Zhang Xuezhi

On the "Ultimate Concern" in Song-Ming Study of Principle

Abstract: Albeit their variated manifestations, a distinct humanistic spirit that is also characteristic of Chinese philosophy as a whole is found among the thoughts of the masters of Song-Ming Study of Principle. They advocated the pursuit of transcendence through concrete cultivation which generates refined faith, sincerity, courage and an enjoyable state-of-attainment. These contributions played a decisive part in the refinement of Confucian thought regarding theories of transcendence, for developments in the theory of spiritual effort in pursuit of transcendence during this period are unique both with respect to China and abroad. This essay explores this uniqueness, through which we can enrich our understanding of Song-Ming Study of Principle as a tradition, and further appreciate the transcendental dimension from the perspective of social practice. Exemplifications of a quest for self-transcendence, including self-cultivation and the concern for ultimate values are rooted in everyday life and carried out in concrete social practice.

1 Introduction

In a time when peace and development have become the most powerful trends in the world, and when religious and ethnic frictions have raised the potential for unrest but also called for intercultural and interfaith dialogue, it is appropriate to renew our discussion of transcendence and the value of ultimate concern. As Chinese culture is slowly being accepted by the international community and getting more and more attention and interest from western scholars, it is useful to discuss transcendental thoughts and their manifestations within traditional Chinese culture, especially in Song-Ming Study of Principle. In the pursuit of transcendence, developments made by thinkers of Song-Ming Study of Principle are unique both with respect to China and abroad. Through this uniqueness we can enrich our understanding of Song-Ming Study of Principle and further appreciate the transcendental dimension from the perspective of social practice.

Translated by: Liu Xinwei, H. L. Yuen, and Kevin J. Tunrer

Zhang Xuezhi, Beijing, China

https://doi.org/10.1515/yewph-2023-0005

Today's world has seen the return of various excellent traditional values, they are shaping a world based more and more on dialogue and syncretism, which in turn provides a new background and opportunity for reflecting issues around ultimate concern and the construction of the meaning world. Since the disregard for supreme deities in Chinese culture is known by all, former researchers have used concepts such as "ultimate concern" to explain the transcendent (as in "beyond ordinary and worldly concerns" – translator's note) character of Confucian learning. From the exegeses of the *Zhongyong* and the *Commentary on the Book of Change* to the analyses of Kongzi, Mengzi and masters of the Study of Principle have all embodied this point. However, more often than not a related discussion lays emphasis on the metaphysical level to reveal ultimate concern's spiritual significance, and the effort to connect this to definite changes in cultivation methods is relatively rare. Moreover, the relationship between the many parts involved in the transcendence of Confucian learning remains unclear. The author wishes to the treat the Study of Principle above as a whole and use ultimate concern as an interpretive key to undertake a panoramic investigation, which will reveal the different aspects from which transcendence is reached. In our investigation, we will emphasize on specific interactions between transcendence and practical living.

Song-Ming Study of Principle is distinguished among the various stages of Chinese philosophy for the highlighted prominence of the pursuit of spiritual perfection, the heightening and exploration of self-cultivation; the distinguishing features of Chinese philosophy, such as the unity of Heaven and human, the unity of knowledge and action, the unity of emotion and situation,[1] and especially the being one-and-not-two and one-in-the-two of the transcendent Dao and concrete objects, are much clearer in Song-Ming Study of Principle than before. The concepts used to describe the absolute or transcendent being within the context of Chinese philosophy, like Heaven, Dao, Principle, *Taiji* etc., do not equate to the western understanding of a supreme deity – their essence is to play a role in real life, a philosophically-laden role that enables a transcendence beyond the mundane world. The ultimate concern shown by the masters of the Study of Principle also takes a route different from the western one that is completely isolated from real life: the method of cultivation of the Study of Principle never turns away from mundane contexts and situations, and their "ultimate concern", leaning against the grand philosophical background of the unity of Heaven and human, definitely does not point to an abstract absoluteness. "Sincerity is the

1 Tang Yijie, "On the true, good, and beautiful in the traditional Chinese philosophy", Social Sciences in China, vol. 4, 1984.

Dao of Heaven; having Sincerity in one's mind is the Dao of human", these words from the *Zhongyong* and the *Mengzi* were fully embodied in Song-Ming Study of Principle. To pursue the transcendent realm within concrete cultivation, while obtaining refined faith, sincerity and courage, and enjoying this state at the same time – this is a main aspect in understanding the ultimate concern of Song-Ming Study of Principle. Further goals of our investigation of the ultimate concern of Song-Ming Study of Principle are: to understand and interpret Chinese traditional philosophy from an ultimate perspective, and to achieve a more profound comprehension of the value of Song-Ming Study of Principle with a circumspective outlook that surveys the entirety of Chinese philosophy.

2 The Elevation of Sincerity and Brightness

The establishment of Song-Ming Study of Principle played a decisive part in the refinement of Confucian thought regarding the theory of transcendence. Despite their diverse backgrounds and seemingly variated dictums, thinkers of the Study of Principle tradition find no disagreement with regard to their ultimate goal. Although Daoist characteristics are eminent in the thought of Zhou Dunyi, the founding master of the Study of Principle tradition, his ultimate goal lies in the pursuit of "Sincerity". Zhou's interpretation of "Sincerity", i.e. transcendence is immanence, is coherent with his theory of cosmogony and self-cultivation, namely "*wuji* yet then *taiji*" and "upholding tranquility". In his *Comprehending the Book of Change* 通书, Zhou Dunyi comments on Sincerity, "Sincerity is the foundation of the sage. 'Vast is the great and originating (power) indicated by *Qian*, all things owe to it their beginning,' such is the origin of Sincerity. 'The method of *Qian* is to change and transform, so that everything obtains its correct nature as ordained', Sincerity is thus established. It is the pure and the supreme good. Therefore it is stated that 'one *yin* and one *yang* is called the Dao, what carries it on is goodness, what shows it in its completeness is the nature.' The originality 元 and prosperity 亨 are the flourishing movement of Sincerity; the benignancy 利 and persistence 贞 are the recurring movement of Sincerity. Great is the *Book of Change*, the origin of the nature and the ordinance by Heaven!"[2] Sincerity is both the root and origin of the myriad things and the totality of all things themselves. From the perspective of the root and origin, Sincerity is transcendent; from the perspective of the myriad things, it is immanent. From the transcendental aspect, the Dao is antecedent and fundamental;

2 Zhou Dunyi, The Works of Zhou Dunyi, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1990, pp. 12n.

from the immanent aspect, the myriad things accomplish themselves in the vast changing network of the Dao, and in their doing so, they also realize and embody the Dao. "Sincerity" is the development and expansion as well as the return of the myriad things with respect to the Dao. The ideal personality grasps and unifies both the transcendental and the immanent aspects of Sincerity. For Zhou Dunyi, the ideal personality is precisely the one who identifies with Sincerity. Such a person would find no separation between the transcendental and the secular, and would manifest a strong and conscious interest in the ultimate concern and pursuit for Sincerity, while being aloof and effortless with regard to secular affairs. In Zhou Dunyi's words, "With the noble person, honorable is the one filled with the Dao and rich is the one with his body settled; therefore, he is in constant composure and perfect contentment. So he attaches little importance to rank, status, gold and jade, and allots them no extra weight!"[3]

It is important for thinkers of the Study of Principle tradition to argue for the reality of the myriad things. It is because all that are found in human experience are real, as opposed to the Buddhist doctrines of "emptiness" and "void". Accordingly, the myriad things can be obscure or manifest, but there is no "nothingness" as opposed to "being". Zhang Zai writes on the reality of the myriad things, in order to reveal a state of "Sincerity-Brightness" that transcends all concrete and individual circumstances. The former is summarized in "the Great Vacuity is *qi*" and the latter is signified in the "expanded heart-mind". The "expanded heart-mind" is a state-of-attainment which reaches beyond the limits of concrete experience while also affirming the reality of things. It teaches one to be unified with the myriad things and with the Sincerity-substance 诚体 represented by the Dao of Heaven, which is markedly different from Buddhist and Daoist doctrines which argue for a freedom of mind that is dependent upon the illusory nature of the myriad things. Hence, Zhang Zai emphasizes the distinction between "knowledge from the virtue-nature" and "knowledge from seeing and hearing". Knowledge from seeing and hearing relies on sense organs and therefore does not afford any understanding of the Sincerity-substance, whereas knowledge from the virtue-nature is the result of a breakthrough beyond knowledge from empirical senses that is made possible when a certain state-of-attainment is reached via the cultivation of one's virtue. Knowledge from the virtue-nature is not gained via the empirical sense organs, yet it also cannot be attained without empirical knowledge.[4]

3 Zhou (1990), p. 38.

4 Zhang Zai, The Works of Zhang Zai, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1978, p. 24.

The state of being unified with the myriad things is termed the state of "Sincerity-Brightness" by Zhang Zai, who writes, "if Heaven and human are thought to have different functions, then one is still yet unqualified to speak of Sincerity; if Heaven and human are thought to have different knowledge, then one is still yet unqualified to speak of Brightness. The 'Sincerity-Brightness' is such that no small or big is seen between the nature and the Dao of Heaven." As one reaches this state-of-attainment, a new relationship between the myriad things and mankind is also brought about. This new understanding in turn offers a new interpretation of important Confucian doctrines. Zhang writes, "The unification of righteousness and ordinance lies in the Principle; the unification of *ren* (humaneness) and intellect lies in the sage; the unification of movement and stillness lies in the Spirit; the unification of *yin* and *yang* lies in the Dao; the unification of the nature and the Dao of Haven lies in Sincerity."[5] From the objective viewpoint, the Principle exists necessarily; whereas from the subjective viewpoint, it is an obligation which an individual must fulfil. A person ought to have both a heart-mind that sympathizes and cares for the general public and those around him and an adequate wisdom which enables him to attend to his affairs in whichever manner appropriate. The ideal personality for Zhang Zai stresses a unity of *ren* and intellect, the internal and the external. The fundamental principle that undergirds the myriad things is the "one *yin* and one *yang*", it operates in a mysterious and spirit-like way in which movement is with stillness and stillness is with movement; the Dao of Heaven in a person is the nature, to realize and confirm the Dao of Heaven is Sincerity, and the Sincerity is the state of the unity of Heaven and human. In Zhang Zai's philosophy, the concern for transcendence, i.e. the Sincerity of the Dao of Heaven, and the realization of it in one's body and heart – these alone are the ultimate concern. In this state-of-attainment, one gains an extraordinary understanding of the meeting of Heaven and human and of the affairs of human society. The nature-substance and the intellectual faculty belong equally to the human body as they are bestowed to us naturally. Therefore the foremost mission for a person is to preserve and guarantee his nature-substance, and follow this nature in his action. According to Zhang Zai, the intellectual faculty lacks the initiative power gained from self-cultivation; it is at work spontaneously, unwittingly, and without a consciousness of its own. If one assumes that it is the effect of one's own effort and control, one misappropriates Heaven's credit as his own.[6]

5 Zhang (1978), p. 20.
6 Zhang (1978), p. 25.

The Sincerity representing the unification of an individual and the Dao of Heaven is the entire goal and meaning of human endeavor, all other intellectual and cognitive activities can be accomplished smoothly following the example of it. This is Zhang Zai's understanding of the basic existence and action of human beings. In his philosophical system, the virtue-nature is placed at the most important position and endowed with enormous initiative: the virtue-nature is interpretive and active; whereas the intellectual faculty is mechanic and passive. Zhang Zai emphasizes the knowledge of the virtue-nature and the fact that human is an interpretive animal. The act of interpreting material and mechanic objects of nature as symbolic bearer of moral value useful for the self-cultivation of virtue is the foundation and starting point of the path to transcendence. According to the *Western Inscription*, Zhang Zai believes that Heaven and Earth are one's parents, the people are one's compatriots, the society is one's family, and the myriad things are one's peers. As a result, an action carried out upon one's fellow human beings is essentially the same as it carried out upon Heaven: to thoroughly comprehend the spirit-like and master the processes of the transformation is a continuation of the will of one's parents; wealth and social status are natural gifts presented by Heaven and Earth; and the compliance with life and the peace with death is within one's natural duty. The veneration for transcendence thus turns into spontaneous actions in one's daily affairs in ordinary worldly life.

From a broad perspective, the tendency for traditional Confucian thinkers to place more theoretical import on political and social affairs, postnatal cultivation and practical philosophy instead of a priori principles and laws of nature is mitigated henceforth after Shao Yong. The absolute and transcendent nature of the object of ultimate concern became more prominent in philosophical writings thereafter. Shao Yong's 'numerical' argumentation for the innate reality of Principle and his emphasis on a postnatal 'observing the myriad things' in order to thoroughly understand the Principle made an indispensable contribution to the Study of Principle. According to Shao Yong, postnatal spiritual effort is an adherence to and a spontaneous continuation of one's prenatal fundamental nature. Hence, in Shao Yong's philosophy the prenatal and the postnatal are two concepts on the same trail. Following Shao Yong's contribution and Zhu Xi's modification, principles in the tradition of Study of Principle, including "the Principle precedes *qi*", "the substance and the function come from one origin", "one root with myriad differentiations", "studying below and reaching above" are greatly developed and disseminated. Indeed, Zhu Xi's *The Original Meaning of the Book of Change* relies on Shao Yong's *Xiantian Tu* 先天图 as its theoretic blueprint and foundation. Zhu Xi's evident predilection toward metaphysics and

fundamental principles owe largely to Zhou Dunyi's and Shao Yong's Daoist theoretical predisposition.

The fundamental being of the universe, which is also identified with the term "*Taiji*", is of foremost importance in Shao Yong's philosophy. It inherently consists of two opposite aspects, namely *yin* and *yang*. These aspects are two opposites that form a unified whole from which all kinds of numerological relations spring forth, and from the numerological relations come the structures and forms representing the myriad things.[7] In light of this genealogical sequence, the fundamental substance of the universe is the nature-substance. *Taiji* itself is absolute and at rest, whereas the process in which it manifests itself in the myriad things is active and mobile. The myriad things ultimately return to the *Taiji*. Although this doctrine is influenced by Laozi's "returning to one's root and fulfilling one's ordained end" and predominantly uses terminologies from the study of the *Book of Change*, the emphasis of Shao Yong's theory lies in that the "numbers" are the origin of the myriad things. Although the numbers are derived from the *yin-yang* motion of the *Taiji*, but they are the actual determining factors of the myriad things. *Taiji* is unitary, numbers are diverse. *Taiji* is the substance, numbers are its functions. One is to observe the substance from its functions. Therefore, the unitary, active, spontaneous and healthful network which is composed of the myriad things is of utmost importance for Shao Yong.[8] To method for grasping this changing and manifold *Taiji* is to "observe the myriad things", which is to perceive external objects as they are. In order to do this, one mainly has to grasp its principle and nature, as well as the necessity of its unique being-so given by its interrelationship with the myriad things.[9] Shao Yong's conception of "observing the myriad things" follows the *Commentary on the Book of Change*, which says, "exhaust the principles and fully attain the nature to arrive at the ordinance (by Heaven)." But Shao Yong has eliminated all traces of moral implication that is found in Mengzi's "exhausting one's heart-mind, knowing the nature, and knowing Heaven." Instead, he considers the innate principles and natures of the myriad things determined by the "numbers" to be his central focus of concern. "Observing the myriad things" means to acknowledge the way things are as they appear without personal addition. The various aspects of the heart-mind, especially traditional Confucian moral interpretations of the heart-mind, are very much diminished, whereas prenatal, inherent principles are

7 Shao Yong, *Huangji Jingshi Shu*, Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou Ancient Books Publishing House 1993, pp. 424, 358.
8 Shao (1993), p. 356.
9 Shao (1993), p. 295.

greatly emphasized. These principles even limit the use of interpretative initiative. Shao Yong writes, "being naturally as they are, such is the Heaven, only the sage could seek for it; imitating and following, such is the human; as for the things one does at times and stops at times, such is the human and also the Heaven," "the study in the prenatal realm mainly proceeds with Sincerity; the ultimate Sincerity can connect to the spirit-like Brightness, and without Sincerity one cannot attain the Dao."[10] In Shao Yong's thought, the objective and absolute nature of the object of ultimate concern is greatly distinguished.

In the tradition of the Study of Principle, there are two interpretive camps, namely that which emphasizes the objective aspect and that which emphasizes the subjective aspect. Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi belong to the former camp; whereas Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming belong to the latter camp. Shao Yong is a complete adherent of objective principles, even more so than Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi. Shao Yong does not mention the refined sincerity, because for him, a tranquil, emotionless observation of the myriad things without addition is itself "Sincerity", i.e. the greatest extent to which an individual could be unified with the Dao of Heaven. From this we can begin to appreciate why Shao Yong has decided to title his magnum opus *Huangji Jingshi Shu* 皇极经世书. "*Huang*" means great. "*Ji*" means exactitude and correctness. In this work, Shao states that the great, exact, and correct Principle has created the myriad things, and to excel in political and societal affairs one must be instructed by this Principle. Shao Yong elucidated the "Sincerity-Brightness" of the *Zhongyong* in a style that "reveals the spirit without being encumbered by a single word". In fact, Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and Shao Yong all helped to delineate a path toward an object of pursuit with ultimate meaning for the whole of Song-Ming Study of Principle, which is to set out from one's practice and act with "Sincerity" as an attitude in the presence of Heaven, and be ascertained that such attitude shall lead to the intercommunication between human and Heaven, namely a so-called "transcendence" in the terminology of modern philosophy. Although this path merely outlines a basic blueprint, it laid a seminal foundation for later thinkers with similar pursuit. The mission for all later Song-Ming thinkers of the Study of Principle tradition is to elaborate on how the aim above could be achieved, i.e. what are the spiritual effort required to realize Sincerity within oneself and thereby achieve an ultimate unification between oneself and Heaven.

10 Shao (1993), pp. 355, 425.

3 The Oneness of the Nature-Substance and the Diversity of its Manifestation

Zhou Dunyi's emphasis on cosmology shows theoretic influence inherited from late Tang dynasty. With regard to human nature, he continues the Han-Tang tradition of explaining it with toughness, softness, good and evil in the endowment of *qi*. The "nature" in Zhang Zai's discussion mainly indicates the nature of Heaven, namely the stillness and purity of the Great Vacuity and *qi's* tendency to attack and seize. The emphasis on human and his moral distinction from animals is not yet given a prominent theoretic status. And Shao Yong's main focus is on the nature of *Taiji* itself, he spoke more of Heaven and less of human. This situation is reversed by the two Cheng brothers, their preference for the nature-substance closes the distance between individual existence and the absolute being or transcendence, thereby bringing together the studying below and the reaching above.

Cheng Hao's focus is on "heart-mind". His "heart-mind" is not the reason to sense, perceive and take in external objects, but the manifestation of the innate moral consciousness and the realization of this manifestation. First, he affirms that *ren* is innate within the human heart-mind, and manifests itself constantly; the effort of cultivation is to recognize, preserve and conserve this *ren*.[11] Cheng Hao also believes that despite the innate nature of the *ren*, the recognition of it is entirely natural and should neither be interrupted nor promoted. The natural state of the heart-mind is an imitation of the natural state of Heaven and Earth: "The constancy of Heaven and Earth is such for that it embraces all things in its heart and is itself without heart; the constancy of the sage is such for that he is in unison with all affairs in his feelings and is himself without feeling. Therefore, in the cultivation of a noble person, nothing is better than broadly becoming impartial and responding to coming things accordantly."[12] Cheng Hao emphasizes the immanent nature and moral character of the object of ultimate concern (i.e. the absolute being) and the naturalness of recognizing it. He places the absolute being in the human heart-mind, which melts away its steepness and sternness and turns a cold, indifferent absolute into a warm, tender and naturally emerging *ren* in the heart-mind. The transcendental character of the Study of Principle is hereby made more prominent.

11 Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, The Works of the Two Cheng Brothers, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1981, pp. 16n.

12 Cheng (1981), p. 460.

Ever since Mengzi came up with the theory of the "four sprouts", it is inherited as a basic doctrine by later Confucian thinkers. The originality of Cheng Hao is that he attributes and summarizes the four virtues with different functions in different fields into one single *ren* – the "full virtue", thereby conceptualizes, centralizes, and intensifies the diffuse, faint, phenomenal mental contents. In terms of the relationship between the nature and feelings, he no longer refers to the feelings themselves as the nature-substance, but points out the feelings as manifestations of the nature in order to explain the innate and essential position of the nature. *Ren* is the nature, and love is the feeling; *ren* is the substance, and love is the function. Classifying the *ren* (humaneness), righteousness, propriety and wisdom as the nature, and the commiseration and compassion, shame and resentment, deference and compliance, right and wrong as the feelings highlights the unity and solemnity of the Heaven-ordained, human-endowed nature. Upon this basis, Zhu Xi makes a more sophisticated and thorough elucidation of the doctrine "*ren* includes the four virtues": the substance of *ren* is *ren* itself, the proportion and propriety of the *ren* is its manifestation in the system and courtesies, the judgment of the *ren* is the choice of *ren* over one's desires, making it compliant with this choice and realizing it in real actions, and the distinguishability of the *ren* is to make the right choice in face of right and wrong and turn oneself towards *ren*. The *ren*, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are all different patterns of the nature under the guidance and regulation of *ren*, and are all directly related with *ren*.[13] *Ren* is the whole, and the four virtues are its categories; *ren* is the leader, and the four virtues are its assistants. "*Ren* includes the four virtues" congregates the differentiated into the one and converges the phenomena into the essence, it thus establishes an unprecedented unity and intensity of the fundamental *ren*-substance, establishing a new towering and pithy impression of the Study of Principle. Cheng Hao's "*ren* includes the four virtues" can be interpreted as that *ren* is fundamental, hence universal and necessary rather than occasional and dispensable; the essence of transcendence is the universal love, it presents itself within the human heart-mind and is the final direction of the human action. Consequently, the lack of love is a deviation from the essence of human.

The kind, frank and level disposition of Cheng the Elder and the strict, firm and upright one of Cheng the Younger make complementary contributions in the revelation of the transcendence. Cheng Yi stresses on the absoluteness of the Dao of Heaven and the penetration between it and the definite things. In *Cheng's Commentary on the Book of Change* 周易程氏传 he writes, "As for 'Heaven', specifically

13 Zhu Xi, The Works of Zhu Xi, Chengdu: Sichuan Education Press 1996, p. 2977.

speaking, it is the Dao, for even Heaven would not disobey it; separately speaking, it is called 'Heaven' in terms of its physical form, and is called '*Di* 帝' in terms of its domination, and is called 'spirits' in terms of its functions, and is called 'spirit' in terms of its marvel, and is called '*Qian*' in terms of its (vigorous) temperament."[14] There is only one Heaven, but there can be different perceptions of it from different aspects. Cheng Yi uses different concepts to describe Heaven because he wants people to understand its interpretability and non-singularity. The interpretation of Heaven can be multiple: there is Heaven of ruling, Heaven of principle, of destiny, of material, and of naturalness;[15] yet it is still a unitary Heaven. The mystique around Heaven is eliminated. Ever since Cheng Yi makes the doctrine of exhausting the principles and meanings of Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as an original approach of his academic thoughts, he establishes a solid foundation of rationalism. His understanding of the *yi* 易 was then most certainly under the guideline of "the substance and the function come from one origin, and the manifest and the abstruse have no gap between them, [thus one should] observe their convergence and transformation in order to act upon their codes and proprieties".[16] The substance and the abstruse are the Principle; the function and the manifest are the definite things. The "one origin" and "no gap" means there is no estrangement between the Principle and the events, the Principle is embodied in the events and the events alone are what reflect the Principle. To "observe the convergence and transformation" means to realize the mutual inclusion of the Principle and the events, and to act according to the Principle embodied in the events. Apart from a consideration for the needs in real action, what Cheng Yi wants to emphasize is that, the world is a flow of change of substance filled with order and principle, and such order and principle are all manifestations of one Principle. His interpretation of the *Book of Change* does not take the path of the images and numbers, but solely focuses on the meanings and principles of the hexagram and linear judgments. This is also intended to underscore the mutual relationship of the one principle and the myriad principles, and to establish laws for human action. Zhu Xi is very clear on this point: "Yichuan (Cheng Yi) saw a great truth, and then took the Classic to conform to his truth, he was not explaining the *Book of Change*."[17] With this understanding of the Principle, Cheng Yi's method

14 Cheng (1981), p. 695.

15 Feng Youlan, A History of Chinese Philosophy, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1961, p. 55.

16 Cheng (1981), p. 689.

17 Zhu Xi, Classified Words of Master Zhu, ed. by Li Jingde, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1986, p. 1653.

of cultivation is then "preservation and cultivation must take the attitude of *jing* 敬, and the improvement of study lies in extending knowledge".[18] At the same time, the theoretic emphasis on the myriad differentiations and in the detailed efforts, and the position against vagueness and generality were passed on to Zhu Xi through Li Tong as a Daonan school tradition.

Shao Yong and Cheng Yi both declare some kind of apriority of transcendence. But with Shao Yong, the numbers were prior to the principles, and the principles are derived from the numbers. However, Cheng Yi stresses that the Principle is primary and antecedent to the myriad things, and everything in the world are derivatives of the Principle. This shows that the interests and concerns of Cheng Yi in transcendent issues are developed entirely for the purpose of using them in reality. The Principle is the codes and norms of realistic affairs, it is the "should-so 所当然" of them. In terms of the definition of the Principle by Zhu Xi, "the reasons of the why-so 所以然, and the norms of the should-so", Shao Yong mainly emphasizes on the "reasons of the why-so", and Cheng Yi mainly focuses on the "norms of the should-so". The former is the what-is with a scientific nature; the latter is the what-should-be with a moral nature. Shao Yong's understanding of the society and history is subject to his "study of the numbers"; while Cheng Yi writes solely about social and human affairs, and all are compliant with the Principle. Even though his "investigating things to exhaust the principles" includes a wide range of issues, it mainly concentrates on human, worldly affairs. This was criticized by Zhu Xi who has an immense interest in the natural things.

Cheng Yi's philosophy emphasizes on "Heaven" as "principles and norms", and at the same time pays great attention to the relationship between the Principle and the events. Heaven as an object has multiple natures or interpretive dimensions, such as the foundation of existence, the vast flow of operation and transformation, the source of value, etc. Cheng Yi emphasizes on the orders and norms, i.e. the necessary and certain aspects of the Principle.[19] The meaning of this depiction and this focus is to counter against the Buddhist and Daoist concepts of "emptiness" and "nonexistence", and to affirm and highlight a transcendental "existence" and unify it with concrete matters in daily life, making it possible for the Study of Principle to have a universal theoretical form that is on par with Buddhist and Daoist doctrines. In a manner of speaking, this is connecting the transcendental dimension with the dimension of social concerns and the human world. This turns the Principle to an imperative, an obligation

18 Cheng (1981), p. 188.
19 Cheng (1981), pp. 132, 43, 153.

that is committed to voluntarily. Cheng Yi's "As for principle then there is only one Principle under Heaven, so push it to the four seas and it will always work; this has to be the Principle that withstands the inquiry into Heaven and Earth and the examination of the three Sovereigns", "All things have principles, obey them and they proceed with ease, disobey them and they proceed with difficulty. Everything follows its own principle, why exhaust your own strength with impertinence?"[20] etc., are all stressing the dimension above.

Cheng Yi's method of cultivation brought forth the different roles of knowledge and value in the cultivation of personality and their mutual assistance and enhancement. "Preserving the nature with *jing* 敬" is on the value side. "*Jing*" is a reverent, awed, vigilant, contained and composed attitude; use this attitude to guard and nourish the nature-substance innate in the heart-mind, and keep a fear of even the slightest laxation or failure. Besides, *jing* has the effect of transforming a mere natural principle into a principle of value through silent interpretation. "Extending knowledge" is mainly on the knowledge side. Cheng Yi thinks highly of the acquisition and accumulation of the knowledge, because it can be transformed with *jing* into value rationality. It emphasizes on the studying below and reaching above, to attain and confirm transcendence through the accumulation and penetration of definite knowledge. The studying below serves not only in the increase of knowledge, but also as a path towards transcendence. By this approach, the sternness of the metaphysical Principle and its insulation from the physical things are eliminated, and in its place is a generality interpreted from principles of particular things, and a transcendence interpreted from the actual world. In terms of thinking methods, this approach develops not the ability to abstract but the ability to interpret, not the ability of mere intellect but the ability to perceive values in knowledge. The "preserving the nature with *jing*" and the "improving study with the extension of knowledge" are two different realms of the spiritual activities, but since the pursuit of the good in the Study of Principle is the same, the merging of the two ways of thinking develop a unitary way of interpretative thinking. That Cheng Yi stresses the "Sincerity is what unifies the inside and the outside, without Sincerity there would be no things", "Things and I share the same principle, the moment you understand that, you understand this, this is the Dao that unifies the inside and the outside",[21] is a clear demonstration of this approach.

The pursuit of the two Cheng brothers towards the meeting of Heaven and human is based on the thoughts of their predecessors, and they arrive at a

20 Cheng (1981), pp. 38, 123.
21 Cheng (1981), pp. 9, 193.

breakthrough in two ways: First, they affirm the foundational position of the heart-mind with an innate moral consciousness; second, they point out the two basic spiritual efforts in the pursuit of transcendence starting with this heart-mind. By explicating and elucidating the *ren* principle inherent within the heart-mind, through "preserving the nature with *jing*" and "improving study with the extension of knowledge", a finite existence could establish communication with the infinite transcendence. The purpose of this communication is clearly not just to speak out one's feelings or to accumulate knowledge, but to accomplish some spiritual effect with respect to the ultimate concern. The effect of the latter is such that when things come and one responds accordantly, the inside and the outside are unified through the Dao, whereby the possibilities of the human heart-mind can be fully explored.

4 The Transcendence and Immanence of the One Principle with Myriad Differentiations

The two Cheng brothers initiate the study of principle (in the narrow sense) and the study of the heart-mind with different academic emphases,[22] and their successor, Zhu Xi, develops both lines of thought of the Cheng brothers. The doctrines of "investigating things to extend knowledge, preserving the nature with *jing*" are inherited from Cheng Yi and the doctrine "*ren* includes the four virtues" is mainly developed from the thought of Cheng Hao. As the great integrator of the Northern-Song-Dynasty Study of Principle, Zhu Xi is a prominent metaphysician, his structured thinking provides a comprehensive theoretic and interpretive system that is both analytic and comprehensive, both oppositional and unified for every aspect of the Study of Principle. His accomplishments in the study of the Classics, Study of Principle, history and literature, and his characteristic academic pursuit, namely "reaching for expansiveness and exhausting the subtleties" embodied in these accomplishments, together constituted the uniqueness of the transcendental aspect of his thought.

There are many layers in Zhu Xi's learning, one building upon another and altogether creating a whole. The most basic is the theory of Principle-*qi*. Principle cannot separate from *qi* and *qi* cannot separate from Principle. But since Principle is the "why-so" and "should-so" of the *qi*, Principle is more fundamental, more important, and logically prior to *qi*. Principle can be discussed separately

22 Feng (1961), p. 869.

as well as comprehensively. The comprehensiveness of all principles of Heaven and Earth and the myriad things is called *Taiji*. The characteristic of formlessness and imagelessness of *Taiji* is called *wuji*. "*Wuji* yet then *taiji*" is an excellent description of the fundamental substance of the universe: as the overall absoluteness and the basis of all existences, it is formless and imageless, but it is not unsubstantial. It is a metaphysical "existence 有", and a metaphysical existence is nonexistence 无. "Existence" addresses its effect in reality, for all things and activities rely on and are dominated by it; "nonexistence" expresses that its existence cannot be experienced, it cannot be grasped with the senses. It is precisely that which cannot be experienced whose effect is without limit. Because of this attribute, *Taiji* is ethereal and yet full, nonexistent and yet powerful. It can be comprehended through will-power or emotions, and it can also conform to empirical beings flawlessly through interpretation. As a rationalist, Zhu Xi's theory of Principle-*qi* and theory of *Taiji* are a reflection of the why-so of Heaven and Earth and the myriad things, and are eventually settled in the appeal for transcendence, in order to find a sense of belonging in spirit.

When Zhu Xi learned from Li Tong (Mr. Yanping), apart from the Daonan school traditional doctrine "experiencing the not-yet-aroused in stillness," another thing that greatly influenced his life-long academic path was the emphasis on the myriad differentiations. "A saying of Yanping goes: 'What distinguishes our Confucian learning from the heterodox doctrines, is the one principle with myriad differentiations. About the oneness of principle there is no need to be concerned; what's difficult lies in the myriad differentiations.'"[23] This turns Zhu Xi from the vagueness and generality from his early learning of the Zen to a meticulous and specific track. This turn is memorized, practiced and enjoyed by Zhu Xi all his life. This way of thinking is an inheritance from Cheng Yi, but also a result of Zhu Xi's lone hard exploration. Although Cheng Yi thought that "there are many ways to approach an exhaustive study of principles," he nevertheless lays more emphasis on social ethics. His "exhaustive study of principles" is directed mostly at worldly affairs. For example, his *Cheng's Commentary on the Book of Change*, the most thorough and pithy work explaining the *Book of Change* through meanings and principles, mostly explains how man should act in accordance with the *yi* principle, but does not discuss natural things a lot. But in Zhu Xi's *Original Meanings of the Book of Change*, not only does he try to restore the historical truth that "*the Book of Change* is a book for divination", he also uses considerable examples in nature to explain the *yi* principle. He believes in a consistency in human affairs

23 Qian Mu: New Record of Master Zhu's Studies, Chengdu: Bashu Publishing House 1986, p. 740.

and the physical world, and the scope of the latter is even larger and its power of persuasion stronger than the former. After Zhu Xi's rectification, transcendence is embodied on a more universal basis within everything: not only ethics, but also physics are its manifestation, and the mutual interpretation between the two is even stronger than in the theories of thinkers before Zhu Xi. Cheng Yi's "the moment you understand that, you understand this" receives even firmer support and becomes a common understanding within the Study of Principle. Natural things, as the reference for and projection of cultivating one's virtue, also obtains an interpretative space far transcending their original meanings, breaking free of the Confucian limitation on only focusing on human affairs, and unintentionally winning more emphasis on exploring natural things itself. The importance of Zhu Xi's "one principle with myriad differentiations" is such that, to realize the "one principle" one needs to go through the "differentiations", and the differentiations are not limited to any certain field. In this way, the relation between the relative and the absolute, the particular and the general, the definite and the abstract becomes closer, providing a more direct platform for thoughts regarding the convergence and mutual transformation of the two: "Ten thousand is one, and one is ten thousand. For all-together is one *Taiji*, yet every single thing has also one *Taiji*."[24] This leap and flashback is an example of undertaking an interpretative reflection between the two sides through analogies, significations and metaphors. In this way, Zhu Xi digs deep into the fundamental tension of philosophy between the general and the particular.

In addition, Zhu Xi considers the "one principle" to be more powerful than "myriad differentiations". A special characteristic of Zhu Xi's thought is his concern for the nature of things and his dislike of arguments from observable phenomena; he considers the nature to be internal, deep, and enduring and the phenomena to be external, shallow, and transient. For example, when Mengzi argues that goodness is rooted in human nature, his argument begins from the "four sprouts", which themselves are identified with the goodness of the nature. However, Zhu Xi considers the "four sprouts" to be "emotions", whereas the nature is what makes a human a human. For Zhu Xi, the emotions are the manifestation of the nature but is not to be identified with the latter. Therefore, *ren* is "the virtue of the heart-mind and the principle of love" but not the emotion of love itself. Zhu Xi's criticisms of Han Yu's "broadly loving is what we call *ren*" and Xie Liangzuo's "speak of *ren* in terms of awareness" are out of the same reason, for Zhu Xi thinks they confuse human nature and emotions as

24 Zhu (1986), p. 2409.

well as the metaphysical and the physical. This distinction from Zhu Xi is meant to explain that there is a fundamental substance beyond and behind all observable phenomena, and we cannot simply identify the former with the latter. The boundary between the two is strict and the former is more fundamental, more profound, and possesses an even firmer and more enduring reality. Therefore with Zhu Xi, the one principle is with myriad differentiations, the Principle is seen in matters and affairs, the fundamental substance is seen in the phenomena; the two cannot be separated. The one principle is more fundamental, it is to be distinguished from the totality of the myriad differentiations. Comprehending the one principle is the most fundamental and the most crucial pursuit. This could serve to highlight the authority and importance of the one principle as well as the difficulty of recognizing it. Due to this difficulty, there is joy in confirming it through one's own practice.

Zhu Xi's greatest contribution to the Study of Principle is the establishment of the study of the Four Books and the foundation of its future development. His annotations and interpretations, in a certain sense, represent and formalize a hermeneutical approach to Confucian studies which includes a gradual, ordered progression in one's studies, studying below and reaching above, and aiming at becoming one with the Sincerity-substance of the Dao of Heaven. This can be seen from the logical order Zhu Xi set up for the Four Books: "I want people first read the *Daxue* to set the frame and scope; then read the *Lunyu* to set up the foundation; then read the *Mengzi* to watch its glow and rouse; then read the *Zhongyong* to seek the subtle and abstruse parts of the ancients."[25] Zhu Xi believed that the *Zhongyong* should be read at last and that it was not suitable for beginners, one must first read the other three books and comprehend their essence before dedicating to it. The *Zhongyong* greatly discusses the Dao of Heaven and the nature-principle, for example, it begins with: "The ordinance by Heaven is what we call the nature, following the nature is what we call the Dao, and the cultivation of the Dao is what we call the system of instruction"; and then discusses "being watchful over one's solitariness"; and after that "the state of equilibrium and harmony" and taking "equilibrium and harmony" as the great root and the universal way of Heaven and Earth and the myriad things; finally, it discusses the results brought about by "realizing equilibrium and harmony". According to Zhu Xi's explanation: "First, (the *Zhongyong*) states that the Dao originates out of Heaven and cannot be changed, its substance is equipped within oneself and cannot be parted. Secondly, it discusses the essentials of

25 Zhu (1986), p. 249.

preservation, cultivation and introspection. Lastly, it discusses the acme of the transforming influence of the sage and the spirit-like."[26] Zhu Xi regards the *Zhongyong* very highly for it has the greatest capacity for leading people beyond the definite and acquire an enlightened understanding of the Sincerity-substance of the Dao of Heaven. Organizing the Four Books in such an order is intended to indicate the order of learning for learners: from definite to abstract, from particular to general, with the highest goal of arriving at the "soundless and scentless". This is the personality and academic quality demanded to gain the vision and scope of the ultimate concern. After that, with the instruction of the doctrine "reach to the highest and most brilliant and take path of the balanced and constant", one shall once again come back to the ground. Therefore, Zhu Xi interprets the "*yong*" (constant) of "*zhongyong*" as "common or ordinary", giving the *Zhongyong* the characteristic of one principle dispersing into myriad matters and myriad matters converging into one principle, all with smooth flexibility. This theoretic emphasis is closely related to the high value he places on the one principle with myriad differentiations, and it also accords with the nature of Study of Principle as philosophy. Zhu Xi, as a great integrator and accomplisher of former theories, prefers an approach with fine order, discrimination, and a gradual progression. However, as far as other scholars with different temperaments or academic backgrounds are concerned, Zhu Xi's attempt to approach the Dao of Heaven by extending knowledge could be difficult and confusing, and would most certainly arouse opposition from other "easy and simple" cultivating method – what the latter takes issue with is not the object of ultimate concern itself, but the direction in which one spends his effort on in order to realize such concern.

5 The Different Levels of Realizing the Dao Through the Heart-Mind

Throughout the history of Chinese philosophy, the focus on the subjectivity of the self is always a prominent doctrine. The fondness of Chinese philosophy for spiritual experience, the stress on moral intuition, and the importance attached to the interrelated and interpenetrated ways of thinking such as analogy, imagination,

26 Zhu Xi, The Four Books in Sections and Sentences or with Collected Comments, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1983, p. 18.

metaphor, etc. all endow the study of the heart-mind[27] with a strong momentum. The ever growing permeation of Buddhist and religious Daoist thought on Confucianism even more so make it an important school of thought within Song-Ming Study of Principle that could rival that of Cheng-Zhu.

Although Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming are both regarded as great masters of the study of the heart-mind, there are big differences between them. Lu Jiuyuan did not deny the existence of principles in things themselves; but he considered the principles in external things and the moral consciousness in the internal world as one. Through interpretation, the principles of external things can show moral meanings and the moral consciousness can be seen as objective principles. The two are unified. Lu Jiuyuan's "the universe (lit. time and space) is my heart-mind and my heart-mind is the universe;" "the matters within the universe are the matters within one's duty, and the matters within one's duty are the matters within the universe"[28] are precisely expressing this point. With Lu Jiuyuan, there is only one principle in the heart-mind. It can be manifested as compassion, shame/resentment, and other moral virtues. There is also only one principle in the whole universe, which can be manifested as different principles of different things. Moreover, the principle of the heart-mind and the principle of the universe are, in the end, the same. Therefore, "the heart-mind is one heart-mind; the principle is one Principle. The utmost rightness comes down to one, the essential meaning cannot be dual. Hence this heart-mind and this Principle allow actually no room for being dual."[29] The Principle is given a great power of inclusiveness. Any correct value, natural principle, or inevitable tendency, etc., can all be seen as the "Principle" and as one. And moral virtues were regarded as having great initiative, ruling man's will, emotion and reason. If one leaves this Principle in the heart-mind, one loses the foundation of everything. Therefore, all Lu's theories can be epitomized in a single sentence from Mengzi: "First establish what is grand 先立乎其大."

Lu Jiuyuan has all of the principles in the universe formalized, compressed, analogized and attached to the Principle in the heart-mind. This formalization in turn serves as a presupposition for interpretation: the Principle in the heart-mind could offer multi-faceted interpretations. Lu Jiuyuan's "first establish what is grand" has two advantages: the "one principle" is an easily comprehensible totality, thus can let people directly enter the fundamental state without

27 Translator's note: Here the author is using the broad sense of the term, in which case basically any study focused on the heart-mind could be called the study of the heart-mind. Such cases are seen in many Song-Ming philosophical works.

28 Lu Jiuyuan, The Works of Lu Jiuyuan, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 1980, p. 273.

29 Lu (1980), pp. 4n.

getting lost in details; as for the details, a great interpretive space is allowed for, which creates conditions for free transitions and leaps between different branches of spiritual activities, such as reason, will, and aesthetics, and they serve as a fertile soil for the undying vigor and liveliness of the heart-mind. Between this division and totality, this comprehensiveness and particularity, an abundant space for intellectual activities unfolds. The breadth of interpretation is limited only by one's creativity. Room has been left for the free play of reason and will. This is different from Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi – they have a very organized nature, often quite specific in boundary and essence, leaving no room for confusion. This is good for clarifying definitions and ideas, but diminishes the power of interpretation. Therefore, Lu Jiuyuan directly takes a jab at Zhu Xi: "'Their speculation and imitation were skillful, their copying and borrowing were close; the patterns and frames were enough to make themselves confident, and the categories and segmentations were enough to make themselves content', these words cut into the center of old Mr. Hui (Zhu Xi) 's illness."[30] As for Lu himself, he would neither agree with "I add footnotes to the Six Classics", nor let "the Six Classics add footnotes to me", but purely and entirely listen to his original heart-mind and follow the naturalness.[31] As a result, his theory of spiritual effort merely proclaims that one should "directly understand your heart-mind and see your nature 明心见性" – a subtractive, lessen-the-burden kind of effort. A theory like this could easily inspire a wild spirit, creating independent, maverick rebels, or self-inspired, fearless fighters. On the other hand, those in the Cheng-Zhu school are more likely to follow the rules, take a solid and safe path, and not be easily agitated. Indeed, Lu Jiuyuan laid emphasis not on the submission and obedience to the presence of Heaven or Principle, but on their unlimited potential for interpretation, and the refined faith rooted in the Principle itself in our heart-mind. Yet this is still a pursuit of transcendence, a religious appeal; more admirably, there is always a rational

30 Lu (1980), p. 420.

31 Translator's note: The words "the Six Classics add footnotes to me, I add footnotes to the Six Classics" were Lu Jiuyuan's answer to a student's question asking why Lu didn't write any books. (Lu (1980), p. 399) Without punctuation marks, it could be read in multiple ways, depending on which part is a statement and which part is a question. According to Lu's *Chronicle*, the sentence is "the Six Classics should add footnotes to me, why would I add footnotes to the Six Classics?" (*Ibid*., p. 522) There is another evidence in his *Recorded Sayings*: "If in our study we know the fundamental, then all the Six Classics are our footnotes." (*Ibid*., pg. 395) In modern scholarship, these words are often quoted to express two opposite hermeneutical methods. But as we can see, the original meaning of the sentence is not about how to interpret the Classics, but about the attitude one should hold towards them while keeping in mind what is most important.

containment in the study of the heart-mind, preventing it from entering mania and ecstasy. Due to "reaching to the highest and most brilliant and taking path of the balanced and ordinary", interpretation efforts always wander in the realm of experiential things; thus the unconditional submission to the absolute being becomes unlikely, and the personality of oneself would not fade away and get lost in illusions. This seemingly "shallow" mode of thought however restricts the wickedness that may result from "profundity". This is one of the unique aspects of Lu Jiuyuan's philosophy.

The theories of Wang Yangming and Liu Jiuyuan have differences and similarities. They both belong to the study of the heart-mind and both promote the moral consciousness originally within the heart-mind; yet Wang lays more emphasis on the pursuit for objective knowledge. Lu Jiuyuan's goal is to assert the main pursuit of the scholar-gentry, he seeks after the spirit of Mengzi and relies on no one else. He wants to promote the study for one's own improvement 为己之学, to break away from the habit of flaunting and comparing in learning while being wretched and fatigued in action, so he talked a lot about "first establish what is grand". The pursuit of knowledge does not garner sufficient emphasis in Lu Jiuyuan's thought. Zhu Xi regards understanding and thinking as the main functions of the heart-mind and suggests that one should study knowledge first and value later, which is really balanced and in line with common sense. On the other hand, Lu Jiuyuan thinks highest of the inner feelings and moral consciousness, so his theories begin directly from the moral and aesthetic nature of the heart-mind. Wang Yangming lived in a time when Zhu Xi's theories prevailed, Zhu Xi's imprints are ubiquitous in his thought. He actually incorporates the advantages of both Zhu and Lu: he values both will and knowledge. Because of his special experience – the extreme difficulties he lived through in the uncivilized lands of Longchang that led to the enlightenment of his life, he is more inclined to stress the power of will. Yet still, in his late mature thought, the unity of morality and knowledge is implied by his doctrine "extending pure knowing". He deems Lu Jiuyuan's thought as a great help to inspire virtue, but not enough to provide a complete basis and direction for practice. Zhu Xi's thought, on the other hand, separated knowledge and virtue into two parts and has a tendency to encourage a detailed and dedicated pursuit for knowledge with little effort spent on moral self-cultivation. Wang Yangming wants to overcome both maladies of Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan; he wants to tread a path where morality is the leader and knowledge is the assistant, and the natural unity of the two is gradually realized through actual practice. Therefore, his view on the relationship of the two is such that "the 'taking path of inquiry and study 道问学' alone is what we do to 'honor the virtuous nature 尊德性'. (. . .) Is there any virtuous nature honored with nothing, without

any inquiry and study? Is there any inquiry and study for the sake of nothing, without any involvement in the virtuous nature?"[32] His "extending pure knowing" is actually extending the inherent moral consciousness to external things, leading to knowledge through everyday practice under the guidance of right values, absorbing the knowledge within the pure knowing, extending it over and over again, obtaining knowledge, purifying morality, and elevating the heart-mind. The extending, expanding and elevating of the pure knowing does not stop till the end of one's life. During this progress, the virtuous, intellectual and aesthetic nature gradually fuse with and influence each other.

The person who achieves this condition is a "Grand Person", i.e. someone who is unified with the myriad things. In his late years, Wang Yangming highly praises the "unity with the myriad things". In the *Inquiry on the Daxue* 大学问, he describes the Grand Person: "As for the Grand Person, he takes Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one unity, views all under Heaven as one family and regards the Middle Kingdom as one person. If there is distinction in his mind just because things are physically separated, then this is a petty person already. (. . .) This is rooted in the Heaven-ordained nature, naturally bright and without blindness, and that is why it is called the 'bright virtue'."[33] Wang Yangming's spiritual ethos is at first mundane and speculative, but with the expansion and unfoldment of his social practice, his spirit becomes more and more transcending; he has the heart for the unity with the myriad things, and he also has the mind to carry out differential love in actual practice. He therefore develops the theory of the "natural orderliness in the pure knowing 良知上自然的条理". The essence of this theory is to love universally in the spiritual sense, and to embody priorities of values in particular activities. This kind of priority and differentiation is presented in the form of intuition within the pure knowing, and it instructs people's actual practice.

The transcendental nature of the "unity with the myriad things" can be explained from two aspects: the discard of evil and the return towards being itself. Good and evil is an important theme in the Study of Principle. The so-called "evil" can be understood broadly or narrowly: evil in the narrow sense is that of law and morality, namely the destruction of good and beautiful things; evil in the broad sense is the alienation from transcendence and the "ought-to-be" within one's own heart. The "extending pure knowing" is actually the process of wielding the willpower of goodness in actual practice to expel and rectify evil.[34]

32 Wang Yangming, The Complete Works of Wang Yangming, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House 1992, p. 122.
33 Wang (1992), p. 968.
34 Wang (1992), p. 971.

Evil is the deviation from the Principle of Heaven, whether in action or in thought. Therefore, Wang Yangming's "doing good and removing evil" also applies to both action and thought. "With the purge of the desires of man, flows the Principle of Heaven" – this is the state of approaching transcendence where the refined faith points; this is the state of overcoming the alienation from the transcendence. The evil in the sense of law and morality is evident and public, everyone knows it is evil; however, evil in the broad sense is concealed and private, and not everyone knows it is evil. Evil in the narrow sense is acquired; while evil in the broad sense is innate. This is why Zhu Xi, once in his explanation of the *Daxue*'s "making bright one's bright virtue", said, "The bright virtue, is what man receives from Heaven, clear, brilliant and without blindness, to include all principles and respond to all events. Only sometimes, when it is limited by the endowment of the *qi* or obscured by the desires of man, it is confused; yet still there is something in the brightness of its fundamental state that never fades away. Therefore scholars should follow what is aroused from it and make bright of it, in order to return to the original state."[35] The harm and obscuration to man's innate goodness caused by the *qi* held within and the desires for things is ontological; man's alienation from the original and true state is inevitable. Knowing this embodies the self-awareness of man's commitment towards transcendence.

The unity with the myriad things is also the unification with the absolute being like Heaven and the return towards transcendence. Wang Yangming regarded the unity with the myriad things as the settlement of objective reason within subjective reason, and the perfect realization of the both is the immanent manifestation of transcendence. Objective reason indicates the carefree, natural and harmonious things themselves; while subjective reason means the initiative of human mind. The unity with the myriad things is the perfect correspondence of the subject and the object, it is the realization of the immanent transcendence, and the return towards what-ought-to-be with the overcoming of the defects of what-is. The process of man's self-cultivation is the process of returning to the unifying *ren* 一体之仁 through spiritual effort. This process includes evil and corruption, and only by including evil as an indispensable stage in cultivation can the final goodness be realized. Since evil is inevitable and any purity gained is gained through the struggle with it, hence it is the process of cultivation that deserves the greatest attention. Wang Yangming's extending pure knowing is just a theory focusing on practice and process. In actual practice, the natural orderliness in the pure knowing will give natural, appropriate responses to external

35 Zhu (1983), p.3.

things according to the principles settled and condensed within the heart-mind; it will mind both the objectivity of the absolute and the subjective principles in realizing the absolute; thus the unifying *ren* and the differential love will co-exist: the unifying *ren* means the universality of transcendence, while the differential love is the manifestation of the one-in-all and all-in-one. Definite things are, on the one hand, particular and unique, and on the other hand, sharing the same principle for being part of the universe. Among Yangming's disciples, the "Rectifying Heart-mind in the Innate Realm" school 先天正心派 emphasizes the unifying *ren* and its totality, originality, and purity; while the "Making Sincere of the Thoughts in the Acquired Realm" school 后天诚意派 emphasizes on the partiality, capacity for nurture and the possibility of corruption of the individual person. Wang Yangming once admonished his students saying: "If you two gentlemen could adopt each other's ideas, then all those who are above or below average could be led into the Dao. If you each hold onto one side, then right here you will miss different people and each in his own way miss the full realization of the state of the Dao."[36] This stresses the interconnection of both sides. However, because the disciples started learning from Yangming at different stages of his thoughts and each held different dispositions, they all ended up with different emphases in regard to Yangming's theories and cultivation methods. It is right in the remediation of the derivative maladies among Yangming's disciples that Liu Zongzhou, the rear guard of the Study of Principle, develops a lofty transcendental spirit and a harsh theory of cultivation.

6 Confirming and Establishing Transcendence in Concrete Cultivation

The Ming dynasty philosopher Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周's thoughts are directed mostly on his criticism and rectification of Yangming's disciples, especially the schools of Taizhou 泰州 (Wang Gen 王艮) and Longxi 龙溪 (Wang Ji 王畿). He greatly stresses the "making sincere of one's thoughts" in the *Daxue*, intending to use this to treat their problems: they either "deviate into unsubstantial mysticism and turn unruly", or "confuse the pure knowing with sentiments and opinions and become presumptuous". Both problems indicate an absence: the former loses the recognition and reverence for a proper original state, and consequently abandons the pursuit of transcendence; the latter mistakes the acquired

36 Wang (1992), p. 117.

for the natural and neglects the crucial process of concrete cultivation. Given these two errors, Liu Zongzhou takes the clarification of what makes a human a human as his major pursuit during his late years – which leads to the writing of the *Guide to Human* 人谱.

Part I of the *Guide to Human* contains a *Diagram of the Human Ultimate* 人极图 imitating Zhou Dunyi's *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained* 太极图说. Also accompanied with a diagram and an explanation, it regards the inheriting of goodness, realizing the nature and spreading it across all under Heaven as the true path of being a human. Part II contains a *Keystones of Establishing a Human* 证人要旨 with six works which are a main description of the spiritual effort in cultivation. And after those, in the *Compiled Records of Guide to Human* 人谱杂记, good words and deeds of the ancients are quoted and classified according to the six works to serve as exemplars or admonitions.

The first of the six works is titled "having awe in leisure time to experience the inner absolute 凛闲居以体独", in which Liu Zongzhou combines Zhu Xi's interpretation of *shendu* 慎独 (being watchful over one's solitariness) and his own (taking cautious care of the inner absolute). The second work is titled "divining the emerging thoughts to know the subtle indications 卜动念以知几". It stresses that although the subtle indications 几 have emerged, the "root of thoughts 意根" is not lost. Knowing the subtle indications is to examine whether the emerging thoughts conform to the root of thoughts, and when they do not, one ought to wake up immediately and prevent them from becoming unduly evil. Thus the moment of knowing evil is the moment of suppressing evil, and the moment of guaranteeing the flow of the root of thoughts. The third work is titled "being cautious about one's dignified manners to establish one's ordinance [by Heaven] 谨威仪以定命". It details spiritual efforts in behavior and speech. Manners are an important aspect of cultivation. Liu Zongzhou believes manners to be the projection of one's inner world, when a person takes care of his inner absolute and makes his thoughts sincere, this will spontaneously manifest externally in accordance with norms. Being attentive towards one's manners in turn helps the accomplishment of one's internal efforts. The fourth work is titled "fulfilling one's responsibilities in principal human relations to actualize the Dao 敦大伦以凝道". Liu Zongzhou's *Diagram of the Human Ultimate* begins from the heart-mind-substance that is without the concept of goodness yet with the highest goodness, to the nature-substance that is inheriting the goodness and being realized, to the universal way that is the five principal human relations. Human being is an ethical being, the nature comes with birth, and the nature is the Principle (lit. order/orderliness), and the Principle is manifested first and foremost in the five human relations. The five human relations are the most important part of the spiritual effort in cultivation. An individual should first think of

"how many unfulfilled responsibilities are there in my five human relations", then begin his self-cultivation in practice thereof. Fulfilling one's duties in the five human relations is of itself following the nature without disgrace. The fifth work is titled "completing all good deeds to examine their return 备百行以考旋". "Examining return" is cited from the linear judgment of the *Lü Hexagram* *履卦* of the *Book of Change*: "Nine at the top line, he reviews his treads and examines the signs, and the return is with the best fortune." It means that if one examines the behavior of oneself, and if there is no defects, then it is auspicious. Thus a human should fulfill every ethical responsibility, and examine them in order to be without regret. The five human relations outlines the principal ethical situations of life, yet among them there are countless details and minor deeds which requires one to meet them appropriately, so that one can "come back to oneself and be sincere 反身而诚" and have "all things complete in oneself 万物皆备于我". The sixth work is titled "moving towards goodness and correcting errors to raise sageness 迁善改过以作圣", and the first five works should all eventually be settled in the last one. This thought directly inherits the doctrines of "reverting to stillness 归寂" and "upholding quietness 主静" theories of the West-of-the-Yangtze-River (Jiangyou 江右) disciples of Yangming. It claims that there is no ready-made sageness. All must achieve it through the process of cultivation. The most realistic and direct effort of cultivation would be to adjust oneself in sight of good and to correct oneself in sight of error, and gradually making one's way into the Dao thereby.

From the six works we can see that the cultivation effort Liu Zongzhou promotes is carried out orderly from the abstract to the concrete, from the mental to the physical, from the general to the particular. This progression eventually settles in the most realistic and feasible effort of moving towards goodness and correcting errors. The "*Guide to Human*" means the explanation of what makes a human a human, and the "*Establishing a Human*" means to qualify oneself as a human. The former is the fundamental substance, and the latter is the spiritual effort, the awareness and realization of one's commitment. In "knowing the subtle indications", both good and evil are conceived with respect to the manifestation of transcendence. Goodness is the entirety of the transcendence only in a miniature scale. Evil is the deviation from transcendence. Thus the "moving towards goodness and correcting errors" is the return to transcendence, and the "establishing one's ordinance" is the realization of transcendence in the individual. Throughout his life, Liu Zongzhou places the relationship between human and Heaven and the position of human in the universe at the center of his thinking, he dedicates a more conscious effort to the discussion of ultimate concern than the former masters of the Study of Principle, and this is also in line with the late Ming Dynasty trend of taking the three teachings as a harmonious unity. The

Guide to Human is also written against the then popular *Merits and Faults Chart* 功过格 of Yuan Liaofan, and the simplified *karma* thoughts advocated in it. Liu Zongzhou was not generally against retribution, "the family that accumulates goodness is sure to have plentiful happiness, and the family that accumulates evil is sure to have plentiful misery", says the *Supplement* to the *Kun Hexagram* of the *Book of Change*. But Liu Zongzhou dislikes the obvious and utilitarian fashion and the lack of systematic reasoning and argumentation. He wants to awaken the scholar-gentry from the already secularized Buddhist and Daoist preaching, and highlight the path of demonstrating one's personality with one's state of attainment, and establishing one's state of attainment through concrete cultivation. This standpoint is reflected perfectly in his self-inflicted martyrdom in starvation at the irreversible fall of the Ming dynasty.

In his effort to correct the derivative errors of Yangming's disciples, and in his meticulous understanding of the cultivation efforts, Liu Zongzhou offers a substantive response to the ultimate concern of the entire Study of Principle, and this response also demonstrates most clearly that all theoretical efforts of the masters of the Study of Principle eventually come back to the practice of life. Zhou Dunyi's confirmation of the Sincerity that penetrates Heaven and human, Cheng Hao's discovery of the heart-mind of *ren* 仁心, and Zhu Xi's understanding on the order for study or other masters' ceaseless exploration all eventually finds their conclusion in Liu Zongzhou's awareness and consciousness of the ultimate concern and the cultivation effort.

7 Conclusion: On the Ultimate Concern of Song-Ming Study of Principle

From a bird's-eye view of the sections above we can see that there is a strand of "ultimate concern" that runs throughout Song-Ming Study of Principle, which is manifested in a tendency to achieve a transcendent and ideal state of attainment through self-improvement of everyday practice. It takes the concern for transcendence and the will to confirm it as the origin of the universe and humanity as its first step, and is focused on the cultivation of refined faith, sincerity, candor and courage in the process. In this way, the school of thought effected a great influence on the shaping of personality and method for self-cultivation of the scholar-gentry that constituted the pillar of the society. These theoretic features, which belong to Song-Ming Study of Principle and to Chinese culture as a whole, can be utilized to assert a positive effect in overcoming

calculating and individualistic ways of thinking, and remedying the various maladies in modern society.

Song-Ming Study of Principle, as a theoretic tradition, includes a lot of thinkers and contents with different focuses and paths. But in terms of the contents that are passed on to us and the fact that various thoughts are gradually integrated into a unified framework through the interpretive works of later thinkers, the Study of Principle can be treated as a relatively close and complete theoretic system. Correspondingly, the transcendental elements found in different thinkers can be seen as different layers and links in an overall logic structure.

As the originator of the Study of Principle, Zhou Dunyi's confirmation of the "Sincerity-substance" as the object of the ultimate concern, his explanation of the relationship between an ideal personality and the Sincerity-substance, and his guidance on the method of cultivation all lays an important foundation for later successors. Zhang Zai focuses on the reality of the object of the ultimate concern (Sincerity) and the key doctrine of the "expanded heart-mind" (or Brightness) which is required in one's cultivation to achieve Sincerity, and the depiction of the unification of Sincerity and Brightness 诚明合一 as a state of attainment. Shao Yong focuses on the content of the object of the ultimate concern, especially the relationship between the entirety and its parts, and between the principles and the numerological relations of the myriad things. His doctrine of "observing things" emphasizes the fact that what is real is what is natural. The two Cheng brothers both find issues with the Daoist elements in Zhang Zai and Shao Yong's thoughts, but they accept their description of the object of the ultimate concern with different emphases. Cheng Hao adds Buddhist thoughts and stresses the importance of "heart-mind" and the stillness of it in realizing the ultimate fundamental state. In this way, he also highlights the unity of the ultimate fundamental state and the original heart-mind, and the inward path of realizing this state of attainment. Cheng Yi, on the other hand, emphasizes the transcendent nature of the object of ultimate concern, the different paths to perceive it, and its relationship with definite affairs in the human world. If Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai and Shao Yong focus mainly on Heaven, then the two Cheng brothers' main focus has turned to the world of humans. By stressing that the object of ultimate concern is within ordinary affairs, they bridge the gap between that object and the people who try to realize them. Zhu Xi is the master who integrates various strands of thought in the Northern-Song-dynasty Study of Principle, and his transcendence also has an integrated nature. He incorporates different focuses of his predecessors in an overall theoretical structure, gives them proper theoretical roles and highlights the essential parts. His theories of Principle and *qi*, heart-mind and the nature, Heaven and human, knowledge and action, investigating and extending,

preserving and cultivating, all helps to perfect different aspects of the object of ultimate concern. Moreover, his theory of the one principle with myriad differentiations and his explanation of the order, functions and structures of the Four Books give specific directions of the path to realize the object of ultimate concern. Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming establish the object of the ultimate concern in the heart-mind, the original heart-mind itself is the ultimate object. Lu Jiuyuan emphasizes the spirit of respecting oneself, inspiring oneself, and relying on nothing but oneself, which is nothing but praise for the refined faith, sincerity, courage and willpower of the pursuit of the Dao. On this basis, Wang Yangming makes several theoretic developments. He bestows a greater importance to the pursuit of knowledge, which serves to bolster one's willpower. He strengthens the unity of morality and knowledge in the power of actual practice. He also stresses the unity of and with the myriad things to overcome the alienation from transcendence, and altogether propels the study of the heart-mind to a new level. On the other hand, by maintaining that the ultimate object is within everyday practice and reassuring the fact that realization of that object is possible with feasible actions for anyone and at any time, Yangming also creates conditions for the dissemination of the Study of Principle in the lower classes of society. With a rigorous form that is bearing on harshness, Liu Zongzhou counteracts the tendency of Yangming's doctrines to simplify spiritual efforts with the meticulous and rigid nature of the study of Zhu Xi, thus restoring the stern and exacting side of the Study of Principle. Liu Zongzhou's theoretic contribution re-establishes the sanctity and order with regard to self-cultivation and the realization of the Dao. At this point, the Study of Principle has – from Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai and Shao Yong's focus on the Dao of Heaven to the two Cheng brothers' focus on the Dao of human, from Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi's non-duality of Heaven and human and the unity of the substance and the function, to Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming's establishment of theoretic foundation in the heart-mind and the penetration of Heaven and human with the heart-mind, and eventually to Liu Zongzhou's return to the Dao of Heaven and regarding Heaven as the ultimate – it has progressed through the perception, interpretation and rectification of the object of ultimate concern.

In the history of Chinese philosophy, Song-Ming Study of Principle is the tradition that pays the greatest attention to ultimate concern and transcendence. This is because it has absorbed earlier theories especially from Buddhism and Daoism, and develops a deeper understanding of the theories of cosmology, the fundamental substance/state, and the heart-mind-nature. Moreover, due to the promotion of the imperial examinations, it permeated into every aspect of the social life, presenting an unprecedented worldly character. Kongzi's "not complaining over Heaven, not blaming on men, studying below and reaching above",

Mengzi's "fully attaining the heart-mind and knowing the nature to know Heaven, preserving the heart-mind and cultivating the nature to serve Heaven", the *Commentary on the Book of Change*'s "exhausting the principles and fully attaining the nature to arrive at the ordinance", the *Zhongyong*'s "the ordinance by Heaven is what we call the nature", "without the perfect virtue, the perfect Dao will not concrete" etc., all lays foundations for the practical features of the transcendental theories of the Study of Principle; and Wang Yangming's verse "Unseparated from the deeds every day, yet reaching afar before everything was made" epitomizes this practical characteristic clearly: one is to achieve the transcendent ideal by "doing what is proper to his station 素位而行". A salient feature of transcendence in the Study of Principle is that, it is not a transcendent universality, instead, the transcendent embodies concrete social-practical contents. Kongzi once tries to break away from the divinity of Heaven since Shang dynasty and endow it with more humanistic contents; common scholar-gentlemen at that time also pursue transcendence within the pursuit of *ren* and propriety; Mengzi and the *Zhongyong* tries to knock through the wall between Heaven and human to stress that the ordinance of Heaven is within humanity and to link the introspective path of cultivation to the transcendental goal; the *Book of Change* underscores the relationship between intellectual activities such as investigation into the physical world and the immanent transcendence. These all guard against the way that leads to a mystery-meditating, society-forsaking, solitude-pursuing kind of cultivation, and instead forms a strong bond between self-cultivation and social practice. This constitutes the basic standpoint of Song-Ming Study of Principle's interpretation and practice towards transcendence.

The Study of Principle thinks highly of human cultivation, advocates the acquisition of physical knowledge through the investigation of things and the interpretation of such knowledge into the Principle of Heaven with moral meanings in order to achieve the unity of knowledge and morality, the good and the beautiful. This provides a worldly and aesthetic path to the realization of the ultimate concern in a certain historical situation. Approaching an ideal personality through the appreciation of beauty and the edification of art, elevating the spirit through the natural life, these prevent practitioners of the Study of Principle from pursuing the ultimate reality through self-abusing penance, and show moderation in their understanding of the ultimate concern under their respective historical situation. In a more general sense, transcendence in the Study of Principle has a worldly character, and embodies values of both rational and humanistic spirits.

There might still be some insufficiencies in the Study of Principle's path to transcendence, for example, its fondness for practical affairs may weaken the resolve and persistence that a pursuit of a fixed value should possess; its excessive

emphasis on personal morality may reduce its appeal for public principles; its favorable stand towards empirical and useful things may diminish its improvement in reasoning required for the achievement of transcendence; the belief in some utilitarian factors like in the idiom "Heaven, earth, emperor, parents, teacher" may impair the purity of the cleansing and elevating of the heart-mind. These characteristics have inseparable relationships with other aspects of Chinese philosophy. As to how these insufficiencies may be overcome is a problem that has to be treated seriously for thinkers in the tradition of the Study of Principle and Chinese philosophy as a whole.