

**Lu Xiangshan, Wang Yangming, and the Early Heart-Mind Learning**

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Draft Chapter for *Chinese Philosophy and Its Thinkers: From Ancient Times to  
the Present Day*

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September 7, 2022

## 1. Introduction

Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) are the principal representatives of the Ruist school of the learning of mind (*xinxue* 心學). Lu Xiangshan, whose given name was Jiuyuan 九淵, lived during the Southern Song dynasty. Wang Yangming, whose given name was Shouren 守仁, lived during the Ming dynasty. From the Song to the Qing dynasties, the learning of principle (*lixue* 理學; also known as Neo-Confucianism) was the dominant form of systematic Ruist philosophical discourse. Two schools largely constituted this learning. One was the Cheng-Zhu learning of principle, referring to the philosophy of Cheng Yi 程頤 and the synthesis of Zhu Xi 朱熹, and the other was the Lu-Wang learning of the mind and heart. For both Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming, the mind (or heart-mind: *xin* 心) was the highest philosophical category, and their writings and recorded conversations primarily elucidate its characteristics and the mental discipline necessary to realize its intrinsic moral qualities.

In 1521, when Wang was passing through Lu's hometown, a local official asked him to write a preface for a new edition of Lu's collected works. In the preface, Wang (2011: vol. 1, 7.273) explains that “the learning of the sages is the learning of the mind.” For Ruists, sages were the moral exemplars of ancient times, persons of superior virtue who transmitted what they had learned about human nature so that others could likewise become moral. Wang notes that the learning of the mind originated with a simple teaching set forth by Emperors Yao and Shun, sage-rulers of high antiquity (regarded as legendary today). They said that “the human mind is in peril, the Way mind is subtle, be discriminating and steadfast, that you may hold fast to the center” (Wang 2011: vol. 1, 7.273). For Wang, they had distinguished a self-centered and acquisitive mind from one that accords with the Way, and they pointed to the mental discipline necessary to recover and sustain this mind. He says that the Way mind (*dao xin* 道心) is our intrinsic centeredness and humaneness (*ren* 仁). This mind is our essential identity, our true self that defines the inward trajectory of human moral development. To follow the Way is to become centered and humane.

Wang Yangming further explains that in their learning, the sages Confucius and Mengzi only sought humaneness. Confucius directed students to look in their hearts so they would see the one thread running through his Way. That thread is conscientiousness and reciprocity (*Analects* 4.15): persons establish their identity by helping others do so and form judgments by putting themselves in another's shoes (*Analects* 6.30) Wang also quotes Mengzi, who said, “Humanity is

the heart of man . . . . The Way of learning is none other than this: it is a search for one's lost heart" (Eno 2016: 6A.11). Regarding this heart, Mengzi explained, "All men possess a sense of commiseration; all men possess a sense of shame; all men possess a sense of respect; all men possess a sense of right and wrong. The sense of commiseration is the seed of humanity; the sense of shame is the seed of righteousness; the sense of respect is the seed of ritual; the sense of right and wrong is the seed of wisdom. Thus, humanity, righteousness, ritual, and wisdom are not welded to us from outside. We possess them inherently; it is simply that we do not focus our minds on them" (Eno 2016: 6A.6).

However, after Confucius and Mengzi's time, Wang claimed, manipulative hegemony arose as the kingly Way died out, and those in pursuit of recognition and wealth used virtue signaling to advance selfish interests. This learning perished, and people's hearts were separated from *tianli* 天理 ("heavenly principle"), the natural moral order ideally patterning the moral life in all its goodness. It was only much later (during the Song dynasty) that eminent Ruists recovered the true learning of the Way, and Lu Xiangshan was one of them. Wang asserted that the simplicity and directness of Lu's learning could carry on what Mengzi had bequeathed, insofar as both directed learners to look in their hearts and find their humanity. Thus, Wang Yangming concluded, "the philosophy of Mr. Lu is the philosophy of Mr. Meng" (Wang 2011: vol. 1, 7.274). We now turn to Lu Xiangshan.

## 2. Lu Xiangshan

Lu Xiangshan was born to a well-established clan in Jinxi County, Jiangxi Province, during the reign of Emperor Gaozong of the Southern Song dynasty. His father, Lu He, was a noted scholar who committed himself to governing his family according to Ruist values and ritual institutions. As a child, this youngest among He's six children exhibited a mature disposition, never "kidding around" and instead acting "as calm and sober as an adult" (Lu 2008: 36.481). He was also precocious. At five, he questioned his father about the outer boundary of the cosmos and, absent a reply, thought it over with such intensity that he forgot to eat and sleep (Lu 2008: 36.481). At six, he commenced his studies at the family school while also schooling himself. Although he read widely, Lu preferred to read select ancient classics intensively, especially the *Analects* of Confucius and the *Mengzi*. He regarded these Ruists as sages and models to emulate. Their teachings would remain his passion throughout his life. In fact, at eight, when he overheard someone reciting the ideas of the Northern Song philosopher Cheng Yi, Lu asked, "why do these

not resemble those of Confucius and Mengzi?” (Lu 2008: 36.481) Thus, even at this young age, he distanced himself intellectually from what would become the Cheng-Zhu school of the learning of principle.

At fourteen, in the wake of an epiphany—perhaps an episode of ecstatic unity—Lu Xiangshan felt even more determined to pursue the Way of the ancient Ruists. He had yet to understand the limits of the universe but encountered an ancient work explaining the meaning of two graphs composing the word “cosmos” (*yuzhou* 宇宙). *Yu* 宇, it said, means “the four directions, above and below,” and *zhou* 宙 means “from ancient times to present” (Lu 2008: 36.482-3). Lu suddenly understood that human beings and the myriad things exist amid an infinite universe. A sense of moral responsibility arose with the perception of dissolving boundaries: “The affairs of the universe are my own affairs, my own affairs are the affairs of the universe,” he wrote. Lu also asserted that at root, our minds are identical with the cosmos and heavenly principle, which is why everyone can enjoy commonality and rise to great impartiality. “The universe is my mind,” he claimed, “and my mind is the universe. If in the southern or northern seas there were to appear a sage, they too would have this same mind and this same principle (*li* 理). If a hundred or a thousand generations hence sages were to appear, they likewise would have this same mind and this same principle” (Lu 2008: 36.482-3; Tillman 1992: 191). Nonduality remained a principle throughout his life: the Way does not lie outside events, and vice versa, he often said (Lu 2008: 34.395). Unity was also part of his focus, as he identified principle with the Way and our original mind. He said that the cosmos does not impose boundaries; those are rather self-imposed when people conceal this mind (Lu 2008: 36.483).

What did Lu mean by identifying mind with principle? He proffered no systematic explanations. Principle is one, but principles are inexhaustible. Principle is what is universally right—an objective moral order. It is what is true axiomatically. It is reasoning that people can arrive at through discussion and consensus. It is our master, our inner authority. It is what governs the natural order, giving it coherence. It is what becomes clear when we forget ourselves. It is right before us, though we have hidden it. Confucius’s highest stage of human development defines principle: “I followed my heart’s desire without overstepping the line” (*Analects* 2.4). Principle is the morality natural to the heart, as it should ideally be: love for one’s parents, respect for elders, compassion, and humaneness. Heaven gave it to us, we have always possessed it (it was not

imposed from without), and nothing can escape it (Lu 2008: 1.1). Principle is undivided, a perfect unity filling up the cosmos, the ultimate reality.

From this time until 1172, when Lu passed the national examination at Lin'an (today's Hangzhou) and the Song court gave him his first appointment, he mostly remained at home in Jinxi. He once told a friend that at fifteen, although his physical condition was weak, once he knew his purpose his body became stronger. He regretted his lack of steadfastness but learned how to admonish himself and to drum up willpower, firmly committing himself to sagehood. Determination yielded results, for he "resembled heaven and earth" and hence accorded with the natural order (Lu 2008: 36.483), countenancing no artificiality. "Building up the nobler part of one's nature," in his own estimate, characterized the rest of Lu's life.

In 1162, Lu passed the prefectural examination, the first rung in the civil-service examination ladder, but his father's death postponed the next step. In 1165, after his three-year mourning period concluded, he attempted the provincial exam but failed. Far from disappointed, Lu viewed this as fortunate, for he could, together with relatives, apply himself to the Way of the sages and worthies, exchanging a trap with thorns and thistles for a great avenue (Lu 2008: 36.485). Ultimately, the external markers of our successes and failures in the world do not determine our mind's condition, our happiness. Lu remained at home for some time, married at thirty, and then returned to his studies in 1171, successfully rising through the provincial, metropolitan, and palace examinations.

While at Lin'an, Lu's reputation as a Ruist master grew, attracting a following of students. He conversed with them day and night, for dialogue and lecturing were his preferred methods for conveying ideas. What we know of their conversations comes primarily from records of statements made on these occasions, as well as his many letters. In 1172, while returning home, Lu stopped at Prefect Yang Jian's 楊簡 (1141–1225) residence. Yang asked, "What is the original mind?" Lu replied, "the sense of commiseration is the beginning of humanity; the sense of shame is the beginning of righteousness; the sense of respect is the beginning of ritual; the sense of right and wrong is the seed of wisdom. This is the original mind." Already familiar with Mengzi, Yang was not satisfied with Lu's answer, and he asked the same question repeatedly. Lu then brought up a legal case Yang had judged that day and explained that his knowing what is right to be right and wrong to be wrong was his original mind. At that, in a flash of enlightenment, Yang realized that

mind is lucid, timeless, and capable of penetrating everything. Thus, he formally declared his discipleship (Lu 2008: 36.488).

Upon returning to Jinxi in 1172, together with his brothers Lu constructed the Pagoda Tree Hall, a place for holding philosophical forums. In 1174, he returned to Lin'an for his assignment and was appointed assistant magistrate of Jiangxi's Jing'an County, although he never did take up this office but returned home and continued teaching. The following year he met with Zhu Xi at southeast Jiangxi's Goose Lake Temple, initiating meetings and correspondence that extended over fifteen years and defined the differences between the two schools of thought that emerged over time. Although he was learned in the classics, Lu rejected Zhu Xi's emphasis on erudition, systematization, and textual exegesis as inimical to awakening original mind and understanding the Way. For him, the simple and easy brings lasting greatness; with time drops of water form an ocean and stones become a mountain. With resolve and substance in practice, learning can be quite natural because virtue, especially in its most perfect form as humaneness, is something we already possess; we simply lose track of it, we lose track of our heart. Lu encouraged his disciples to recover it, nourish it to fulfillment, and sustain it. He said that scholarship alone in pursuit of knowledge may set us adrift. After all, the first sages had no texts to study (Tillman 1992: 212; Ching 2000: 147).

In 1179, after completing the mourning period for his stepmother, Lu was assigned assistant magistrate of Chong'an County, Fujian. In 1181, near the end of his tenure, he travelled to Nankang, where Zhu Xi was serving as prefect. Zhu asked him to lecture on Confucius's claim that "the gentleman understands what is moral; the small man understands what is profitable" (*Analects* 4.16). In a moving talk, Lu directed students to examine their primary motivation when preparing for examinations and aspiring to attain office. Is it advantage or righteousness? He explained that their aspirations affect what they see when learning, what they write when testing, and what they do when serving. For Lu, the superior person's primary motivation is doing what is right for its own sake, hence having moral authenticity. The petty person, however, lives for external validation, measuring success by social recognition (Lu 2008: 23.275).

From 1182 to 1186, Lu held offices at the capital, first as director of education at the national university and then as revising official at the Bureau of Edicts and Statutes. Following, he returned home to Jinxi and, for the next five years, devoted himself to transmitting the Way of Confucius and Mengzi by focusing on pedagogy. First at Jinxi and then at Guixi County's Yingtian

Mountain, he gathered with large numbers of students, lecturing and holding philosophical discussions. A student had lodging constructed at Yingtian for this purpose. The building was named Xiangshan (Elephant Mountain) Study, after the mountain's shape.

For his students, Lu continued channeling Mengzi. He affirmed their nature as moral agents, their innate capacity to render judgment about right and wrong, and their intrinsic goodness—their possession of natural sentiments and dispositions that incline towards righteousness and down the collected, simple, and easy Way. Yet, he would warn, they could lose track of their original mind, what makes them human, their humaneness, allowing this treasure to become concealed and bogged down, harming their hearts for reason of their human flaws, such as the desire for things, the desire for victory, the desire to know it all, being opinionated, or making things too complex. Lu regarded himself as one who knew these defects, and he proposed solutions such as illuminating the original mind, nurturing it, so that it manifests like a fire set ablaze or spring first emerging, night and day sustaining and safeguarding its clarity and flow, depthless as the abyss and vast like the Heavens. Establish yourself, he said. Stand upon your greatness, build up your nobility, focus your will on righteousness, correct your errors, and allow your goodness to shine. This is the gate to learning and how we advance in virtue.

In 1191, Lu received orders to serve as prefect of the Jingmen Commandery, a frontier defense town located along the northern border shared with the Jin dynasty. Thus, he was compelled to give up his plan for a quiet life of teaching at Xiangshan and to take his family north. Confronted by mismanagement and decay, and always serious about practicing what he taught, he directly involved himself in constructing city walls, improving the judicial process, instilling military discipline, rationalizing taxation, and organizing records. He also regularly lectured. One day, before a crowd numbering in the hundreds, he expounded on the meaning of the phrase “imperial perfection” from the *Classic of Documents*. The *Classic* explains that the sovereign establishes in himself this perfection, gathers sources of good fortune, and then bestows both on the multitudes. Those sources are longevity, prosperity, well-being, love of virtue, and ripe old age. For their part, the multitudes embody that perfection and return it to the sovereign, securing its preservation.

Lu explained that this perfection is the great centrality (*zhong* 中) that fills the cosmos, ordering and nurturing the myriad things. The center is also the heart-mind and its moral sense bestowed at birth by Heaven. The sage-rulers of antiquity established and employed it, forming a

triad with heaven and earth that assisted in their growth and change. The multitudes correspondingly safeguarded that perfection, acting nobly in what were peaceful times. Yet people's psychophysical endowment varies in terms of purity and mental acuity, which is why they lose sight of this perfection. Upon birthing the multitudes, Heaven had the individuals who were first enlightened enlighten those not yet enlightened, for the sages and people similarly possess this perfection. When the sovereign establishes it, they enlighten the people with the Way, illuminating their heart-mind, the moral sense given at birth.

Now, today, Lu explained, the emperor, having received what Heaven conferred and governing on Heaven's behalf, has established this perfection, gathered the sources of fortune, and, with the assistance of prefects and magistrates who relay them, given them to the people. With this moral sense, and by safeguarding the original heart-mind, the multitudes know to love their parents and respect elders; they know of ruler and minister, superior and inferiors, the middle country and outsiders; and they know of good and evil, truth and falsity. In fact, with respect to the sources of happiness, this one heart-mind is what really matters. If it is correct, without self-deception, all will be good fortune, but if it is immoral, then all will be misfortune. Lu insisted that if you were right with yourself, even should your body fail to enjoy longevity or your family prosperity, this heart-mind would yet possess good fortune. Wealth and honor, calamities and hardship will no longer determine your mental state (Lu 2008: 23.283-5).

In 1193, Lu's chronic illness flared up. Believing the end was near, "he bathed, put on new clothes, and sat calmly in meditation for two days before expiring peacefully" (Tillman 1992: 201). In his time Lu had many disciples, but after his death Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism overshadowed his school, especially since it became state-sponsored orthodoxy in later dynasties and was thus the basis for civil-service examinations. During the Ming dynasty, however, because Wang Yangming spoke positively of Lu and because their philosophies shared marked similarities, critics and neutral observers began to refer to their style of Ruism as the Lu-Wang school of the learning of mind.

### **3. Wang Yangming**

Wang Yangming, whose given name was Shouren, was born in 1472 to a gentry family of Yuyao County, Zhejiang Province. Prior to 1482, he mostly remained in Yuyao, residing at the Wang family home where his mother (*née* Zheng) raised him and he was homeschooled in Ruist classics, histories, and composition by his father and grandfather. While preparing for the civil-

service examinations, his father, Wang Hua (1446–1522), supported the family by private tutoring. At age seven, the young Shouren accompanied him while he was away and stayed over at a Buddhist temple. He developed a fondness for Buddhism and Daoism, commencing three decades of experimentation with these two traditions.

In 1481, at the capital (Beijing), his father passed the highest examination and received an appointment. In 1482, he brought Shouren to his official residence on West Chang'an Boulevard (just south of the Forbidden City) where, until 1487, he received private tutoring and entered a school, all the while being exposed to the elite social world of the political hub of the Ming dynasty. At eleven, when a tutor asserted that examinations are the most important matter in life, Wang rejected that claim, stating that one should instead aspire to become a sage. Thus, he revealed his aspiration to attain the goal for human development set forth by the Song school of the learning of principle. Furthermore, at such locations as the Da Xinglong Temple (today's Qingshou Temple), he witnessed Ruist masters convening forums for philosophical discussion.

One was Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (Chen Baisha 陳白沙, 1428–1500), founder of the Jiangmen School of Ruism (named after a township). After years of disciplined study of classical works, Chen felt dissatisfied with his learning trajectory, for he had failed to attain insight into the unity of mind and principle. He built a pavilion, isolated himself, and practiced Ruist meditation for ten years until his mind's essence (*xinti* 心體) manifested. After that, his doubts disappeared and confidence soared: "Herein lies the way of sagehood," he claimed (Jiang 1980: 37). He began teaching, established an academy, and attracted a following of students. He taught skepticism and negation as a method for liberating oneself from the contrived and achieving oneness with the Way. He proposed discarding complexity, stripping away vanities, pursuing the quiet life, and spending time in meditative introspection, all for fostering tranquility and vacuity and realizing in great joy the unfettered, perfect mind that unfolds of itself, attaining a harmonious unity with the cosmos. With his contemplative focus, Chen's philosophy of life departed markedly from the state-sanctioned Cheng-Zhu learning of principle, and he was an important predecessor of Wang Yangming in establishing a Ming school of mind (Jiang 1980).

In fact, while in Beijing, Shouren devoted much time to studying the works of Zhu Xi, whose commentaries on classical works were designated by the Ming court as the orthodox standard for schooling. One text central to Zhu's program for moral self-cultivation (and thus for attaining sagehood) was the *Great Learning*. It states that to become aware of one's virtuous nature

as a step towards realizing the Way, one begins with *ge wu* 格物 (“investigating things”) after which follow *zhi zhi* 致知 (“extending knowledge”), being sincere in one’s intentions, correcting the mind, cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state well, and setting the world at peace.

For Zhu, to investigate things was to come to a full understanding of the principles of things and affairs, by which he meant primarily moral knowledge, knowledge of the good, and, more broadly, insight into the objective normative order of the universe. One begins with the knowledge one has, exerting oneself in careful study and reflection until one reaches a breakthrough and is possessed of a wide and far-reaching penetration. The young Shouren, serious about the sagely ideal, interpreted *ge wu* as an injunction for contemplative practice and sat in observation of bamboo located in his father’s official compound. After seven days, having failed to acquire its principle (*li* 理), he fell ill and concluded that he could not achieve sagehood. He turned his energies to literary pursuits and the examinations (Wang 2011: vol. 3, 33.1349).

In 1487, Wang returned to Yuyao and then travelled to Nanchang, Jiangxi, to greet his future spouse, *née* Zhu, arriving in 1488. While residing at her father’s official compound, he practiced calligraphy, first by imitating copybooks and then by focusing his mind and forming a clear image of the graph, treating this mental discipline as a mode of investigating things. He made progress. On his wedding day, he visited the Iron Pillar Temple, where he encountered a Daoist practitioner who was sitting cross-legged on a mat. He questioned him and learned of the theory of nourishing longevity, and then he sat down facing him, trying out his Daoist meditation (Wang 2011: vol. 3, 33.1347).

Late in 1489, Wang returned to Yuyao. From 1490 to 1499 (the year he passed the highest examination and became a presented scholar), he resided alternately in Yuyao, another Wang family residence in Yue City (today’s Shaoxing), and the National Academy in Beijing, all the while pursuing with discipline his wide-ranging studies and testing his way up the examination ladder. He passed the provincial examination in 1492 but took the metropolitan examination two times (in 1493 and 1496) before finally making the rolls in 1499. During this decade, although he remained immersed in Song Neo-Confucian philosophy, he directed much of his time to the literary and martial arts as well as Daoist practices.

In 1498, after reading Zhu Xi’s memorial to Emperor Guangzong, which stated that dwelling in reverence, holding to one’s purpose, and following an orderly sequence are the

foundations for learning, Wang regretted his lack of focus and redirected himself. However, although his thinking became more harmonious and penetrating, he had not in his own estimate properly benefited from Zhu Xi's philosophy, for with respect to principle and his mind he yet sensed division—a lack of penetrating understanding and of nondual insight. Disenchanted with Zhu's difficult program, Wang believed sagehood was still out of reach and felt an inclination to withdraw from society. When staying in Yue City from 1497 to 1498, he remained immersed in Daoist teachings on nourishing life. He spent time at the Yangming Grotto located in a mountain range just south of the city and practiced Daoist austerities, such as the method of perfect emptiness form refinement, which yielded subtle states of mind, such that he “forgot himself and forgot things, forgot heaven and forgot earth, forming one body with the empty void.” At this time, he referred to himself as “Yangming the recluse,” and hereafter Yangming became his name of art (Shu 2017: 1.128).

In 1500, the court appointed Wang Yangming as secretary in the Yunnan Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, a position he retained until 1502, when he requested leave for reason of illness and returned to Shaoxing to convalesce. He continued practicing Daoist austerities at the Yangming Grotto, but in 1503 he chose to relocate to Hangzhou and stay at the Jingci Temple while studying sutras, practicing Chan (Zen) sitting, and questioning Buddhist practitioners. He had decided that Daoist techniques amounted to “fiddling with the quintessential spirit, which is not the Way,” so he shifted focus to Buddhism (Wang 2011: vol. 3, 33.1351). Nevertheless, he still failed to find the answers he sought, and he told a monk that our mind, by its very nature, gives rise to caring thoughts of family members, forming natural attachments. What distinguishes the Ruist is acknowledging this reality and acting accordingly. Thus, Wang was rejecting Buddhism and Daoism and returning to his Ruist commitments.

In 1504, Wang presided over Shandong Province's provincial examination. As part of his duties, he provided model essays that explained his political philosophy. Interpreting the wisdom of the Four Classics (the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Great Learning*), the essays confirm that the virtuous official serves his ruler not out of self-interest but rather to implement the Way, a repository of moral principles bequeathed by the sages of ancient times. In doing so, he seeks to awaken the sprouts of goodness in the ruler's heart so the ruler can set an example for and properly influence his subjects. Consequently, the official must be willing to speak truth to power and to step aside if unable to do so.

Furthermore, the essays show Wang's growing commitment to the Ruist path, for he identifies Buddhism and Daoism as mistaken ones. Following the Way, he says, requires studying Ruist classics and commentaries, learning to will as sages willed, thoroughly examining moral principles, overcoming self-centered propensities, and according with the mean. With sages as the exemplars, a man seeks to purify himself by denying self-centered inclinations and following principle in all that he does. By doing so, the Way of Tian (Heaven)—a deeper cosmic-moral order—will disclose itself to the wise, those with clarity of mind, as the basis for taking action that brings about social and political change (Israel 2014: 22–25).

After completing his duties, Wang Yangming toured Qufu, hometown to Confucius, paying respects at the Confucius Temple (Shu 2017: 1.314-324). He then travelled north to Beijing and was appointed to the Bureau of Military Appointments in the Ministry of War. This brought him in touch with intellectual circles at the capital, including political elites and famed litterateurs as well as young men in search of advancing their careers. One method for young men to elevate their profile was to pledge discipleship to renowned Ruist masters. It was from this time—when the capital was crowded with examination candidates—that Wang began to accrue a following of students (Wang 2011: vol. 3, 33.1352).

In 1505, the Hongzhi emperor (Zhu Youtang) passed away, leaving the empire to his eldest son, Zhu Houzhao (the Zhengde emperor, r. 1506 to 1521). Upon enthronement, Houzhao revealed an inclination to disregard his officials, rather allowing power to fall into the hands of eunuch favorites. A crisis erupted as high officials of the Ming court engaged in a power struggle with these eunuchs, especially Grand Eunuch Liu Jin. Protest mounted through the summer and fall of 1506. Wang Yangming entangled himself in the political turmoil when he submitted a memorial to the emperor, calling for rescinding an order drafted by Liu that had led to the arrest of speaking officials—those whose duty it was to remonstrate. The memorial proposed removing the treacherous from power and recalling able advisors. Wang explained that showing clemency would promote a climate of trust and confidence, redounding to the benefit of the emperor (Wang 2011: vol. 1, 9.323). However, the emperor ignored his courageous effort to speak truth to power, and he incurred Liu's enmity. Liu ordered the imperial bodyguard to detain him. Wang was imprisoned for a month, and when released on January 3, 1507, in what was a clear demonstration of Ming despotism, he was lashed thirty times in front of the Forbidden City's Meridian Gate. Following,

he was demoted to a lowly post at the Longchang courier station, which was located just to the northwest of Guiyang, Guizhou Province's capital (Shu 2017: 1.383–385).

Wang first returned to Zhejiang, where he largely remained until he departed in early 1508. He then travelled 1700 kilometers, arriving at Longchang three months later. Now, in the wake of humiliating treatment by the court, he found himself living far from his familiar worlds, in an underdeveloped, mountainous region amid ethnic groups with whom communication was difficult. He first resided in a thatched hut and then a mountain grotto where, inspired by Mengzi's conviction that hardship steels resolve and strengthens character, he embraced his plight as material for philosophical reflection. What would a sage do under such circumstances? Although Wang felt free of anxiety over matters of praise and blame, the thought of death yet weighed on his mind. Awaiting his fate with equanimity, he practiced meditation in the cave and elsewhere in Longchang, purifying his mind, seeking tranquility and one-pointed concentration, to the point where he was no longer aware of his physical form and attained stillness. Then, one night he awoke to an epiphany, finding that he now understood the true meaning of *ge wu* and *zhi zhi* (for Zhu Xi, “investigating things” and “extending knowledge”).

Wang concluded that we are by nature self-sufficient and that seeking principle outside ourselves is mistaken (Wang 2011: vol. 3, 33.1354). Mind is principle, he discovered; mind is *tianli* 天理, the heavenly principle, the natural moral order in all its purity and perfection, as it is objectively, when realized in authentic subjectivity. Since the heart-mind in its natural state spontaneously manifests the moral law of which heart-mind can become readily aware as intersubjective situations are encountered, one need not learn right and wrong and how to behave by memorizing or manufacturing a formula. Humaneness in its many forms ideally requires no second thought. Compassion arises when we see a child fall into a well, as does love when we are with our parents, prompting us to act, as righteousness requires. Thus, introspection and direct realization of our moral mind are the route to the normative order and lawful course of the dynamic cosmos—the route to finding our true self, which is a perfect goodness, our very basis, the source of all that is meaningful.

What Wang taught at Longchang and then at Guiyang's Wenming Academy in 1509 show up more clearly in records taken down by his student Xu Ai when they were travelling together down the Grand Canal in 1512. These comprise the first part of the *Chuan xi lu* 傳習錄 (*Records of Practice*), a compilation of Wang's most important conversations and correspondence that

expanded over time. Wang called for recovering our mind in its original condition, where moral knowledge and action form a unity, emerging together simultaneously. That is the meaning of “extending knowledge.” It should be the case, he taught, that we just know how to treat people and act accordingly. Alas, it is not always so. Certain flaws of the psychophysical self interfere, especially self-centeredness, something like “ego” in a pejorative sense. *Ge wu* as a practice can help. For Wang, *ge* means to rectify—to correct or change oneself for the better. It means ridding ourselves of undesirable thoughts and inclinations, while amplifying and sustaining both mindfully and in action those that are good, a manifestation of the original condition of our hearts, when our heart is true to its nature, purely principle. *Wu* is the world formed of these thoughts and inclinations, arising in the space of our awareness—specifically something about which we are thinking, the object of our intentions—which is why amending ourselves amends the world, bringing it in line with the natural moral order inherent to the heart-mind.

In 1509, Wang Yangming was appointed magistrate of Luling County, Jiangxi. He departed Guizhou at year’s end, arriving there the following April. Wang capably shouldered the responsibilities of a magistrate, acting upon his tenet that moral knowledge must be realized in practice. Confronted by social disorder spawned by a combination of dysfunctional government, banditry, rampant litigiousness, and all-around hardship, he implemented measures to provide relief and enlightened guidance. Those measures included building security from the ground up with systems of mutual surety and defense, working with respected members of the community to resolve legal disputes and instill etiquette and morality, rationalizing taxation, disciplining local government personnel, improving public works, and promoting Ruist education. However, owing to political developments at the Ming court, he was recalled to the capital for reassignment, arriving there in the fall of 1510. Between that time and 1516, he held several central government offices requiring him first to live in Beijing and then later in Nanjing, the Ming dynasty’s secondary capital. As these offices were not taxing, he devoted most of his time to teaching his philosophy.

In 1516, however, the Ming court appointed Wang Yangming grand coordinator of Southern Gan, with the authority to coordinate civilian and military provincial and local officials serving in nine prefectures spread over four provinces in southern China. The goal was to quell social and political violence and follow up with measures to maintain law and order over the long term. Outside urban centers, armed disturbances and banditry were common, state presence weak,

and lines of authority confused. Wang departed Hangzhou at the end of the year and traveled to Ganzhou, Jiangxi, arriving at his headquarters early in 1517.

Wang immediately set to work rallying officials in the region, forming local militias, and implementing a local registration system that served the goal of mutual surveillance and aid, building security and armies from the ground up. From February to April, he conducted campaigns against “bandit lairs” (resistant populations) located in southwestern Fujian. After that, he turned his attention to the restive settlements located in mountainous regions of Nan’an Prefecture, Jiangxi. Campaigning commenced late in October and ended in December. Finally, from February to April 1518, he campaigned against the outlaw settlements located in northern Guangdong Province.

During and in the aftermath of aggressively treating the disease of brigandry with the military instrument, Wang was also taking action to build up the health of these lands through authority and education. First, transforming the chaos of crime-infested territories into order founded upon law-abiding subjects who understood propriety required establishing three county seats. Second, as a complement to the security emphasis of his registration system, he proposed grassroots, communal organizations as venues for both fostering people’s natural moral goodness—natural propensities to do what is good and right and reject what is bad and wrong—and monitoring the outcome, suitably awarding and punishing as necessary, all with the backing of local authorities. That included, for example, community schools for children, where a cheerful and not overly disciplinarian environment could encourage moral introspection and correct errant behavior. Community covenants, on the other hand were designed to bring local communities together in an egalitarian fashion, to select respected persons to organize regular meetings at local temples, and to establish a roster with officers. These covenants helped create a public setting for fostering communal harmony and monitoring conduct. Members were to recount their good deeds and be given the opportunity to correct mistakes, with the understanding that through repentance one could change, joining together with others who also had the goal of advancing in virtue (Israel 2014: 101–7). The stress on reforming the individual’s moral subjectivity in communal settings is characteristic of Wang’s learning of mind.

Throughout the prior eight years, whether in Beijing, Nanjing, Zhejiang, or Jiangxi, Wang continued positioning himself as the leader of a philosophical movement aimed at transforming Ming China’s political culture through education. As time permitted, he conveyed his philosophy

to those seeking his instruction, and indeed the volume of people doing so grew, primarily young men trying to establish themselves in the scholar-official class. In 1518, in Ganzhou, committed followers began printing and disseminating records of Wang's teaching, as well as brief philosophical pieces he composed in the wake of campaigning.

Wang believed that the world was in crisis, decayed and decadent. The Way was long lost and the teaching requisite to entering it had vanished. Consequently, immorality ruled the day. What motivates most people are worldly success, power, wealth, and attention seeking, especially the governing class. They would readily turn on their most loved and respected friends if they believed doing so would confer an advantage. Wang had much to say about people's flaws and outright wickedness, the origins of such in all-too-human desires, the endangered mind, as well as how the troubled world reflected its distorted functioning.

Pedagogy could change this but that meant revisiting foundational texts. Most importantly, Zhu Xi's arrangement of the *Great Learning* was wrong, misleading learners to overly emphasize learned inquiry, a kind of knowledgeability insufficiently moral in orientation, untrue to our moral mind, the basis our subjectivity, and hence our ethical life. Wang called for using another edition, the old one, because that was the correct one. The old one lay emphasis on being truthful—without self-deception—as the starting point for learning and the foundation for the other steps, the ones that end with governing the state well and setting the world at peace. He directed learners to be steadfast towards the goal (sagehood) and intensely mindful—ever vigilant—of the moral tone of their mental life, of emerging thoughts, inclinations, and intentions, all facets of the will. Here is where immorality begins, and where you can fall into error, taking the world down with you. Are you good-willed? Be truthful, stand upon sincerity, put wickedness to rest, uproot seeds of wrongdoing, get over yourself, rid the thieves of virtue, as if treading on thin ice or dodging a den of snakes. Treasure your conscientious willingness to change, rectify the foundation and purify the source, faithfully carrying out the task of making the personal life sincere, as you polish yourselves in the affairs of life, thereby restoring to clarity your moral self-knowledge. Henceforth, wherever you end up you will find meaning, for that will be the place for true learning, where the heavenly principle arises and flows, manifesting the highest good.

In 1519, Wang Yangming was still residing in southern Jiangxi as grand coordinator, overseeing the implementation of his measures to maintain peace and security after two years of campaigning. This year, however, he confronted a more serious threat: a rebellion by an imperial

prince whose palace establishment was located in northern Jiangxi, in the city of Nanchang. The Prince of Ning, Zhu Chenhao, launched his enterprise on July 10, 1519, with a plan to send forces north to dethrone his cousin. However, he underestimated the threat to his plans posed by Wang, who was quickly able to mobilize an army and brilliantly employ stratagem, subduing the prince's forces and capturing him on August 20.

After Wang captured the prince, the Zhengde emperor, abetted by sycophants, departed with his own expeditionary force, intending to lead his own campaign against the prince and rewrite the history of the rebellion. His accomplices urged Wang to release the prince, and his refusal to do so led to plots against him. Eventually, he made a deal with the emperor's chief eunuch, handing the prince over so that the emperor could stage his capture on a public square. Even after that, while serving in Jiangxi as grand coordinator in 1520 and 1521, Wang was subject to constant defamation and threats on his life by political enemies. Those who served alongside him went unrewarded.

In 1520, under these trying circumstances, Wang Yangming unveiled his most important teaching, his formula for attaining sagehood: *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 (attaining inborn knowledge of the good). He said this tenet was born of a hundred deaths and a thousand predicaments, and he trusted that with it we can overcome our fears and anxieties, including over life and death. He compared it to holding a boat's rudder: handle in hand, we fearlessly confront the most adverse winds and waves. In this way, practicing *liangzhi* confers equanimity. That is why Wang remained unstirred during this time, so observers said, serenely executing the military arts seated at his headquarters and also teaching students and giving out orders.

In fact, *liangzhi* contributed to victory, he believed. What greater wickedness is there than rebellion, and what greater righteousness than punishing it? Wang (2011: vol. 3, 41.1775) asked, "All people have this inborn knowledge of the good (*liangzhi* 良知), so how could it be the case that no others will respond to the call and come?" Whatever else may have motivated the men in his armies, their pure, nascent moral sense—as the locus where moral law naturally and clearly reveals itself to awareness—outshone the rest, so they rose to the occasion. In fact, our inborn knowledge of the good enables us to accord with principle and gather righteousness quite effortlessly. The wondrous, unimpeded flow and operation of *liangzhi* brings "an ability to move through the world and human society in a manner that is completely spontaneous and yet still fully

in harmony with the normative order of the natural and human worlds—the Dao or ‘Way’” (Slingerland 2003: 4).

*Zhi* means to realize, attain, and extend. *Liangzhi* is the inborn capacity to know the good—an innate, immediate, automatic, unerring, unextinguishable sense of right and wrong everyone possesses. He borrowed this term from Mengzi, further empowering it. It is our moral compass—an intuitive certainty that seals the truth. The right and wrong and truth and falsity of all that comes before it are instantly illuminated. Revere and follow *liangzhi*, Wang advised, and it will change you, making you a better person. Should someone know this secret teaching of *liangzhi*, no matter how many immoral or crooked thoughts arise, *liangzhi* will know, and they will all melt away of their own accord. He said,

Your little bit of *liangzhi* is your own standard. If what your thinking is fixated upon is right, then *liangzhi* will know it is right. If it is wrong, then *liangzhi* will know it is wrong. It is not susceptible to the slightest deception. You just do not want to deceive it. Truly act on its basis. If something is good, maintain it. If something is evil, eliminate it. This is just so reliable and cheerful! This is the perfect teaching of *ge wu* 格物 (rectifying things) and the correct practice of *zhi zhi* 致知 (realizing knowledge)” (Wang 2011: vol. 1, 3.105).

For Wang, *liangzhi* is like a granule of efficacious elixir that transmutes iron to gold with one touch.

The Zhengde emperor died of illness in 1521 and was succeeded by his cousin Zhu Houcong (the Jiajing emperor, r. 1521–1567). At first, the new ruler was favorably disposed towards Wang and summoned him to Beijing to confer honors and high office. However, although Wang departed Nanchang, powerful figures at the Ming court were envious of his growing prestige and took measures to block him from serving alongside them; they appointed him Nanjing minister of war. In September 1521, Wang returned to Zhejiang Province, where he remained until mid-1527. That year, the emperor recalled him and he was appointed censor-in-chief and supreme commander of the provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong.

While in his hometowns of Yuyao and Shaoxing, teaching crowds of students, disciples, and onlookers at temples and academies, in a cheerful setting enlivened by poetry, singing, and wine, Wang elaborated his message of recovering the mind’s original condition, the identity of mind and principle, the unity of knowledge and action, and realizing good knowledge. The philosophy transmitted by the sages of antiquity was a philosophy of the heart-mind. One studies

to learn how to express the heart fully, thereby illuminating the Way for the world (by which Wang means the personal, social, and political worlds). To do so, the Way mind, which is one's true self, one's moral authenticity, and what is known through exercising vigilance in solitude, must be restored, uncovered from the separative self-sense occluding it, the endangered mind born of egoic desire. Our inauthenticity drags us outside ourselves, stripping us of our autonomy, as we become subject to praise and blame, defined by the status that we allow the world to impose on us. It makes us mean.

Give no fuel to this fire, Wang counsels, for it is a wickedness happy to bear its teeth in the strife-ridden world generated by it. Rather, place your faith in the Way and be steadfast in your determination to achieve sagehood, setting your mind on virtue. Surround yourself with like-minded friends and share with them the progress you have made. Seek not tranquility but rather the equanimity that comes from doing the right thing. Purify your intentions and overcome your selfish propensity to elevate yourself over others. Embrace humility and reject false pride.

Fortunately, we have a little bit of spiritual illumination within, present of itself, making the goal possible. Our nature decreed by Heaven is the highest good, our illustrious virtue, the essence of which is intellectually responsive, evident, and unobscured. This essence is *liangzhi*, the inborn knowledge of the good, our sense of right and wrong, our natural standard. As *liangzhi* is aroused by and responds to experience, it knows itself in its natural manifestation as the enlightened clarity of heavenly principle. This law most purely manifests, for example, as a child's will to love parents, this propensity or most subtle thought, or as the compassion anyone knows upon witnessing an endangered child. This is our illustrious virtue, what our heart-mind gives and knows at once, as well as the power by which we overcome errant thoughts and inclinations, setting ourselves aright. We have only to accord with this knowledge, illuminating its natural clarity and acting upon it to remove what would obscure it, thereby recovering our mind's original condition. When goodness arises in you love and sustain it. When wickedness arises in you hate and reject it. This Way is simple and easy, Wang taught.

Wang Yangming arrived in Guangxi late in 1527. Han Chinese and non-Han ethnic groups, local and migrants, populated this loosely governed southern province. Conflicts frequently broke out. The Ming court dispatched him to quell armed uprisings by native Zhuang chieftains. After achieving a peaceful resolution by granting the chieftains a provisional voice within the limits imposed by his benevolent paternalism, Wang turned his attention to the so-called "Yao bandits."

These peoples had resisted the Ming state for decades, and Wang concluded that military operations to exterminate the most violent among them were imperative. His offensive lasted three months, and around three thousand perished.

Wang regarded this campaign as a total triumph that uprooted a long-festering problem and explained his decisions and success in philosophical terms. In general, he was confident that with a sufficient display of might and virtue, and by implementing policies that struck the right balance between granting enough autonomy sufficient to prevent resistance while retaining coercion sufficient to compel submission, peoples living on the frontiers would come to recognize the rightness of Ming imperial expansionism and the vision of community underlying it. His humanistic philosophy of *liangzhi* did prompt him to treat people as moral subjects responding to their consciences, and he therefore sought to understand why populations were resisting as well as to build a climate of confidence. However, ultimately, Wang's notions of subjectivity were conditioned by his subscription to a deep-rooted civilizing discourse held by Ming elites.

Thus, at times, he determined that rebellious peoples were beyond the pale. All people are endowed with the same nature and inborn moral sense, he believed, but absent the correct environmental conditions and proper nurturing, these endowments may become obscured. While some become incorrigible, with the implementation of enlightened policies by virtuous leaders, others can be changed. Hence, Wang implemented a two-prong policy, first using force to exterminate the worst elements and then taking long-term measures to civilize the region (Shin 2006: 103).

Plagued by chronic illness, Wang Yangming departed Guangxi in the fall of 1528 and headed home, although he never made it. He passed away while journeying, on January 9, 1529. Late in life, he stressed that our mind's essence—its intrinsic reality—is genuine love and commiseration. My heart is the heart of the cosmos, and my humaneness form of all things one body, one whole. As such, other's pain pains me, other's suffering is my suffering, other's good is my good, and I am therefore always naturally inclined to gather righteousness. This knowledge is our *liangzhi*, our most basic moral intuition, our innate knowledge of the good, which is what makes us human, equally so and throughout all time. For Wang, this was the fundamental message of the Ruist sages of ancient times and the one that he sought passionately to convey, as his teaching of the learning of the heart-mind.

#### **4. The Followers of Wang Yangming**

It is obvious that, while in and out of office and wherever he was traveling or residing, Wang Yangming conveyed his philosophical tenets by teaching them directly to students, colleagues, friends, and acquaintances who came seeking his instruction. At times, he held one-on-one conversations that were personalized based on his assessment of the learner's understanding of his doctrines and level of moral awakening. At other times, he held lively forums for lecturing and discussion, with participants numbering from a handful to hundreds. Some of these individuals pledged discipleship, becoming committed followers. Most were young or middle-aged scholars still making their way through the civil-service examinations or at an early stage in their official careers.

More generally, those individuals regarded as his followers evidence one or more of these characteristics: their life and thought clearly demonstrate Wang Yangming's influence; they encouraged their students to seek instruction from him; they utilized their political status to support him on the political stage; they compiled, printed, and disseminated his *Record of Practice* or collected works; they constructed academies or shrines in his honor; during and after his lifetime, they promoted his ideas by holding forums for discussing them (Zou 2017: 6). Thus, Wang's followers, as well as their followers, advocated for and disseminated their teacher's ideas, playing roles in the emergence of the School of the Learning of Mind inspired by him. This school dominated philosophical discourse during Ming China's sixteenth century.

Estimates of the numbers of individuals taught by Wang who meet these criteria range from hundreds to thousands, but a record sufficient to determine intellectual commitments exists for only about two hundred (Qian 2009: 266; Zou 2017: 1–9). Scholars have organized them in various ways. In his *Records of Ming Scholars* (*Ming ru xue an* 明儒學案), the Ruist scholar Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) organized them geographically, primarily by provinces but also by larger regions or master-disciple affiliation. They include the Zhezhong school (Zhejiang Province), with Wang Ji 王畿 as a prominent representative; the Jiangyou school (Jiangxi Province), with such prominent representatives as Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 and Nie Bao 聶豹; the Taizhou school (Taizhou Prefecture, Jiangsu Province), with Wang Gen 王艮 as its founder; the Nanzhong school (Southern Metropolitan Region); the Chuzhong school (Huguang Province); the Northern school; and the school of Yue and Min (Fujian Province and Guangdong Province).

The philosopher Okada Takehiko, on the other hand, grouped Wang's followers based on their philosophies' shared characteristics. He recognized three camps: Present in Perfection Now, Revert to Silence, and Cultivate and Verify. The Present in Perfection Now camp stressed that *liangzhi* is perfectly present right now, rejecting gradual methods for its cultivation as obstacles to realizing the mind's original condition, its fundamental state. Wang Gen and Wang Ji fall into this camp. The Return to Silence camp believed that with respect to *liangzhi* a practical distinction should be drawn between the void and silent state (*xu ji zhi ti* 虛寂之體) and the functioning of bestirred arising (*gan fa zhi yong* 感發之用). To realize *liangzhi*, one should return to the mind's silent, original condition, fully establishing it, because only then will one realize *liangzhi*'s intrinsic capacity to discriminate moral truths amid the phenomenological flow. Nie Bao falls into this camp. The Cultivate and Witness camp rejected the notion that *liangzhi* is already present in perfection as well as the Return to Silence camp's bias towards tranquility. *Liangzhi*'s original condition, they said, must be perfected by cultivation and verification, that is, by exerting moral effort, much like how gold is obtained in its purest form by smelting gold ore. Ultimately, for this camp, the natural condition is moral practice. Zou Shouyi is a prominent representative of this camp (Okada 1971: 98–99). Many other classification schemes have been proffered by scholars studying this movement.

Wang Gen (1483–1541) was a salt merchant from Taizhou Prefecture, Jiangsu Province. When he visited a shrine to Confucius at the age of twenty-five, he was inspired to devote himself to the Ruist Way. He spent more time studying Ruist classics and, in the tradition of Chen Xianzhang, sitting in meditation. When he was twenty-nine, he dreamt the skies were falling and pressing down on him. People were screaming for help, so he raised his arms, holding up the sky, causing everyone to dance with joy and thank him. He awoke in a sweat and clearly perceived his mind's essence (*xinti* 心體). A strong sense of social responsibility shaped the remainder of his life. He taught that a humane person regards the cosmos and everything in it as one body, looking upon the people as one would a wounded person. If one thing is out of place, then I am out of place.

It was not until he was thirty-eight, however, that Wang Gen visited Wang Yangming. Convinced by his tenets, Gen declared his discipleship. He subsequently turned to teaching, traveling to academies and joining forums held by other disciples of Wang Yangming. He also established his own school, the Hall of Joyful Learning, teaching people regardless of social

background. He and his disciples spawned a movement of popularization that brought the learning of mind outside the scholar-official class (Lidén 2018: 85–106).

Wang Gen was not a systematic philosopher; his ideas shine through pithy statements, poetry, and short prose pieces. He is primarily concerned with people's well-being, which he saw as a natural way of being. He says that we must safeguard, respect, and love ourselves because the self is the foundation for ordering family, governing the country, and setting the world at peace. By self, he means our body and mind but also our life as a whole. When our lives are secure and in order, when we are sane and settled, we can serve as an accurate measure to the world around us.

This should be simple and easy, not compelled or contrived. *Liangzhi*, our inborn knowledge of the good, is always already there, self-composed, freely present in perfection now as our mind's original condition, as our happiness. Sages merely taught happiness. If the unbounded joy is missing, they said, you have learned nothing. But self-centered desires and a preoccupation with the affairs of life have unduly fettered and affected our heart-mind. Fortunately, just as soon as a self-centered desire emerges, *liangzhi* is always aware of it, and once aware we can dispel it and return to our originally happy condition (Huang 2007: vol. 2, 32:719). As *liangzhi* possesses inherently the natural moral order (*tianli* 天理), this knowledge is quite self-evident, quite suitable. People have only to accord with this good knowledge, which is what people do anyway, for it is commonplace, employed every day. Who is aware of *liangzhi*? Although *liangzhi* alone exists, originally, we had no need to know this was so. This is the Way.

Zou Shouyi (1491–1562) hailed from a prominent clan of Anfu County, Jiangxi. In 1511, Zou placed first in the metropolitan examination. As Wang Yangming was an examiner, Zou caught his attention. After serving for a year at the prestigious Hanlin Academy in Beijing, Zou returned home to care for his father, remaining for nine years. During that time, he attracted a following of students, but the seemingly different methods for developing one's moral character proposed by the *Great Learning* and *Doctrine of the Mean*, two classics central to the Cheng-Zhu learning of principle, perplexed him. In 1519, when Wang was stationed in Jiangxi, Zou called on him and inquired about it. Wang's reply so inspired him that he declared discipleship, becoming one of his most committed followers and, by some accounts, the one who most accurately understood the master's philosophy.

The Ming court recalled Zou to office in 1522, but his position on a controversial political issue angered the emperor. In 1524, by imperial order, the court imprisoned Zou and demoted him to a humble office. Thereafter, Zou rose slowly through prestigious appointments in Nanjing and Beijing. In 1541, however, after a fire broke out in the imperial ancestral temple, he submitted a memorial urging reforms and counselling mutual respect between ruler and officials. For this, he was compelled to resign. Upon returning home, he spent the remaining twenty years of his life devoting himself to teaching (Zou 2007: vol. 2, 27.1368–70).

Zou Shouyi worried that the true meaning of Wang Yangming's learning of mind was being misconstrued, taken too lightly, and without the effort necessary to realize what it really is, so he did his best to convey Wang's thought accurately. Zou says that *liangzhi*—the heart's essence and our shining virtue—is the most pure, lucid, intellectual, and enlightened dimension of the nature decreed to us by Heaven. It shines with the vastness of the sun and moon and flows as the river's depths, so capacious and impartial that it embraces all things, leaving nothing behind. On the one hand, *liangzhi*'s essence is still and motionless, a centeredness prior to the emergence of the emotional life. On the other, when acted upon *liangzhi* immediately penetrates, automatically judging right and wrong, truth and falsity, and always suitably responding to things as they come.

The essence and functioning, however, do not comprise separate horizons: *liangzhi* is always simultaneously placid and responsive. Ideas and practices emphasizing one over the other miss its nondual nature. Wherever you go, shining virtue is flowing and your inborn knowledge of the good is operating, and you can follow your heart's desire without overstepping the line, with the vitality of a bird in flight or fish jumping. Only worry that the allures of the world outside, mental habits, or an ingrained temperament obstruct the flow, preventing *liangzhi* from functioning according to its intrinsic capacities, whereby the moral life arises harmoniously, pure in Heavenly principle. If the blockages are present, and your heart veers towards wrongdoing, correct your inclinations through intense mindfulness—ever vigilant and apprehensive over what is neither seen nor heard—and abiding in reverence, such that when out and about you behave as a guest would and manage things as if conducting a sacrifice. *Liangzhi* will then be restored to its ever pure, lucid, and enlightening original condition, and you will be able to serve Heaven, as you unite with it in virtue.

Nie Bao was born in Yongfeng County, Jiangxi, to a well-established lineage. He obtained his *jinshi* degree in 1517 and was appointed county magistrate in 1520. He quickly proved himself

a conscientious and competent civil servant and rose through several offices until returning home in 1531 to mourn the loss of his father. In 1526, Nie visited Wang Yangming in Shaoxing and discussed his doctrine of *liangzhi*. They subsequently corresponded, although Nie did not declare formal discipleship until 1530, about a year after Wang's death. At this point, Nie taught that a child's love for parents and respect for elders are original expressions of *liangzhi*, natural sprouts of the unadulterated heart's incipient psychological life. Always nurturing this genuine propensity and right thinking generates the Way as a matter of course (Nie 2007: 587). Practicing filial piety and fraternal respect and extending that outward to society are the practical starting points for realizing one's inborn knowledge of goodness (Nie 2007: 8.134–135).

Nie remained in Yongfeng for a decade. First he mourned the loss of his father for three years and then his mother's loss for another three, after which he stayed out of office so he could devote himself to studying and teaching, receiving students, and attending lecture forums convened at academies for the purpose of promoting his teacher's learning of mind. Ruist philosophizing and pedagogy remained his focus to the end of his life. In 1541, however, the Ming court recalled him to office, and he subsequently traversed a tumultuous political career until the court dismissed him for good in 1555.

Both his time in retirement and the challenges of political life contributed to the evolution of his philosophy. Whether staying nearby in Yongfeng's scenic mountains or imprisoned in Beijing for reason of charges trumped up by political adversaries, Nie often sat in tranquility, deepening his insight into the mind's characterless and silent essence. Concerned that fellow learners were mistaking certain mental phenomena for *liangzhi* and hence unable to realize a genuine ethical life, he emphasized the importance of returning to the starting point, initial mind, which is mind as it is originally intended—the heart of the child, unadulterated simplicity, a centeredness preceding emotional involvement, utter stillness absent sensation, in clear illumination of the great foundation of the cosmos, the source of all transformation. This way, as experience arises, as the stream of mental events unfold, and as emotions are expressed, they do so as an expression of the Way, arising in due measure and hence harmoniously, absent human contrivance, unaffected by the distortions of ego—of errant, endangered mind. Rather, they are the natural flow and operation of *liangzhi*, our inborn standard by which we become a measure to the world, the Way mind and hence source of the promptings of virtue implanted in us by Heaven, the ultimate reality and highest good now setting us in motion (Nie 2007: 11.375–6).

Wang Ji (1498–1583) was a native of Shaoxing Prefecture, Zhejiang Province. At first disdainful of Wang Yangming and his followers, after spending time with him in their shared hometown in 1521, Ji became a committed follower. So adept was he that while his teacher was residing in Shaoxing in the 1520s and swamped by students, he directed Ji to provide their initial screening and instruction. Furthermore, although Ji had lost interest in government service, Wang directed him to take the 1526 national civil-service examinations and utilize his time in Beijing to disseminate his teachings. However, owing to the hostility towards his teacher among elites, Ji refused to take the palace examination, returning home in protest. He only obtained his *jinshi* in 1532, three years after Wang's death. His political career, however, was short-lived. He held positions in the Nanjing Ministry of War but repeatedly fell afoul of Xia Yan, a powerful political figure at the Ming court. An unfavorable evaluation led to his dismissal in 1541. He spent the remaining forty years of his life promoting the school of the learning of mind by teaching, traveling widely, and corresponding and holding forums with other Wang Yangming followers (Wang 2007: *fulu* 4.824–6).

Wang Ji sought to express his teacher's most advanced teaching clearly. They both believed few understood the spiritual horizon to which it spoke, where *liangzhi* is forthwith present in perfection. This is your mind as it is right now, what Wang Ji refers to as the incipience of a moment of thought. As it is not born of phenomena, this form of thinking has yet to turn into calculation. It has yet to become fixated in objects. This incipient thought moment is *liangzhi*, and Wang Ji says it gives birth to heaven, earth, and the myriad things, in an ontological sense. He describes *liangzhi* in much detail. It is the inherent clarity of mind in its natural state, pure and desireless, an undifferentiated oneness. It is the nature bestowed by Heaven and the highest good, and hence your correct or right mind, by which truth and falsity are determined. On the one hand, *liangzhi* is founded in absence; voidness and silence are its intrinsic reality, its essence. On the other, it is spiritually illuminating, intellectually efficacious and clear. A mirror and its reflecting provide a good analogy. Wang Ji says that because it is void, *liangzhi* knows and because it is silent, when acted upon it responds. Put more simply, silence is the origin, but silence and experiencing are one. Experience arises in silence. As such, it does so unhindered, unobstructed, born in absence, without an agenda. Mind's intrinsic nature now flows and the willing to which it gives rise is a willing absent willing. As such, it responds perfectly and its action is absolutely good.

## 5. Conclusion

Through their zealous teaching of his tenets regarding the moral mind and the positive impact of actualizing one's natural goodness, Wang Yangming's followers and their followers made his School of Mind the dominant intellectual trend and fashion through the 1560s. It helped that some of his disciples obtained powerful positions at the Ming court and could provide sponsorship for philosophical forums that saw high turnout from diverse sectors of society.

Thereafter, however, other trends emerged. On the one hand, because Wang himself was open to the insights of Daoism and Buddhism and spoke to the three tradition's core resemblances, as time went on the movement became more syncretic and diverse in orientation. Other moral and religious movements also emerged. Second, in his time, Wang was not without critics. They believed that his identification of mind with principle promoted notions of subjectivity and enlightenment that undermined the objectivity of the moral order principle signified and the activism it required. His message concerning the spontaneous and natural features of the moral life valorized a potentially pathological individualism antinomian in nature. Wang Gen and Wang Ji appeared to exacerbate these trends, and such criticism gained ground because prominent late-Ming intellectuals influenced by them appeared to overstep the social and political bounds of the scholar-official elites. In fact, critics sometimes used the term "Lu-Wang School" in a pejorative sense.

Last, during the Qing dynasty, new philosophical trends emerged that overshadowed the School of Mind. Qing scholars shifted their attention from the metaphysical and introspective orientation of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism to one that was more generally empirical in nature. Statecraft studies and evidential research became the order of the day. Qing scholars believed they could place the classical heritage on a more solid footing (and hence the social order) not through contemplative inquiry but rather through the rigorous methodologies demanded by such disciplines as philology, epigraphy, and phonetics, among others. However, during the twentieth century, modern new Confucians reinvigorated interest in Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming. They believed the School of Mind held keys to solving the most pressing philosophical problems in modern times, most notably the alienation of human beings from their original mind and human nature, and hence their fundamental humanity.

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