic world and in the broad society where we live. When discussing Julia’s book the *Butterfly Healing*, Amir Hussain points out:

Professor Ching tells her story, and the stories of those who are not retained, tenured or promoted by their institutions because they are not white. It is as simple and insidious as this: in universities where the student body may be diverse, the teaching body is largely white. Less than 10% (10%!) of tenured faculty in North America is “of color.”

Now many people, not only women, are repeating the stories Julia told in their own lives.

A Non-Dualistic Qualified Mystic: the Wisdom of Consciousness Transformation

I would define Julia as a non-dualistic qualified mystic. She refers to mystical experience as a transformation of consciousness, whether that is accomplished by meditative practice or in some other way (Ching 1997, 173). She not only “studied, evaluated, and critically appreciated many spiritual traditions” (Ching 1998, 217) but was also very sensitive to her own spiritual experience and recorded the details of her mental activities and consciousness transformation in religious contexts, providing us with first-hand data for understanding women’s religious experience.

As well, she had some *qualified* mystical experiences in all of her dreams which she classified as “authentic” (Ching 1998, xii) dreams. Though she did admit that the butterfly dream was “a fantasy piece” (Ching 1998, xii), I think we can understand her better in that dream than in any of her other more “authentic” dreams. Let me turn to some of those authentic dreams.

On Easter morning I woke everyone in my dorm with a cry uttered in my dream, “The lord is risen.

Alleluia, Alleluia!" So glad is the soul merely to find itself near the fountain that, even before it has begun to drink, it has had its fill. The faculties are stilled and have no wish to move, for any movement they may make appears to hinder the soul from loving God. (Ching 1998, 34)

This happened during the first year she was steeped in the liturgical mysteries of her Catholic order. She critically interpreted this dream as "spiritually intoxicated." Surely it is a manifest effect of her desire at that time to enjoy "mystical communication with God" and to taste the reality of Heaven.

The ascetic life in the order also made her very sensitive to gender issues. If, as a nun, she could not enjoy the freedom to talk to young men in this world, she could dream that this prohibition would be lifted in heaven. In her occasional daydreams or trances we can see her reflecting on the issue of God's gender:

I dreamed ... Maybe God became incarnate on another planet among another kind of beings, more intelligent beings. And if these beings have gender differences, maybe God became incarnate in a female form. (Ching 1998, 36)

She continued her reflection on God's gender, and finally expressed the very feminist idea, "Maybe the space invaders are Catholic guardian angels, with white wings affixed to their strong, masculine shoulders, in the service of the female God incarnate". This part, I suppose, is a late construction. It shows that she had never stopped coming up with her own opinion, even in her dreams. The concepts of "I", and of self-identity as a woman and a seeker were reflected in the consciousness transformations brought about in her mystical experiences

Julia sensed herself as a "between being" in her dreams.¹³ The sense of having a body that sometimes emerges in a dream is an important analogue of the sense of self as a "between being" (Thurman 1994, 37) – a necessary part of mystical experience in dreams. She recorded that "I could hear my little brother's voice. ... I had held his hands in mine ..., and I cried. I woke up from my light sleep crying." She had many dreams about her family when she was in the religious order, in the hospital as well as at her home. This shows the influence of the traditional religion

in which she had been brought up. The meditation she practiced in the order and later in her life might have helped to retain her perceptions in dreams and unusual consciousness transformation. It is said, "Normal people without special training rarely have such a sense. Many rarely remember dreams, almost none remember the beginning of the dream or the dissolving out of the dream, and very few are capable of lucid dreaming – dreaming while being aware they are dreaming, without waking up" (Thurman 1994, 37). Her later life proved that she was an experienced meditator and her brain waves had very high alpha waves, similar to the brain waves characteristic of a Native American spirit painter who paint in a trance (Ching 1998, 147).

Here I want to mention the "fantasy piece" of the "butterfly dream", though Julia admitted that it was not "authentic". I think we understand Julia much better in this dream than in any of the "authentic" dreams, because it is a true product of her mind. Obviously, this dream is inspired by *the Zhuangzi* (2: "Qiwulun"; see also Watson 1968, 49 and Graham 1981, 61), but it is significantly different from Zhuang Zhou's dream. The *Zhuangzi* discusses a metaphysical concept of the "transformation of things" which distinguishes two different realities of a thing: as a being in the phenomenal world and its "reality" as a "between-being" in a dream; there may be a suggestion as well of the third sort of reality: the two in one – the Oneness of the ultimate. Zhuang Zhou and the Butterfly are one being in that dream, in contrast to Julia's dream, where the Butterfly and Julia are two different between-beings. Julia retains her "I" consciousness and talks to the Butterfly. Her dream extends to three different existential realities: as a being in the phenomenal world reality, as a "between-being" in a dream reality and as an enlightened being with great wisdom or a being of the "Great Awakening" (unity of one's self with Ultimate Reality.) It shows her learning within and without Chinese thought. For example, Śankara, the eighth century Indian philosopher, tells us: "Whether in the state of deep sleep or of waking or of dreaming, no delusive perception appears to pertain to me in this world. As those three states have no existence, self-dependent or other-dependent, I am always the Fourth, the Seeing and the non-dual" (Sankara 10:4) Julia's butterfly dream is explicitly non-dual.

Regarding which reality is real, Julia told the between-being butterfly in her dream that it is a dream if we make it a dream and it is real if we make it real (Ching 1998, 220). The

function of the mind as the main source “makes” a thing real or not real. This determination appears during consciousness transformation. Julia also wanted to clarify that there is no gap between soul and body, and there is something of the real in the dream and something of the dream in the real. This idea is no different from Julia's application of her theory on transcendence and immanence in Chinese thought. We can find the roots of her thought in her analysis of Wang Yangming's “original substance of the mind” and the “original substance of knowledge”: “... Yangming's teaching of *hsin chih pen-ti* and *liang-chih pen-ti* not only suggests the presence of the absolute within the contingent self, but provides also a description of the process of transformation by which the contingent self becomes more and more related in harmony with the absolute within, without ever destroying the tenuous balance between immanence and transcendence” (Ching 1976, 184-185).

It is important to clarify that Sankara's non-dualism, often classed as monism, stresses the “all-knowing pure consciousness” which is beyond all objects of knowledge and is an experience that *Atman* is identical with *Brahman*. For its part Wang Yangming's idealistic philosophy focuses on the mind, by which he means essentially the will. There would be no principle (*li*) of anything, and indeed no things, unless one were *minded* to realize them. Julia's consciousness transformation wisdom focuses on the procedure of “transformation” to a non-dualistic state of experience. In experiencing and reflecting on this state she is not interested in theories of ontological monism or idealism.

Physical Immortality Declined

There are two kinds of immortality: transcendent immortality and physical immortality. To attain “transcendent immortality” is to transcend one's physical life-history, but “physical immortality” prolongs it on a different plane.

Daoist transcendent immortality can be found in Laozi's *Daodejing*: “One who does not lose his proper place endures for long; One who apparently dies but does not perish is long-lived” (33; See also Thompson 1996, 81). Confucians believe in the immortality of ethico-social influence, especially among educated people. “[The] best course is to establish virtue (*lide*), the next best is to establish achievement (*ligong*), and still the next best is to establish wards (*liyan*). When these are not abandoned with time,

it may be called immortality.”¹⁴ Buddhist immortality can be reached through release from *samsara* and the attainment of *nirvana*. Though belief in Amitabha Buddha can guarantee a rebirth in his Pure Land after death, the physical body is to be left behind and to be cremated. Tantric Buddhism takes care of every moment of the eternal soul/consciousness during the *Bardo*, the interval between death and reincarnation, and of that duration through numerous lifetimes of reincarnation. It does not care very much about the physical body after death.

Only in Alchemical Daoist practice is physical immortality exemplified. Ge Hong (253-333) took his refined elixir and got “released from his corpse.” When people lifted his corpse to place it in the coffin, it was as slight as though it were empty clothes (Wu 1991, 234). In Daoist literature there are people “going up to heaven in broad light” (Robinet 1997, 100-102; see also Kohn 1992, 303-313). For example, Wang Chungyang the founder of the Complete Perfect Sect “sheds his bodily shell and leaves the mortal realm” on the back of a divine crane; and Sun Buer, the only woman Daoist *zhenren*, ascends to heaven publicly in a cloud of smoke (Wong 1990, 85 and 122).

Julia described a Daoist story about the physical immortality of an entire family together with their dog and pig. This story may be the story of Huainanzi, Liu An, in the *Shengxian Zhuan* (Kohn 1992, 292-296). Julia’s comment on this was: the Chinese just couldn’t think of separating body and soul. She declared that, if one could live one hundred years, that is enough to be called physical immortality (Ching 1998, 90). In putting up with the pains and sufferings of her body she turned to God again as well as the reflection that the real healing to be found is to become whole again, or to attain salvation. She thought that, for her, living was a task assigned by God and a duty owed to the people who loved her and needed her. Immanuel Kant ascribed supreme value to the “good will” which is good “not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition” (Kant 1785, section 1). For the last part of her life, Julia lived for the sake of “good will” aiming neither at the grace of God nor at the hoped-for consummation of salvation. She performed “duty for duty’s sake.”

We can envisage Julia as really wanting to go back to heaven and to her origin there as the stone – achieving thus a transcendent immortality as something useful for human and

spirits. Her recorded transformation of consciousness will benefit everyone. She did not desire physical immortality but admired the following: "To be alive is to be on time, and to lose it is to be on course. I can be content" (Ching 1998, 155).¹⁵ To live according to nature is to respect its laws, including that of dying. By a superior wisdom Julia was no longer affected emotionally by the vicissitudes of life and the world. She did not lose her sensibility, but she had risen above it through the transformation of her consciousness.

Another very different example of a woman going through a mystical experience and declining physical immortality is evident in the story of Lady Wang, the central figure in a Song Dynasty first-person narrative poem, *The Complaint of Lady Wang*. Some scholars think Daoism attracts women for its immortality, goddess worship, reverence of Yin, female alchemy (*nüdan*), art of the bedchamber, fitness and herb-beautification (Zhang 1988, 88). But Lady Wang did not become a nun for these reasons. Having been nearly murdered and banished by the first wife of the family, Lady Wang lamented, "Why was I born?!"

As a seeker she visited the Temple of Banji/Banzhao, a deified Confucian woman scholar, who was the most famous woman educator of the Han Dynasty and the author of the *Instructions For Women (Nü Jie)*. Facing the goddess Banji, Lady Wang felt that she followed her moral teachings. With the same question regarding the meaning of her life she consulted a Buddhist nun. The nun performed a divination for her explaining the law of *karma*, which left her unable to commit suicide. Then during an ecstatic journey she encountered the immortal Daoist woman Lishan Laomu to whom she asked the same question. Lishan Laomu divinated for her using the *Yijing* and showed her the way to be one with the Dao. She experienced the fantastic moment of being one with the Dao but afterwards the same question still tortured her: What is the meaning of her life? Her search led to another mystical travel, and she encountered the Xi Wangmu/ the Queen Mother of the West – the greatest goddess of Daoism. But the goddess did not give her much help. This reveals the nature of man-made Xi Wangmu, a title "conferred on female ancestors in the father's line. ... Defining the Queen Mother in kingship terms in the context of the ancestral cult shows an attempt to incorporate her into the predominate view of the structure of the world" (Cahill 1993, 18). Other immortal sisters in Chinese mythology – Hemp Lady, Cao E, Weaving Maid, and

Chang E- were more intimate and tried to help but they were powerless. Finally, Chang E offered her the elixir of immortality. She declined. Her main reason was the value she placed on family duty and her desire to be a wife living with her husband in the mortal world. Lady Wang's existential choice reflects her wisdom – an ordinary practical wisdom. She had the opportunity to see the other world, which other people could never have, but she chose to be in this world – a typical Confucian world outlook. What she wanted was only to be a wife in a normal family which implies her desire for equality – the basic idea of modern feminism. Her choice exemplified Confucian teaching. In this way, her function is more effective than the great woman moral instructor Banji and the great Confucian scholar Zhu Xi of her time.

Historically, Lady Wang probably lived around the period of the Emperor Guangzong (1190-1194) and the Emperor Ningzong (1195-1218) in the area of today's Hebei and Shandong provinces. Footbinding, widow chastity and polygamy practices could lead a woman to choose a life as a nun. When Zhu Xi was the prefect of Zhangzhou in Fujian, he emphasized rituals of mourning, funerals, marriage and forbade young women to live in private nunneries. He issued a document *Quan Nudao Huansu Pang* (A Public Letter: *Urging Daoist Nuns Returning Their Family Duties*). In the letter Zhu Xi says that since he came to Zhangzhou he had seen many women leave home and stay in Daoist temples as nuns. Women have the important responsibility to bear children. If all women leave their families to become nuns, says Zhu Xi, then no one will give birth to children, and the continuation of generations will cease. If these practices continue for less than one hundred years there will be no human beings. Animals and beasts will occupy the space between heaven and earth. Zhu Xi argued how could Confucian scholars discuss the affection between father and son, the righteousness between the ruler and the politico-moral principles of the society? Thus, he decreed, from the following day, no woman could become a nun in a Buddhist Temple or a Daoist Shrine without special permission from the family and the official (Zhu 1930).

From Zhu Xi's public letter calling on Daoist nuns to go back to their home and duties, we can be quite assured that Lady Wang's reading ability and poetic training could help her to use popular knowledge from Daoist teaching and ancient mythology, in addition to her imagination, to write a poem describing her mystical experience. It is a feminine expression of mysticism,

romanticism, and syncretism, not only because it touches moral issues regarding women but also because it describes a woman's way of life during the ineffable, transcendental, passionate, mystical journey. She describes how she dressed and makes herself up, how she takes care of her skin and hair style, how she steps in a graceful dancing manner to pick up flowers and plants for cooking, how she purifies her woman's body from inside to outside by meditative means during her ecstatic travel. The dual function of women as sex object and moral teacher, which Dorothy Ko has discussed in detail (1994, 264), was also Lady Wang's role. An interesting point on this matter is that Lady Wang described her ecstatic journey in a love letter written in poetic style to her husband which she gave him in his dream; he found the actual letter in his bed the next morning. Her letter was full of citations from the *Great Learning* urging her husband to be a successful Confucian *junzi*. We are fortunate to have this account of women's role, both in mystical experience and in daily life, by a woman rather than, as has more commonly been the case, by male scholar. Lady Wang declined immortality, but her insight has never gone beyond Confucian existential values.

NOTES

1. For example, *Analects*, 14:28, 4:1, and 4:2.
2. For example, *Analects*, 9:8.
3. See also *The Zhuangzi*, "Yangshengzhu: 3": "following the principle of Heaven (*Tianli*)"; and the *xin*/mind in *Xunzi*: "Jiepi: 21".
4. This book is a gift Julia gave me on July 18, 2000. I have always felt the utmost respect for her, in the tradition of Chinese students' relationship with their teacher, but I feel now that I know her as "one soul to another" through reading the book. I have introduced this book to my students and friends for it is not only about her but about us.
5. Julia also mentioned that many times like Augustine she had experienced that "my inner self is a house divided against itself." This cultural consciousness was the original root of her thought and became an important factor leading her to speculate on religions of East and West and on her own existence.
6. By the end of the Twentieth century Liu Yuqing, pointed out that all the scholars in previous historical periods ignored Lady Wang's poem, *A Complaint of Lady Wang*, which was

popularly diffused among the Nan Song people. It is as long as 500 sentences and consists of 2,534 Chinese characters, and is thus 749 characters longer than the *Kongque Dong Nan Fei* (A Peacock Flies East and South). It is also 57 Chinese characters longer than the celebrated longest lyric poem in the *Chuci* style, "Li Sao." As I mentioned before I have been interested in its significance for understanding the concept of gender in Chinese thought not in its length. See my analysis of the poem: "A Feminine Expression of Mysticism, Romanticism and Syncreticism in the *Plaint of Lady Wang*" (forthcoming).

7. Here I have borrowed some ideas of C. D. Broad, though Broad does not focus on women's religious experience only (see Broad 1953, 129). Julia was brought up in the Catholic tradition, but she chose Master Zhuang's butterfly from the Chinese tradition to interpret her understanding of existence and ultimate reality. See my discussion below on her authentic and non-authentic dreams.

8. A "bundle of match sticks refers to the Chinese metaphor: "*shoude xiang huochaiguner*."

9. It was psychological stress that made her body suffer and twice caused breast cancer. According to her uncle, a doctor in Taiwan, her family had no history of cancer.

10. Dzokchen and Mahamudra are two kinds of the highest formless meditations in the Nyingma school and in the Sarma schools.

11. According to Küng, the three river systems are: The Abrahamic or Semitic-prophetic religions, the Indian and mystical religions, and the Chinese religions, which arose especially in the Yellow River basin, and which set great value on a wisdom tradition.

12. Julia mentioned many times that Wang Yangming had been her hero, even when she concentrated on her studies on Zhu Xi.

13. In 2000 I visited the Tibetan Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India. Nagawang Samten discussed with me about the *bardo*, in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. There are six kinds of between-beings on the cycle of *samsara*, the course from birth to rebirth. Being between-being is being one who experiences death when one lives.

14. *Tso Chuan/Zuo Zhuan* (Zuo's commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals) Duke Xiang, 24th year.

15. See also the *Zhuangzi*, "Dazongshi: 6" and "Yangshengzhu: 3", "安时而处顺".

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秦家喜心

... [For] meaning is what we make of life. It's present in our effort to acquire it. It slips through our fingers when we give up the quest.

Meaning is also called wisdom, even compassion—loving others as we do ourselves, or at least trying to do so. Call it Buddhism, Taoism, or Christianity. The labels don't matter. Meaning is found in living and loving, in giving and receiving, and hopefully, also in dying when the time comes.

—Julia Ching (1934-2001), *The Butterfly Healing*

