religions

MDPI

Article

Yang Shi's Confucian Quiet-Sitting Meditation: A Distinction from Cheng Yi and Huayan Buddhism

Bin Song

Department of Philosophy and Religion, Washington College, Chestertown, MD 21620, USA; bsong2@washcoll.edu

Abstract: Yang Shi initiated the Neo-Confucian methodology of self-cultivation centered on quiet-sitting, and focusing on Yang Shi may shift the study of Confucian quiet-sitting to a more chronologically appropriate "beginning-forward" approach. Incorporating techniques such as breathing and calming the mind, Yang's approach to self-cultivation follows a model of returning to the state of centrality through quiet-sitting, and then preserving and expanding that state in moments of everyday life. This model is based on a moral psychology and metaphysics that views the comprehensive pattern-principle of the universe, Tianli, as fully manifest in the vital state of the human heartmind achievable through the practice of quiet-sitting. This view inherits major features of Cheng Hao's philosophy while distinguishing itself from Cheng Yi's. Yang Shi's reflections on the differences between Confucian and Buddhist contemplative practices also indicate, despite his view being closer to the Huayan Buddhist metaphysical perspective of perfect fusion between pattern-principle and things compared to Cheng Yi, an insistence on characterizing his quiet-sitting philosophy as distinctively Confucian.

Keywords: meditation; quiet-sitting; mindfulness; centrality; perfect fusion; Neo-Confucianism; Huayan Buddhism

Citation: Song, Bin. 2024. Yang Shi's Confucian Quiet-Sitting Meditation: A Distinction from Cheng Yi and Huayan Buddhism. *Religions* 15: 1537. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121537

Academic Editor: Jinhua Chen

Received: 27 September 2024
Revised: 7 December 2024
Accepted: 13 December 2024
Published: 16 December 2024

1. Significance of Yang Shi to the Study of Ruist Contemplation

It is widely acknowledged within the Ru tradition[1] and among contemporary researchers that it was Cheng Hao (程顥 1032–1085) and Cheng Yi (程頤 1033–1107) who played an initiatory and decisive role in incorporating the practice and theory of quiet-sitting meditation into the Daoxue (道學, learning of the Dao) discourse during the Song to Ming dynasties (960–1644), a period of Ruism alternatively translated as Neo-Confucianism. Nevertheless, decades elapsed between the death of Cheng Yi and the birth of Zhu Xi (朱熹1130–1200). Given the sociopolitical context at the time of Cheng Yi's death, it seemed unlikely that the Daoxue teachings of the Cheng Brothers would be passed on to Zhu and, through Zhu's monumental work, become the officially endorsed orthodox Ruist teaching for centuries in late imperial China and East Asia more broadly.

First, Cheng Yi became embroiled in the partisan conflict between Wang Anshi (王安石 1021–1086)'s "New Learning (新學)" and other scholar-officials who opposed it. In his later years, Cheng Yi faced multiple demotions by the central government, and the dissemination of his teachings and writings was restricted during periods of political censorship. (G. Yang 2019, p. 2) As one of his most prominent students, Yang Shi (楊時1053–1135), recounted, during the last decade of Cheng Yi's life, "his establishment of doctrine and teachings served as great taboos for the world, and scholars were hesitant to voice their opinions openly"[2] (S. Yang 1792, vol. 25, p. 10).

Second, due to escalating domestic crises and invasions by ethnic minority regimes from the north, the Song dynasty was forced to relinquish its extensive northern territories and relocate its capital to the south. The transition from the Northern (960–1127) to Southern Song (1127–1279) took place precisely between Cheng Yi's death and Zhu Xi's

birth, causing upheavals that further complicated the transmission of the Cheng Brothers' Daoxue teachings.

Despite the numerous obstacles presented by external circumstances during this tumultuous period, several of the Cheng Brothers' students remained steadfast in their commitment to preserving and disseminating their teachings. Among these students, the so-called Southward Way (道南) lineage—comprising three prominent Ru scholars across three successive generations, namely Yang Shi, Luo Congyan (羅從彥 1072–1135), and Li Tong (李侗1093–1163)—is considered by major Daoxue historiographies to be the critical link ensuring the unbroken transmission of learning from Cheng Yi to Zhu Xi.

The title "Southward Way" originated from such an event: "When Cheng Hao was in Yingchang, Yang Shi sought medical treatment and was transferred to the capital. Instead, he went to Yingchang to study with Cheng Hao. Cheng Hao was very pleased, often saying, 'Mr. Yang is the one who understands my teaching most easily'. When Yang Shi left, Cheng Hao accompanied him to the door and told his seated guests, 'My Way has turned southward (吾道南矣)'" (Cheng and Cheng 1981, pp. 428–29).[3] Yingchang was located in present-day Henan province, in the northern part of China, while Yang Shi's hometown was in modern Fujian province, in the southern part of the country, hence Cheng Hao's dictum.

Zhu Xi, born in the same province as Yang Shi, deliberately positioned himself within the same lineage of Ru teachings that originated from the Cheng Brothers and were passed on by the Southward Way school, as evidenced in his article, "In Memory of Master Li Tong (祭延平李先生文)":

> "For a thousand years, the Way was lost,
> The Cheng Brothers rose and revived,
> Finding the thread, to Mr. Yang Shi it was passed.
> When Mr. Yang Shi journeyed south,
> The Way traveled with him.
> As students became aware, they rushed to the door,
> Only then, to Mr. Luo Congyan, was the lineage transmitted.
> … Alas, the Master (Li Tong) had found his teacher (Luo Congyan) early,
> Forgetting both self and world, he regarded the Way as his sole foundation,
> Refining meaning, simplifying complexity, delving deep, and discerning the subtle.
> … Zhu Xi, a young student, bowed and paid his respects,
> Honoring his late teacher (Li Tong), truly sharing the same lineage."
> (Zhu 2002, vol. 24, pp. 4064–65)

Given Zhu Xi's influence in the remaining Daoxue history, later historians also embraced the narrative of the Lineage of the Way (道統) as constructed by Zhu. For instance, Huang Baijia (黃百家1643–1706) wrote, "The Cheng Brothers acquired the secrets of Mengzi's (孟子372–289 BCE) lost teachings from the remaining classics and promoted them throughout the world. Among the students who ascended the hall of the Cheng Brothers to explore the profound, the most renowned were You, Yang, Yin, Xie, and Lü. While each of these scholars passed on their teachings, it was only after Yang Shi that the lineage continued through three generations, culminating in Zhu Xi, who illuminated this Way and spread it across the world. Cheng Hao's statement about the 'Way turning southward' as he bade farewell to Yang can be considered a prophecy fulfilled" (Huang et al. 1648, vol. 25, p. 4).

Nonetheless, what remains most remarkable for the contemporary field of contemplative studies is that the central practice in the teachings of the Southward Way lineage is, in fact, quiet-sitting (靜坐). In other words, it was the persistent practice of, and profound philosophical reflection on quiet-sitting by three generations of Ru scholars in the Southward Way school that facilitated the transmission of the Lineage of the Way from the Cheng Brothers to Zhu Xi, further establishing orthodox Ruism, the so-called Cheng-Zhu Learning of Pattern-principle (程朱理學), throughout Ruism's second-millennium history. We

find confirmation of the significance of the quiet-sitting practice for the Southward Way school in Zhu's own words, describing his learning experience with Li Tong. Zhu says: "Master Li taught people by generally guiding them to distinctively experience the state of the great foundation (of all under heaven) during moments of stillness when the heartmind (心) has not yet arisen (靜中體認大本未發時氣象分明), so that when dealing with matters and responding to things, they would naturally follow the proper course. This is the secret passed down within the school of Mr. Yang Shi" (Zhu 2002, vol. 22, p. 1802). Also, Huang Zongxi (黃宗羲1610–1695) states: "Luo Congyan practiced quiet-sitting to observe the state before the heartmind was aroused; this is a continuous bloodline passed down from Cheng Hao to Li Tong, forming a single unbroken lineage" (Huang et al. 1648, vol. 39, p. 7).

Since the practice of quiet-sitting plays such an important role in the formation of the orthodox Cheng-Zhu Ruism, it is of utmost significance for contemporary contemplative scholars to study the practice in the Southward Way lineage, starting from Yang Shi, in order to clarify the contemplative nature of Ruism as a whole. More concretely, the significance of a systematic study of Yang's quiet-sitting practice and philosophy comprises the following four major points.

Firstly, the current study of Yang Shi in English-language academia is rather limited. Dennis A. Leventhal considers Yang as a connecting link between the Cheng Brothers and Zhu Xi and argues that unless Yang's thought is clarified, "our understanding of the historical evolution of the doctrines received and restricted by Chu Hsi is incomplete" (Leventhal 1978, p. 52). Nevertheless, in what remains the most systematic English study of Yang's thought so far, Melanie Jameson asserts, "Yang gives no indication that he meditates, and rarely even uses words often associated in Buddhist and Taoist texts with the practice of meditation, such as 'tranquility' or 'quiescence'" (Jameson 1990, p. 135), thereby missing the significance of quiet-sitting meditation to Yang's thought as emphasized by Zhu Xi and later Ruist historians. Jameson's portrayal may have contributed to later scholars' similar oversights. Therefore, a methodic study of Yang on quiet-sitting could fill an evident gap in Yang Shi studies within international scholarship.

Secondly, there is a considerable gap within the field of contemplative studies regarding Ruism in general. Louis Komjathy highlights that the field has largely focused on contemplative practices from major world religions, but "relatively little consideration has been given to Confucian, Jain, Jewish, and Sikh practices" (Komjathy 2017, p. 138). None of the recently published handbooks, such as the *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of Meditation* (2021), or the *Routledge Handbook on the Philosophy of Meditation* (2022), includes a chapter on the Ru tradition. However, consistent with traditional Ruist scholarship, English scholarship has already noticed the initiatory role of Yang Shi in Ruist quiet-sitting meditation, as Masaya Mabuchi maintains: "The idea of directly bringing oneself closer to the true substance of the original nature through quiet sitting was formed during the time of Yang Shi" (Mabuchi 2016, p. 213). Therefore, a focused study on Yang will undoubtedly shed light on Ruist contemplative practice for the field.

Apart from increasing the sheer quantity of contemplative research on Ruism, focusing on Yang Shi also revisits its methodology. Current English scholarship on Ruist quiet-sitting tends to "end-backward", focusing on figures such as Gao Panlong (1562–1626), Okada Takehiko (1908–2004), and Zhu Xi.[4] Gao lived at the very end of the Daoxue movement, and Okada prospered toward the end of the spread of Daoxue Ruism to Japan. Since the most recent developments of an intellectual trend typically inherit all previous diversities and controversies, thereby comprising the highest degree of complexity, it is a significant challenge for contemplative scholars to understand Ruist contemplation as a whole through works that focus on these concluding figures. Similarly, Zhu Xi is well-known as the most complex, sophisticated, and influential philosopher in the second millennium of Ruism in East Asia. As stressed by Leventhal, understudying Yang as a contributing figure to Zhu's thought will obscure our understanding of Zhu as well.

Therefore, a new methodology of contemplative studies on Ruism could complement previous scholarship with a "beginning-forward" approach, focusing on initiatory figures of Ruist quiet-sitting such as the Cheng Brothers and Yang Shi. As I will showcase in the following study, Yang is an excellent case to illustrate the diversity of quiet-sitting philosophy within the Cheng-Zhu lineage of Ruism. He also contributed a rich reflection on the differences between Ruist and Buddhist contemplations. In this sense, a beginning-forward methodology that focuses on Yang can illuminate the diversities within Ruism as well as the distinctions between Ruism and non-Ruist traditions in ancient China—two directions of Ruist contemplative study that are anticipated by researchers such as (Tan 2019, p. 370) and (Shi 2012, p. 52).

Thirdly, in traditional Ru scholarship, quiet-sitting is discussed under the methodology of self-cultivation (工夫, gongfu). The purpose of self-cultivation is to refine the human heartmind and realize human nature (心性, xinxing). Ultimately, the explanation of human heartmind and nature needs to be grounded in a discussion on the fundamental state of being (本體, benti) of things in the universe. The *benti* discourse is likened to "metaphysics", the *xinxing* discourse is similar to "moral psychology", and the methodology of self-cultivation lacks an exact corresponding category in mainstream contemporary Western philosophy. Therefore, we can reserve the use of the phrase itself.

Although the details of Yang Shi's quiet-sitting practice, such as its techniques, context, and testimonies, have not yet been prioritized by contemporary Ruist scholars, a greater degree of consensus concerning Yang's philosophy of quiet-sitting, including his methodology of self-cultivation, moral psychology, and metaphysics, is discernible. For instance, Mou Zongsan (牟宗三1909–1995) in (Mou 1999, Part 3, Chapter 3, pp. 353–58) identified Yang's methodology of self-cultivation as "transcendent and experiential corroboration via introspective intuition (超越的逆覺體證)", in the sense that Yang singles out quiet-sitting as a transcendent moment distinct from other everyday moments of human life. Yang turns his awareness inward and, through intuition, directly experiences and corroborates the existence of the ideal state of human heartmind and nature, which is rooted in the metaphysical state of the universe. Mou deemed Yang's approach to self-cultivation as deriving from Cheng Hao and grouped these two Ruists together into the "vertically run (縱貫)" lineage of Daoxue Ruism. This classification implies that this lineage considers the fundamental state of the universe as fully capable of manifesting in the functional activities of human heartmind, as human nature has a direct connection to the universe. In contrast, Mou grouped Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi into the "horizontally extended (橫攝)" lineage, as they stressed the ontological priority of the fundamental state of the universe over the functional activities of human heartmind. They both relied on outwardly oriented intelligence (知 or 認知) to investigate things in the world gradually in order to eventually grasp the truth about the metaphysical state of the universe.

Mou's identification of Yang Shi's methodology of self-cultivation has been reaffirmed and elaborated upon by many other contemporary Ru scholars, making it one of the most influential interpretations of Daoxue history. For instance, Yang Rubin in (R. Yang 2005, pp. 48–51) provided more textual analysis to highlight the similarities between Cheng Hao and Yang Shi, as well as the differences between the Cheng Brothers. Yang Rubin in (R. Yang 2004, pp. 63–71) categorized Yang Shi's quiet-sitting practice as "transcendent experiential witnessing (超越的體驗)", a phrase reminiscent of Mou's original concept. Yang Rubin also distinguishes Yang Shi's method of witnessing from Zhu Xi's, which he calls "nourishing experiential witnessing (涵養的體驗)". He views that as per Zhu, humans need to investigate things in the world, internalize the pattern-principles of these things within the human heartmind, and thus gradually "nourish" and expand the ontological bond of human nature with the universe. Similarly, Cheng Lai characterized the methodology of self-cultivation practiced by Yang Shi and the Southward Way lineage as "intuitionist (直覺主義)", which contains elements of "mysticism (神秘主義)", whereas Zhu's approach relies on outwardly-oriented intelligence (Chen 1991, pp. 405–07).

As this article aspires to be the first systematic English study of Yang Shi on quiet-sitting, three points of innovation can be achieved based on the existing consensus regarding Yang's methodology of self-cultivation: first, to specify the details of quiet-sitting practice within this methodology; second, to provide original translations and accessible annotations for international scholars in the field of contemplative studies to better investigate this consensus; and third, more importantly, while commonly agreed interpretations of Yang tend to depict his philosophy as a coherent whole, they often contrast it sharply with Zhu Xi's apparently different approach. However, as I will demonstrate later, Yang's approach to quiet-sitting has its intrinsic problems, making his methodology of self-cultivation not entirely coherent. A more nuanced analysis of Yang's quiet-sitting can, therefore, better prepare us to discern the exact point at which Zhu departs from the Southward Way lineage, thereby contributing to the study of Zhu's quiet-sitting practice—a topic reserved for my future research—that has generated considerable controversy among contemporary scholars.

Fourthly, the palpable influences of Buddhism and Daoism on Ruist quiet-sitting have raised concerns that this practice could devolve into withdrawal, seclusion, and moral passivity. As a result, although quiet-sitting was prevalent during the Daoxue movement, Ruist masters provided abundant cautionary guidelines on how to correctly incorporate this practice into the broader Ruist methodology of self-cultivation. Some contemporary scholarship that aims to introduce the general topic of Ruist quiet-sitting highlights this cautionary stance through a historical approach. For instance, (Murray 2021), (Mabuchi 2016), and (Nakajima 2011) enumerate various Ruist perspectives that either advocate for or critique quiet-sitting and attempt to explain why such perspectives prevailed in their respective historical contexts.

In contrast, one of the most influential contemporary Ruist intellectual historians and philosophers, Peng Guoxiang, uses similar historical evidence to make a prescriptive argument that quiet-sitting historically was not, and should not be, considered "the fundamental self-cultivation (根本性的功夫实践)"[5] (Peng 2021, p. 39). Instead, Peng argues that "the fundamental of self-cultivation (功夫实践的根本)" is to realize the original state of the human heartmind and nature, leading to "the self-awareness and execution of one's moral consciousness" (Peng 2021, p. 51).

If we position Ruists along a spectrum based on their attitudes toward quiet-sitting, with advocates on the left and critics on the right, Yang Shi and his Southward Way lineage would clearly belong on the far left, as they regarded quiet-sitting as a fundamental method of self-cultivation. A systematic study of Yang's quiet-sitting not only enriches the existing historical scholarship but also highlights the diversity of quiet-sitting practices within the Ru tradition.

In particular, Yang Shi and the Southward Way lineage pose a challenge to Peng's broad philosophical assessment of the role of quiet-sitting within Ruist self-cultivation methodology. In my view, Peng's article does not clearly differentiate between the concepts of "the fundamental self-cultivation" and "the fundamental of self-cultivation". The latter refers to the goal of self-cultivation, which, as discussed above, traditionally concerns Ruist moral psychology and metaphysics, aligning with Peng's statement about the realization of moral consciousness. However, determining which method of self-cultivation is the most effective among various methods is the primary concern within the methodology of self-cultivation. In other words, since these two concepts have different meanings, Peng's inference—from "the fundamental (i.e., goal) of quiet-sitting, as one method of self-cultivation, is not quiet-sitting itself" to "quiet-sitting is not the fundamental (i.e., the most effective) method to achieve the goal of self-cultivation"—is unwarranted.

More importantly, Peng's article lacks recognition of the distinction made in contemporary contemplative studies between "contemplation" and "meditation". If contemplation is defined as any human activity involving heightened attention to gain insights into reality, and meditation is seen as its still form,[6] the contemplative nature of quiet-sitting meditation can effectively carry over into other more dynamic methods of self-cultivation,

such as ritual performance, scholarship, and political activism. Viewed from this perspective, all historical evidence of Ruists' cautionary stance toward quiet-sitting can be reevaluated, as such caution may pertain only to the practice of quiet-sitting itself, rather than to the broader contemplative nature of Ruist self-cultivation. As I will indicate later, Yang Shi emphasizes this carry-over effect of quiet-sitting meditation into other human activities and regards quiet-sitting as a fundamental method of Ruist self-cultivation aimed at a broader goal. In this sense, a systematic study of Yang's approach to quiet-sitting can significantly assist contemporary Ruist philosophers in reevaluating the role of this practice within the traditional Ruist methodology of self-cultivation.

In summary, a systematic study of Yang Shi's Ruist quiet-sitting can fill gaps in international scholarship on both Yang Shi and Ruist meditation, providing insights into the nuanced transmission of Daoxue teachings from the Cheng Brothers to Zhu Xi and reassessing the role of quiet-sitting within the Ru tradition. As the first comprehensive English study of Yang's quiet-sitting, this article will offer original translations, annotations, and analysis to present a coherent picture of Yang's self-cultivation methodology. To maintain a holistic understanding of Yang's thought, engagement with secondary literature will primarily be placed in endnotes. Building on the approach used in my previous study of Cheng Yi's contemplative practices (Song 2023), I will analyze the social background, testimonies, techniques, moral psychology, and metaphysics in Yang's work, highlighting his differences from Cheng Yi and his reflective thoughts on the distinctions between Ruist and non-Ruist practices, such as Daoism and especially Chinese Huayan Buddhism. This analysis aims to address basic and fundamental questions that global contemplative scholars may have about Yang's Ruist quiet-sitting meditation.

2. Social Context

Yang Shi attained the status of "advanced scholar (進士)" through the civil service examination of the Song dynasty at just 24 years old.[7] Despite this achievement, he declined government positions in his twenties, opting instead to dedicate himself to studying ancient classics. He began studying with Cheng Hao at age 29, and after Cheng Hao's passing, he formally visited Cheng Yi at age 41, ultimately finding Cheng Yi as his Daoxue master. In addition to the aforementioned "my Way has turn southward" event, another famous incident highlighting Yang's unwavering determination to learn from his Ru teacher is known as "standing in the snow at Cheng's gate (程門立雪)", which transpired as follows:

> "When You Zuo (游酢 1053–1123) and Yang Shi first met Cheng Yi, Cheng Yi sat with his eyes closed (瞑目而坐), and the two young men stood by his side. When Cheng became aware of their presence, he turned to them and asked, 'Are you gentlemen still here? It's getting late, let's rest for now'. As they left, they discovered that the snow outside the door had accumulated to a depth of one foot."
>
> (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 429)

From his thirties, Yang Shi served in various official posts, from local to central government positions, for over 50 years. His most prominent roles included Director of the Imperial College (国子監祭酒), Imperial Lecturer (經筵), Grand Remonstrant (諫議大夫), Palace Attendant (給事中), and Vice Minister of Public Works (工部侍郎), among others. Apart from leaving an admirable record as a governor in local counties and provinces, Yang Shi concentrated on two primary objectives in national politics: opposing Wang Anshi's reformist policies, which Yang believed lacked moral foundations and effective implementation, and dedicating himself to defending against aggression from ethnic minority regimes, particularly the Jurchen from the north.

However, compared to his contributions to the transmission of the Cheng Brothers' Way, even Yang Shi's exceptional political career appears less significant. Like other major Ru scholar-officials in the Daoxue lineages of Ruism, Yang devoted himself to scholarship and education during his time out of office. He demonstrated a strong determination to

transmit the teachings of the Cheng Brothers during challenging times, as evidenced by the following words when he reached the age of 82:

> "In my twilight years, I have closed the door and await the end. During this time, most of my close friends and relatives have passed away, leaving me without followers. All I have for solace are the cherished books I hold dear. The books in my collection have been abandoned or destroyed by thieves, with only one or two remaining. *The Collections of Sayings of Master Cheng Yi* (伊川先生語錄) constantly occupies my thoughts. As there has been no one left in the Master's school, I have taken it upon myself to shoulder the responsibility."
>
> (X. Zhang 1677, vol. 2, p. 18)

One of the most notable achievements of Yang Shi's educational endeavors was the establishment of the Donglin Academy (東林書院) at Piling [毘陵, near present-day Wuxi (無錫) in Jiangsu province] when he was 62 years old. He lived and taught there for 18 years, fostering generations of Ru scholars. In appreciation of Yang's significant contribution to the transmission of ancient Ru teachings, his students constructed the "Shrine of Southward Way 道南祠" near the Academy to honor him after his death. In the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Donglin Academy was rebuilt and became the center of the Donglin school, hosting distinguished Ru scholar-officials such as Gu Xiancheng (顧憲成 1550–1612) and Gao Panlong (高攀龍 1562–1626). This development had a profound impact on the politics and academia of late imperial China.

In summary, Yang Shi led a typical life of a Ru scholar-official, dedicating himself to actively engaging in worldly affairs, which primarily encompassed politics, education, and scholarship. Yang's quiet-sitting practice should be understood within this social, political, and biographical context.

3. Testimony

Despite actively engaging in some of the most significant events of his time, Yang Shi's contemplative poetry, which can be considered a testament to his quiet-sitting practice, reveals a lifestyle imbued with a sense of inner ease and metaphysical security. For example, the following poem is titled "Leisurely Life Amidst Books (閒居書事)":

> "In the vacant courtyard, dusky grass encircles green,
> *Silently sitting* (默坐), carefree among the grassy scene.
> Delighting in poetry and books, bridging past and present,
> Embracing heaven and earth, within myself, serene.
> Through the sparse window, a breeze brushes as I idly lean on the pillow,
> In the deep alley, scarcely a soul, the gate closed alone.
> Who would believe amidst worldly dust, tranquility is everywhere,
> whether within city walls or among the verdant hills' open air?"
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 41, p. 10)

Although Yang Shi served in the government for over 50 years, the following poem reveals how his quiet-sitting practice was integrated into his official schedule, seamlessly blending with his off-duty relaxation and the longing for a distant friend. This poem is titled as "Contemplations in a County Office: A Letter to Zhang Shixian (縣齋書事寄張世賢)":

> "In the morning court, the officials gather,
> Crowded together like fish in a row.
> At the evening court, the officials disperse,
> Fluttering away like startled ducks.
> Returning home, I sit in an empty room,
> Opening volumes as if appreciating jewels.

The door ajar, the quiet remains undisturbed,
A gentle breeze enters my humble abode.
I hold a cup, inviting the bright moon,
Chewing on the passage of time.
Walking with leisure beneath the shaded pines,
My shadow and I find amusement in each other.
Alas, I have been lazy and idle for long,
Aloof and distant from the world.
My old friend, separated by the clear Xiang River,
How can I express my unspoken thoughts?
I ask, elder of Mount Lu[8],
How do you feel about these sentiments now?"
(S. Yang 1792, vol. 38, p. 5)

The two poems above phenomenologically illustrate the integrative role of quiet-sitting practice in Yang Shi's contemplative lifestyle. In contrast, the following poem delves deeper into the philosophical realm, highlighting the most significant aspect of Yang's quiet-sitting that I will analyze later. The poem is titled "Jiangling Governor Zhang Jingchang's Ten Thousand Volume Hall (江陵令張景常萬卷堂)", and it was written to commemorate the occasion when the Jiangling governor, Zhang Jingchang, purchased numerous books for a newly built library:

"When people first bound cords for records, diverse realms shared a single origin,
As time passed, who decreed the elder with four-direction vision to carve his flesh into scars and sores?
The dragon and turtle emerged from the Luo and Yellow rivers,[9] this pattern-principle disclosed by Tian (天, heaven or the universe).
Governor Zhang, with coral and jade-like stature, strides ahead, surpassing those before,
Buying books at the cost of a thousand gold pieces, ceaselessly filling his abode.
The Six Classics flood like vast oceans, giving rise to a hundred schools of thought that intermingle.
Amid the torrent surge a thousand waves, yet the whole body is but a single water.
Contemplating what unfolds before one's eyes offers genuine intrigue,[10] and through countless ages, sitting beside a modest table lends support.
From the brush's tip flow fragrant scents, overflowing the eyes with splendid silk-like beauty.
Subtle words offer glimpses into the realm of sagehood, beautifully resonating with the hope of grasping its essence.
In silent sitting (默坐), forgotten are the fishing traps and rabbit snares; even such refined writings become mere chaff and bran." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 38, p. 6)

In this poem, Yang Shi articulates his belief that the pattern-principle (理)—the fundamental logic governing the profound reasoning for human moral behaviors in the context of evolving human and cosmic realities—is intrinsically woven into the fabric of the universe.[11] The Six Classics, the earliest Ru canon considered by the Ru tradition to have been transmitted and compiled by Confucius, contain "subtle words" that aid in understanding these pattern-principles. However, to enter the realm of sagehood and comprehend the pattern-principle of the universe, relying solely on these subtle words is insufficient.

Instead, "silent sitting", "sitting beside a modest table", and other contemplative practices, such as observing "what unfolds before one's eyes", serve as the authentic path to

solidifying one's interpretation of those subtle classical words. Classics, books, and fine writings resemble "fishing traps" or "rabbit snares", and once the pattern-principle of the universe is grasped and internalized within the human heartmind through the contemplative practice of silent sitting, these literary trappings can be "forgotten". Ultimately, the pattern-principle, hinted at by the classics and grasped through quiet-sitting, is akin to "vast oceans" or "a single water" that unifies all schools of thought.[12]

Clearly, as evidenced by the above poems, quiet-sitting practice played a vital role in both Yang Shi's daily life and his philosophy. Moreover, to provide a more precise phenomenological depiction of Yang's quiet-sitting practice, we must consider the prevailing influence of Buddhism and Daoism during his time, even though the extent to which Yang integrated such influences into his Ru contemplative lifestyle remains a question to be unraveled.

For instance, in Yang Shi's poetry, we find evidence suggesting that he was even inclined to meditate within a Buddhist temple called "含雲寺 (Cloud-Encompassing Temple)". The following is the fifth of six poems written at this temple:

"Amidst bamboo, a shadowy path forms grassy circles,

With a goosefoot staff, I pierce the clouds, my clothes filled with green;

Sitting on a rock, I lose track of time, startled only as evening arrives,

Before the mountains, the bright moon accompanies me back."

(S. Yang 1792, vo. 42, p. 9)

Notably, drawing inspiration from Daoist practices, Yang Shi also observed the phenomenon of breath-suspension during meditation, as evidenced by the following "Record of the Heel-Breathing Hermitage (腫息庵記)" written by Yang for a Daoist:

> "All things in the world share a single vital-energy (氣), uniting to give birth and dispersing to die, and it is the same for all creatures with consciousness and blood. Knowing that uniting is not coming and dispersing is not going, life becomes as evanescent as bubbles and death as transient as melting ice, just like day and night—a constant cycle that brings neither joy nor sorrow. Those who yearn for life, hoping to prolong their years, practice exhaling the old and inhaling the new, emulating bears stretching their limbs and birds extending their wings. Some even resort to refining cinnabar into gold, consuming it in hopes of immortality, and forsaking the ordinary for the extraordinary. However, in the end, six or seven out of ten of these individuals perish without realizing the cause of their demise.
>
> Recently, I acquired a book on the Primordial Dao[13] from the capital and was delighted that it contained no words promoting the ominous techniques of life prolongation (無益生之祥). I thought to myself that practicing its teachings would bring one closer to the Dao. Upon arriving in Piling, I heard that the Daoist Yan Fengxian had mastered the principal method of life preservation (衛生之經), and he could suspend his breath while lying down during the night (夜卧無出入息). This practice seems closer to what the book on the Primordial Dao aims to teach, as the breath spontaneously comes to a halt. I visited his dwelling and inquired about it, and upon listening to his words, I sensed his intention in practicing Zhuangzi's saying about 'breathing through the heel.'[14]
>
> … When Gentleman Zhou Bochen and I visited together (Yan's hut), upon hearing Yan's request for a name, I dubbed it the 'Heel-Breathing Hermitage' to encourage his aspirations and pray for their fulfillment."
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 24, p. 3–4)

As evidenced by this essay, similar to Cheng Yi's attitude towards the Daoist practice of "embryonic breathing" (Song 2023, p. 13), Yang embraced Daoist Yan Fengxian's "breathing through the heel" practice only to a certain extent. On one hand, as a Ruist who seeks to fully realize the value of human life in this fleeting world, Yang did not consider

"life prolongation" or even physical immortality as the ultimate spiritual goals. On the other hand, the Daoist breathing practice, characterized by breath suspension during deep meditative sleep, was viewed by Yang as a means to draw closer to the Dao, as long as the practice aimed to enhance one's health and function as the principal method of "preserving life". Within these constraints, Yang even offered prayers for Yan's success in the practice, highlighting the influence of Daoist meditation on Yang's own approach.

In summary, as demonstrated by his poetry and prose, Yang Shi embraced a distinctively Ru contemplative lifestyle, influenced by related Buddhist and Daoist practices. He regarded quiet-sitting meditation as a fundamental way to comprehend and internalize the pattern-principles in the universe, as suggested by the Ru classics. His contemplative lifestyle was characterized by a deep sense of inner tranquility and metaphysical assurance, striving to seamlessly connect with the surrounding natural environment, human relationships, and integrate into the socially proactive requirements of political officialdom and scholarly careers.

4. Technique and Method

Despite the difficulty in finding Yang Shi's explicit explanations on how to practice quiet-sitting, we can still infer details about his techniques and methods from his more philosophical writings. Here, "technique" refers to what Yang was doing during quiet-sitting, such as breathing and calming the mind, while "method" refers to the broader methodology of self-cultivation, in which quiet-sitting plays a central role.

4.1. Breathing

The technique of contemplative breathing holds a foundational position in Yang Shi's quiet-sitting meditation, as the inhalation and exhalation of vital-energies in the form of breathed air were experienced by Yang as the means through which the pattern-principle of the universe (天理, Tianli) is embodied within oneself. The following two essays offer evidence in support of this perspective:

> "Between heaven and earth, there exists a singular vital-energy, from which myriad forms emerge through a single breath (萬形一息而成). Since ancient times, insightful individuals have integrated all things within their self, grasping the concepts of day and night; thus, they remain unruffled by the transformations of life and death, let alone other mundane matters. However, worldly people engage in selfish intellectual pursuits, and their understanding falls short of delving into the depths of Tian (天, heaven or the universe) and humanity. Consequently, the distinction between self and external beings becomes accentuated, and the gap between them widens. As intimately connected as liver and gallbladder, the self and others become as alien to each other as the states of Chu and Yue. Under such circumstances, how can they possibly engage in discourse on the pattern-principle of the universe?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 24, p. 16)

> "(Question): The Classic of Change states that Qian and Kun are the gateway to understanding the Change.[15] Is it true that studying the Change should begin with this gateway?
>
> (Yang Shi answers): This is not the case. Many people today explain it this way, using the analogy of the Change as a house and suggesting that one must enter through the gate, which would be Qian and Kun. Those who speak in this manner simply do not understand the Change. Are the Change and Qian and Kun two separate entities? Which is inside and which is outside? Qian and Kun are named as such because of their respective attributes of vigor (健) and receptiveness (順), but they are in fact the Change itself. Qian and Kun are the Change, and the Change is Qian and Kun. Therefore, Kongzi said that if Qian and Kun were destroyed, there would be no way to see the Change. Without Qian and Kun, the Change would not be visible, and without the Change, there would be no Qian and Kun. Calling Qian and Kun the gateway to the Change is like say-

> ing that the yin and yang vital-energies move and become still, bend and stretch. This is likened to the imagery of opening and closing a gate. Hence, Kongzi also said that the closing of the door is called Kun, and the opening of the door is called Qian. This is what is meant by the sayings on 'gate'. Laozi also said, 'The space between heaven and earth is like a bellows'.[16] The coming and going, opening and closing of the vital-energy are never-ending. With opening and closing comes alteration, and with alteration everything remains inconstant. What else could this be called but the Change? … In general, to understand the Change, one must first recognize its root, and then one can gain something from it. The Change can be found within our own body (求之吾身), so why should we seek it externally? Zhang Zai (1020–1077) once briefly explained this in his text of Zheng Meng (正蒙, To Rectify Ignorance), saying that the opening and closing of Qian and Kun are images of exhaling and inhaling (乾坤之闔闢出作入息之象). These words cannot be written without thorough understanding. I once wrote in the Eulogy of Cheng Hao that 'the communication of opening and closing (of the transformative mechanism of the universe) lies within a single breath, but who can master this?' This means that the Change is within us. Everyone has the Change but does not know to seek it within themselves. Instead, they become fixated solely on the words found in the classics. What use is that?"
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 14, pp. 14–15)

Clearly, for Yang Shi, the *Tianli*, or the pattern-principle of the universe, is equivalent to the endless alteration, interaction, and creativity of yin and yang vital-energies. The hexagrams Qian and Kun in the *Classic of Change* represent the qualities of vigor and receptivity expressed by the cosmic-scale alteration of yin and yang. Through the simple act of meditative breathing—inhaling and exhaling—individuals can experience a unifying connection with the transformative mechanism of the entire universe. This sense of unity can help overcome anxiety and fear caused by restrictive mundane concerns, such as life and death, ultimately enabling individuals to penetrate the profound truths of the universe and humanity concealed behind the words of the classics.

In comparison to the previously mentioned "Record of the Heel-Breathing Hermitage", Yang Shi's meditative breathing may share similarities with Daoist practices in terms of concrete breathing techniques. Due to a lack of evidence, we cannot be entirely certain about this comparison. However, as evidenced by the quotes above, the metaphysical understanding and objectives of such meditative breathing techniques are distinctly Ruist in Yang's case. This is because comprehending Ru classics and embodying the *Tianli* in order to overcome the anxiety over a limited lifespan are the primary goals of meditative breathing as practiced by Yang.

4.2. Calming the Mind

While focusing intently on one's breath to align with the cosmic flow of yin/yang alteration, one must also confront the challenge of managing random and persistent thoughts during meditation. As previously studied, Cheng Yi neither advocated for thinking of nothing nor fixating on any particular thought to achieve a calm mind. Instead, Cheng focused his attention on the holistic cosmic sensation of *Tianli* and on performing the right actions in daily life, in accordance with ethical norms justified by *Tianli* (Song 2023, pp. 15–17).

While elaborating on Cheng's method for calming the mind, Yang Shi particularly underscores the contrast between the Buddhist practice of mindfulness and the Ruist approach of "thinking appropriately", as reflected in the following two remarks on the concept of "no thought (無思)" in the *Classic of Change*:

> "In the Classic of Change, the hexagram of Xian (咸, Affection) mentions 'affecting the thumb' in the first line, 'affecting the calf' in the second line, 'affecting the thigh' in the third line, 'affecting the back' in the fifth line, and 'affecting the cheekbone and tongue' in the top line. However, the fourth line does not mention the heart (心), although the position of the line symbolizes the heart within

the human body. I believe this omission is because having an egoistic heart that is affected by things results in limited responsiveness. It is only by forgetting the egoistic heart and remaining open to whatever things affect it (忘心而待物之感) that one can achieve boundless responsiveness. The text of the fourth line says, 'Perseverance brings good fortune, regret vanishes; to and fro goes the way, and friends follow your thoughts'. This means that, in the case of the fourth line, thoughts are limited to their kindreds and cannot be comprehensive. The so-called friends following each other's thoughts can only respond to limited types. Therefore, Kongzi said in the Xici, 'What does Tian think? What does Tian worry about? All under Tian return to the same destination but through different paths, unified in their shared goal but diverse in the varieties of thoughts and worries. What does Tian ever think? What does Tian ever worry about?'

The heartmind (心) is like a mirror. When it remains in its place, things with their varying shapes will naturally come to be reflected in it, and the scope of the reflection will be broad. If one holds the mirror and follows things to measure their shapes, how much can be reflected? Some may say that thinking can only address the realm of shaped things, beyond which no thinking can reach. Therefore, only the most wondrous and mysterious capacity under the heavens can be without thought. 'No thought (無思)' is the way to experience the Dao (體道), while 'thought (有思)' is the way to respond to the mundane world. This is a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Classic of Change. What the Classic of Change calls 'no thought' simply means not engaging in forced or contrived thinking (易所謂無思者以為無所事乎思云耳). Hence, when addressing the things under the heavens, one simply needs to be affected by them and build a rapport with them. The mentioned view states that one cannot have thoughts (to experience the Dao), but also that one cannot be without thoughts (since one still responds to the world). Does this make any sense?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 10, pp. 10–11)

"Someone asked: Kongzi characterized the Book of Odes as 'thinking without vice (思無邪)'. Thoughts accumulate and eventually overflow, and the 300 poems in the Book of Odes generally manifest such thoughts. Why isn't it the case that the Odes represents people's thinking without vice? However, some may say, all thoughts are inherently vicious, while no thought (無思) makes one as dull as wood or earth. Does thinking without vice mean having thoughts without engaging any particular thought (有思而無所思)? If this is the case, it seems to comply with Kongzi's view that Buddhism teaches that illusions derive from one's misperceptions of reality, and the very beginning instant of thought be the right thought. However, is this what the sage truly intended to teach his students at that time?

Yang Shi responded: The Book of Documents states that thinking aims to achieve wisdom, and wisdom leads to sagehood. Kongzi said that an exemplary person must focus on nine goals in their thinking.[17] If thinking can contribute to sagehood, and an exemplary person needs to carefully consider their appearance, words, sights, and hearing, how can we say that all thoughts are inherently vicious? The Xici claims that 'The Change has no thoughts and no actions; it remains unmoved in quietude, and after being affected, it resonates with everything under the heavens. If not for the most wondrous and mysterious capacity under the heavens, who could achieve this state?' From the most marvelous to those below, no one can be without thoughts. The so-called absence of thoughts allows one to resonate and build rapport with everything under the heavens. Can we then say that having no thoughts makes one as dull as wood or earth? This discussion is not suitable for those who have not thoroughly grasped the wondrously transformative powers of the universe. The 300 poems in the Odes, which originate from state histories, cannot avoid thinking. However, they all

> adhere to the norms of ritual-propriety and righteousness (止於禮義), as their thinking is without vice". (S. Yang 1792, vol. 14, pp. 1–2)

In the first remark, Yang Shi rejects the dualistic view that "thoughts" are for managing mundane affairs, while "no thought" is for experiencing the metaphysical principle of the Dao, which Yang equates with *Tianli*. Instead, Yang emphasizes that *Tian*, as the cosmic field of creativity, allows everything in the universe to co-exist and co-evolve naturally, without premeditation, plan, or contrivance. This supreme capacity for spontaneous and all-encompassing harmonization is what "no thought" in the *Classic of Change* intends to convey. In other words, humans should take *Tian* as a supreme example to think appropriately, striving to respond to each life situation spontaneously without prejudice. For Yang, this also means that the human mind, whether sensing *Tianli* as a whole, dealing with specific objects, or achieving both simultaneously, cannot be devoid of thought.

Interestingly, Buddhist contemplation is also well-known for opposing dualistic thinking. As the interlocutor in Yang's second remark points out, instead of viewing all thoughts as harmful or striving for a lifeless state of not thinking, Buddhism advocates for "having thoughts without engaging any particular thought". This approach treats the bare attention at the incipient moment of any thought as an example of right thought, enabling one to see realities as they are.

Although the interlocutor's remark on Buddhism lacks a precise reference, their description of the Buddhist method of contemplation closely resembles how "mindfulness" is currently understood and practiced by the general public in the Western world. The popular use of "mindfulness" in contemporary English is greatly influenced by its clinical operations in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). (Alvear et al. 2022) A widely quoted definition of mindfulness is: "A kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is" (Bishop et al. 2004, p. 232). Although it simplifies the Buddhist technical term *sati* (in its Pali form) for specific clinical purposes, the Buddhist roots of this definition of mindfulness are evident, as acknowledged by the inventor of MBSR and recognized by researchers.

In particular, T.W. Rhys Davids, the first to translate *sati* into "mindfulness", reminds us that among the various aspects of reality early Buddhist practice of *sati* needed to "recollect", "call to mind", or "be aware of", "the most important was the impermanence (the coming to be as the result of a cause, and the passing away again) of all phenomena, bodily and mental. And it included the repeated application of this awareness, to each experience of life, from the ethical point of view." (Rhys Davids 1910, p. 322). In other words, the operation of "mindfulness", as showcased by the above clinical definition, has theoretical roots in early Buddhism: since all entities are impermanent, co-dependently arising, and thus lack inherent selfhood, the appropriate approach to contemplation is not to impose elaborate or discursive pre-judgments based on the assumption of such selfhood. Instead, one should pay close attention to how things, defying habitual human expectations, constantly change and interconnect as they are in reality. For early Buddhism, the practice of *sati* carries a clear ethical commitment to eliminating greed, hatred, and delusion, thereby nurturing compassion to reduce human suffering, as these harmful reactions are rooted in an illusory view of selfhood. In the clinical practice of mindfulness, these ethical commitments are adapted to focus on eliminating ruminations, thus creating space for alternative thinking patterns that promote well-being.[18]

As a method of achieving an ideal contemplative state, the practice of mindfulness in early Buddhism was inherited and elaborated upon in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism as well. For instance, in the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛經), after defining "no selfhood" (無我) as the essential nature of all realities, the Buddha advises that one should "give rise to thought without abiding in any" (應無所住而生其心). This guidance is presented as a general method for "purifying and tranquilizing" (清淨) the mind. (Kumārajīva n.d., pp. 402–12) Similarly, in the *Platform Sutra* (壇經), Hui Neng instructs that to attend to the "True Thusness" of re-

ality, one must achieve "absence of thought", which means "not being carried away by thought in the process of thinking" (無念者於念而無念). (Hui Neng 1963, p. 434) A similar teaching appears in Master Zhi Yi's instructions on meditation. In *The Six Subtle Dharma Gates* (六妙法門), Zhi Yi teaches that cultivating "non-thought" (非想) means "abandoning both having thoughts and having no thoughts" (棄捨有想無想). (Zhi Yi n.d., T46n1917) In *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation for Beginners* (修習止觀坐禪法要), Zhi Yi explains further "realizing the true nature of phenomena " (體真止) as "contemplating that each phenomenon arises from causes and conditions and lacks inherent nature; thus, the mind does not react to them. If the mind does not react, delusional thoughts cease, leading to a state of 'stopping' (止)." (Zhi Yi n.d., T46n1915, vol. 6).

These Chinese Buddhist teachings resemble Yang Shi's interlocutor's words: "having thoughts without engaging any particular thought". Therefore, we can conclude that Yang's second quoted remark, addresses whether the Buddhist practice of mindfulness—paying close attention to arising and passing thoughts without engaging or clinging to any particular one—is an accepted method for calming the mind from the perspective of Ruism.

Yang's response to this question is nuanced and subtle. On the one hand, it seems that Yang would agree with Buddhism that one needs to attend to reality without being biased by undue human preconceptions. On the other hand, regarding the further questions of what these realities are and what the correct ethical responses should be, Yang's emphasis hearkens back to Cheng Yi's method: that is, to calm the mind, one should focus on the holistic sensation of *Tianli* (i.e., on how each individualized thing in the universe co-evolves in an overall harmonious manner) and pursue the right actions, with "rightness" justified by concrete ethical norms rooted in *Tianli*. This method is evidently quite different from the Buddhist practice of mindfulness.

To fully unpack Yang Shi's remarks on the method of calming one's mind, we need to understand how Yang considers Buddhist metaphysical concepts such as "emptiness" and "no selfhood", as well as Buddhism's ethical commitment to compassion, a topic I will elaborate on later. Based on the above analysis, it suffices to say that for the technique of calming one's mind during contemplative practices such as quiet-sitting, Yang Shi intends to distinguish himself from the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. Instead, he highlights Cheng Yi's technique of focusing on *Tianli* and performing the right actions as justified by *Tianli*.

4.3. Returning to Embody the Authentic Self and Preserving Centrality Without Loss

Though Cheng Yi's impact on Yang Shi's meditation techniques is unmistakable, Yang developed a distinct general approach to self-cultivation by incorporating quiet-sitting into the more comprehensive Ru self-cultivation program, originating from the *Great Learning* (大學) text and commencing with the concept of "investigation of things (格物)".

As my previous research (Song 2023, pp. 17–23) indicates, Cheng Yi played a critical role in the Daoxue movement's shift from Zhou Dunyi's self-cultivation method of "focusing on quietude (主靜)" to one of "focusing on reverence (主敬)". For Cheng, quiet-sitting was just one of many contemplative practices aimed at nurturing an attitude of reverence toward the pattern-principles of the myriad things in the world. In this sense, quiet-sitting did not hold a central position in Cheng's self-cultivation method, which was further developed as "jointly preserving reverence and righteousness (敬義夾持)", requiring one to continuously perform the right actions in the mundane world while maintaining a deeper cosmic consciousness of reverence toward *Tianli*. Cheng combined the attitude of reverence with a cumulative learning style of "investigating things", as he argued that each thing in the world possesses a pattern-principle, and to respond appropriately to each thing, one must continuously learn these pattern-principles. In conclusion, my research suggests that Cheng's Ruist lifestyle aims to achieve a balance between intellectualism, ethical action, and contemplation.

Under the influence of Cheng Yi's learning style, Yang Shi also emphasized the significance of broad investigation of things for nurturing one's virtue and morality, as evidenced by the following:

> "The profound truth of all under heaven is preserved in the subtle words of the Six Classics. The ancients were well-versed in the names of numerous birds, beasts, plants, and trees. Was it merely about knowing their names? Thoroughly investigating and diligently seeking them all is the way of 'investigating things'. Scholars must take Kongzi and Mengzi as their teachers. …The Classic of Change states, 'The exemplary human extensively recognizes the words and deeds of the past to cultivate their own virtue'. Mengzi said, 'Learn broadly and explain things in detail in order to return to the crucial'.[19] …Scholars of the world have never cultivated virtue nor returned to the crucial. What, then, is the use of their learning?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 11, p. 10)

However, Cheng Yi's style of investigation of things had a distinctively externalist orientation, as he did not prioritize the investigation of one's self over external things. He believed that a broad investigation of all things in the world would eventually lead to one's realization of the one and unifying pattern-principle of the universe. In contrast to Cheng's externalist and expansive model of investigation, Yang Shi underscored the priority of "returning to embody the authentic self (反身而誠)", as evidenced by the following essay about the text of *Great Learning*:

> "Learning begins with the acquisition of knowledge (致知) and ends with stopping when one knows to stop (知止而止). The attainment of knowledge lies in investigating things. Although things are too numerous to investigate thoroughly, by returning to embody one's authentic self, all things under heaven can be found within oneself. The Book of Odes says, 'Tian gives birth to the multitudes, and there is a norm for each thing'. Each shape or color that appears to our body represents a thing (凡形色之具於吾身, 無非物也), and each thing has its own norm. The eyes relate to color, the ears relate to sound, and the mouth and nose relate to taste and smell. What our body receives from the outside and cannot escape from must have something we can rely on (接乎外而不得遁焉者其必有以也). If we know how to experience things using our body without neglecting any of them (體物而不可遺), we'll grasp the pattern-principles of all under heaven. When the pattern-principles of all under heaven are grasped, things become one with us.
>
> Since nothing can disturb our knowledge and thoughts, how can there be any inauthentic intentions? From this point, we can connect with the aspirations of all under heaven, draw analogies from the realities of myriad things, and assist the transformative processes of heaven and earth. As the norm is not distant, how can the knowledge not be called attained? When knowledge is attained, we know where to stop. Just like a journey of thousands of miles in all directions, without a stopping point, where would one return to? Therefore, Kongzi lamented that people could see progress but not know where to stop. The sages of old, from cultivating the authenticity of intention and rectifying their heartmind to achieving peace throughout the world, followed a singular pattern-principle. This is the Way to integrate the paths of both internal and external."
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 26, pp. 3–4)

The most intriguing aspect of the quoted essay is Yang Shi's definition of "things (物)". When Cheng Yi was asked if the investigation of things must begin with examining oneself, he denied and emphasized instead that "every blade of grass and every tree has its own pattern-principle, and one must examine them as well" (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 193), suggesting that for Cheng, "things" possess an independent nature apart from human perceptions. Hence, Cheng's investigation of things aims to continually expand the capacity of the human heartmind to include the knowledge of pattern-principles of external things. However, since Yang Shi defined things as "what appears to our body" or "what

our body receives from the outside and cannot escape from", his investigation focuses on how "things" are perceived and received by the heartmind and integrated into its intrinsic configuration, which exists prior to the reception of external things.

This interpretation of Yang Shi's thought is supported by the statement "If we know how to experience things using our body without neglecting any of them, we'll grasp the pattern-principles of all under heaven", which echoes another previous quote where Yang emphasized the importance of meditative breathing: "The Change can be found within our own body, so why should we seek it externally? … the opening and closing of Qian and Kun are images of exhaling and inhaling". In other words, the unified experience of the universe, achieved through the practice of meditative breathing within the context of quiet-sitting, provides a foundation for Yang to embody the overall harmonization of all things within one's inner consciousness. For Yang Shi, this embodied experience of cosmic union is where the self-cultivation program of the *Great Learning*, consisting of steps such as "attainment of knowledge" leading to "authenticating intentions" and further leading to "rectification of heartmind", should "stop", meaning one should dwell in and hold on to this experience.

Another approach to understanding the significance of quiet-sitting meditation in Yang Shi's general method of self-cultivation is to explore the temporal order in which external things shall be received by the heartmind. To do this, we need to examine his interpretation of another Ruist classic, the *Zhong Yong* (中庸, Centrality and Commonality). The *Zhong Yong* begins by stating that "Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness are aroused, the state is called centrality (中). When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain their due measure, it is called harmony (和)". (Chan 1963, 97, translation adapted). Furthermore, it emphasizes that the states of centrality and harmony are essential for humans to embark on the path of fulfilling their *Tian*-endowed good human nature and, ultimately, realizing the cosmic creativity of *Tian* in the human world.

For Yang Shi, the ideal example to demonstrate how emotions can be aroused to their due measure, and how a state of "centrality" can be pursued before any emotion, is Mengzi's classical discussion on the feeling of commiseration (惻隱) which manifests the cardinal virtue of humaneness (仁):

> "Li Sizu and Cao Lingde asked, 'How can we recognize the virtue of humaneness?' Yang Shi replied, 'Mengzi considers the feeling of commiseration as the sprout of humaneness. In everyday life, one should deeply experience (體究) this sprout, and the nature of humaneness will gradually reveal itself'. Yang then asked Li and Cao how they usually explained the hidden pain (隱) within the feeling of commiseration. Li said, 'It is like when someone has concealed worries or when someone diligently relieves people's hidden suffering; both are considered distress and pain'. Yang said, 'If a toddler is about to fall into a well, and someone sees it, they will surely have a commiserating heart. The distress and pain are not within them, so why do they feel distressed and pained for the child?' Li replied, 'It comes from a natural, unstoppable force'. Yang said, 'How does this natural force arise? If you whole-heartedly study this pattern-principle (體究此理) and understand its origin, the path of humaneness will not be far away'. The two men withdrew, and I[20] asked accordingly, 'Is the unity of the myriad things with me the fundamental state of humaneness (萬物與我為一, 其仁之體)?' Yang replied, 'Yes.'" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 11, p. 1)

> "Luo Congyan asked, 'Mengzi once said that those who fully actualize their heartmind come to understand their human nature. What does "fully actualizing one's heartmind" truly mean?' Yang Shi responded, 'Before delving into the actualization of the heartmind, we must first comprehend what the heartmind is'. Luo asked again, to which Yang explained, 'The heartmind is clear, perceptive, and penetrative (明白洞達); it is expansive, quiet, and unified (廣大靜一). Only when one can thoroughly embody and distinctly comprehend it, can we speak of its full actualization… Generally speaking, one must initially grasp the concept

> of humaneness. Once humaneness is understood, one comes to know the heartmind; and understanding the heartmind leads to understanding human nature. Initially, these three concepts are not distinct from each other".
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 12, pp. 28–29)

As implied by the first conversation between Li Sizu and Yang Shi, the feeling of commiseration, aimed at human fellows' co-flourishing, can indeed be considered "harmonious" or "aroused to its due measure" as per the terms set by the *Zhong Yong*. However, Yang believes that unless one can have an embodied experience of Oneness (一) with all things in the universe and thus grasp the fundamental state of the virtue of humaneness—which, according to the *Zhong Yong*, is also called the centrality—their appropriate feeling of commiseration with suffering human fellows would not spontaneously arise. Aligning his interpretation of the *Great Learning*, which states, "If we know how to experience things using our body without neglecting any of them, we'll grasp the pattern-principles of all under heaven", Yang's understanding of the *Zhong Yong* using this concrete example of commiseration clearly ascribes an absolute priority of significance to the embodied experience of cosmic union.

The second conversation between Luo Congyan and Yang Shi, considering the testimonies of Yang's quiet-sitting practice and his historically confirmed role of authority in the lineage of the Southward Way, establishes a link between quiet-sitting and the foundational state of humaneness. According to Yang, in the optimal state of quiet-sitting, one's heartmind is "clear, perceptive, expansive, quiet, and unified". This meditative experience of cosmic unity manifests the fundamental state of humaneness, which in turn signifies the normative state of the nature of human heartmind. In the terminology of the *Zhong Yong*, this clear and tranquil state of the heartmind is referred to as "centrality", a state of equilibrium achieved before the arousal of emotions.

Therefore, drawing on the terminology from the *Great Learning* and the *Zhong Yong*, Yang Shi summarizes his general method of self-cultivation as follows:

> "The Zhong Yong teaches, 'Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise, the state is called centrality. When these feelings arise and each and all attain their due measure, it is called harmony'. Scholars should harness their heartmind to experience it before the arousal of feelings such as pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness. By doing so, the state of centrality naturally becomes manifest. Hold onto it and do not lose it. If there are no selfish desires to interfere, the emotions[21], when evoked, will certainly be within appropriate bounds. Even when emotions are suitably expressed, the state of centrality never ceases to exist. The sorrow of Kongzi and the pleasure of Mengzi arise due to circumstances worthy of sorrow and pleasure. What role does personal ego play in the emotions of Kongzi and Mengzi? Amid their sorrow and pleasure, the state of centrality naturally persists. It's akin to a mirror reflecting objects: while the objects reflected may vary in form, the clarity of the mirror remains constant."
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 21, pp. 2–3)

> "When discussing the attainment of knowledge through the investigation of things, it implies a thorough exploration of the pattern-principles of those things. If any of these pattern-principles remain elusive, any object in the world can disrupt our perception and thought process, driving the objective of authentic intent (意誠) and rectified heartmind (心正) further away. As stated in the Book of Documents, 'Only by maintaining a focused and unified mindset can one steadfastly grasp their center. (惟精惟一，允執厥中)' The method of holding onto this center is indeed to remain focused and unified. The concept of the center is characterized by impartiality; if there's anything to excluded, it results in partiality. The Zhong Yong states that prior to the arousal of emotions, one is in a state of centrality. If we engage our heartmind to experience (驗) this state before these emotions

> surface, the meaning of 'being timely centered' naturally manifests. Without a focused and unified approach, how can one possibly hold onto this state?"
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 20, pp. 1–2)

Therefore, Yang Shi's overarching method of self-cultivation can be accordingly encapsulated as "Returning to Embody the Authentic Self and Preserving Centrality without Loss (返身而誠, 執中勿失)". The core premise of this mantra is that appropriate responses to worldly matters, where appropriateness is dictated by the inherent pattern-principles of the situations at hand, naturally stem from a state of centrality achieved through the meditative practice of quiet-sitting. Hence, having experienced this state during periods of tranquility, a Ru scholar would strive to sustain such a state, regardless of the life situations they find themselves in.

Importantly, all of Yang Shi's discussions concerning the overarching contemplative approach to self-cultivation occur within the context of interpreting ancient Classics. As such, while guiding his students on how to study these classics, Yang paraphrases this general method in the following manner:

> "The pinnacle of the Way eludes full articulation through either pen or spoken word. It demands physical embodiment and confirmation via the heartmind. In a state of graceful poise, we immerse ourselves, maintaining centeredness within the tranquil unity of leisure, silently discerning the Way (雍容自盡於燕閒靜一之中，默而識之). Throughout this process, we detach from the superficial aspects of the text's language and imagery, drawing us closer to the realization of the Way. Conversely, any method reliant solely on rote memorization, recitation, and calculation deviates from this path." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 17, p. 12)

> "Yang Shi addressed Luo Congyan, stating, 'I have previously imparted several methods to scholars on reading books. These include: embodying the teachings through practice, verifying them with the heartmind, silently contemplating them in the serene unity of leisure and ease, and grasping them personally (自得) beyond the superficiality of the text's words, images, and meanings. Indeed, this encapsulates my own approach.'"
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 12, p. 28)

The allusion to "graceful poise", "leisure and ease", along with the method of interpreting texts in these instructions, resonates with the poetry and prose I previously highlighted as testimonies to Yang Shi's contemplative lifestyle.

In a nutshell, carving out periods for quiet-sitting amidst a busy schedule is a staple of Yang Shi's contemplative lifestyle. The practice can take place anytime, anywhere, but it's typically accompanied by a mood of leisure and ease. Yang would likely initiate his sitting practice with meditative breathing, contemplation of Ru classics, or simple reflection on appropriate responses to the matters at hand. There are no stringent guidelines associated with the technique of sitting meditation; frequently, the practice merges with other activities like reading, writing, walking, sightseeing, or touring.

In profound moments of meditation, Yang experienced unity with the universe. The interpretation he derived from such feelings was deeply influenced by the philosophical tradition of Ruism, passed down to him by the Cheng Brothers. Classical terms used to describe such meditative experiences include "authenticity (誠)", "centrality (中)", "concentration (精)", "quietude (靜)", and "unity (一)". Psychologically, this state was also marked by a heartmind that felt clear, expansive, and penetrative.

More significantly, this unifying experience involved a deep appreciation for the harmonization of all things. Each entity progresses and evolves according to a unique pattern-principle inherent to human-related situations, all within the bounds of a singular, all-encompassing inner consciousness of the meditator. This experience of the universe, unified yet harmoniously differentiated, served as Yang's anchor for self-cultivation. His general approach to embodying a Ru lifestyle was initially to strive for such an experience, and then, to maintain it across diverse activities and moments beyond periods of quiet-sitting.

If Cheng Yi successfully shifted the focus of Ru contemplative practice from "focusing on quietude" to "focusing on reverence", Yang Shi returned to the tradition of "focusing on quietude". He fortified this tradition with vocabularies and philosophies he inherited from his personal learning with the Cheng Brothers.

5. Moral Psychology and Metaphysics

Yang Shi's general approach to self-cultivation reveals that the term "centrality" doesn't merely denote the psychological state of calm equilibrium experienced during quiet-sitting before emotions arise. It also bears a metaphysical connotation, representing the differentiated unity of the universe, *Tian*, where all things dynamically and harmoniously coexist and evolve in ways that ultimately transcend human language.

This dual application of the concept of "centrality", both psychological and metaphysical, aligns with its original semantics in the *Zhong Yong*. Apart from portraying centrality as the state of heartmind that remains unswayed by emotions, the *Zhong Yong* also labels centrality as "the great foundation of all under heaven". (Chan 1963, 97) Yang Shi further elucidates the metaphysical foundation of the psychological state of centrality as follows, and his explanation centers around the term "Ultimate Limit (太極, Taiji)"

> "The rectification of the heartmind achieves its utmost limit (極致) in a state of tranquil stillness (寂然不動). This condition enables one to resonate with, and thereby connect to (感而遂通) all under heaven. In doing so, what obstacles could possibly remain in the pursuit of bringing peace to all under heaven (平天下)?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 12, p. 1)

> "The Way stops at centrality and that's all there is. If one goes beyond the center, it's excessive; if one hasn't reached it, it's insufficient. Therefore, only the center is the ultimate. Centrality is the ultimate limit (至極) of the Way, thus centrality is also called 'the limit'. The ridge of a house is also called 'the limit', because it is the highest point while remaining centered." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 14, p. 9)

> An individual once queried, "The Xici mentions, 'Within the Change, there is an Ultimate Limit'. Could this Ultimate Limit equate to the centrality of the Way?" Yang Shi affirmed, "Indeed". The inquirer further questioned, "In that case, there isn't initially a fixed position for the Ultimate Limit. Could it be that the Ultimate Limit exists wherever we perceive 'here' to be (當處即是太極邪)?" Yang Shi responded, "Precisely". The individual persisted, "How then do the 'Two Modes', 'Four Images', and 'Eight Hexagrams' derive from this Ultimate Limit (自此生)?" Yang Shi elucidated, "Once there is the 'Ultimate Limit', there is an 'above' and 'below'. With 'above' and 'below', there comes 'left', 'right', 'front', and 'back'. With these four directions, there comes the four dimensions (of east, south, west and north). All of these are testament to the natural presence of pattern-principles." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 13, p. 16)

When considered collectively, these three quoted instructions provide significant insights on the metaphysical nature of Yang Shi's contemplative lifestyle. The first equates the state of tranquil stillness with the ultimate point that one's self-cultivation endeavor can attain. This aligns with Yang's previously analyzed assertion that the state of centrality, achieved through the practice of quiet-sitting, represents the ultimate end or "stop (止)" of one's learning journey. Furthermore, in the subsequent two quotes, Yang equates "centrality" with the "Ultimate Limit (太極)". This term, as used in the *Xici*, refers to a supreme principle that is said to *Sheng* (生) or give rise to everything else in the universe, including the vital-energies of yin and yang (the two modes), the four seasons (four modes), and the eight natural phenomena (eight trigrams) such as sky, earth, thunder, lake, and so forth. (Wang et al. 1999, pp. 288–09)

Notably, Yang Shi's interpretation of the Ultimate Limit—a term that has been the subject of extensive debate among Ru metaphysicians throughout the history of Ruism—is unique in its comparison to the ridge of a house. The ridge doesn't generate or create the

whole house; instead, it provides a vantage point that enables a holistic view of all parts of the house. Once the position of the ridge is established, the parts above, below, front, and back can be logically inferred. Similarly, there is no ontological priority or sequence of creation between the Ultimate Limit and other pattern-principles. Rather, the term "Ultimate Limit" provides a comprehensive vision representing all pattern-principles, each of which signifies how things coexist and co-evolve in a particular context.

This interpretation of Ultimate Limit has already been suggested by our previous analysis of Yang Shi's method of meditative breathing. In Section 4.1, I noted that for Yang, "the *Tianli*, or the pattern-principle of the universe, is equivalent to the endless alteration, interaction, and creativity of yin and yang vital-energies". By focusing on the inhalation and exhalation of air in meditative breathing, a distinctive manifestation of yin and yang vital-energies, Yang believed that one could attain a unifying connection with *Tianli*. As a comprehensive viewpoint that encompasses all pattern-principles in the world, the Ultimate Limit is *Tianli* in its singular form. The notion that *Tianli* is embodied within oneself through the practice of quiet-sitting can thus be rephrased, in light of the above quotation, as the Ultimate Limit "exists wherever we perceive 'here' to be". Hence, through quiet-sitting, one can fully realize the ideal nature of human beings, as a part of the universe, to manifest the Ultimate Limit as the paramount pattern-principle of the universe, that is, *Tianli*.

5.1. Comparing Yang Shi with Cheng Yi

Li (理, pattern-principle) provides a holistic perspective for understanding how components of *Qi* (氣, vital-energies) dynamically evolve and interact with each other. *Li* does not exist ontologically prior to *Qi*, yet its normative characteristics are entirely expressed by each element of *Qi*. This nuanced view of Yang Shi on *Li* and *Qi* offers a metaphysical foundation for his approach to self-cultivation.

A further comparison with Cheng Yi underscores the distinctive nature of Yang Shi's metaphysical moral psychology. There is a clear bifurcation between the ontological and empirical realms within all major conceptual pairs central to Cheng's understanding of human conditions: pattern-principle and vital-energy (理氣), fundamental state and function (體用), (human) nature and emotions (性情), and so on. Cheng positions the state of centrality within the upper tier of these conceptual pairs, and deems that since centrality characterizes the ontological state of human existence, it is prior to any of its empirical manifestations in specific psychological states of the heartmind, including the moment of quiet-sitting. As a result, Cheng, in his discussions with Su Jiming, maintained that the state of centrality cannot be "sought (求)" even during quiet-sitting, but can only be "nourished (涵養)" across moments of mundane life. Similarly, Cheng, in his dialogue with Lü Dalin, asserted that the heartmind in its empirical state of quiet-sitting, though not far from the state of centrality, is not the state of centrality *per se* (Song 2023, pp. 23–32).

For Cheng Yi, the practice of "focusing on quietude" during quiet-sitting cannot enable humans to realize their unity with *Tianli*, as quiet-sitting is just one of many possible means to partially express *Tianli*. Instead, Cheng advocates "focusing on reverence", aiming to nurture the ontological bond between the heartmind and *Tianli* across a range of contemplative moments, each imbued with its own unique characteristics. Intellectually, this implies a continuous study and investigation of each pattern-principle in varying situations, eventually leading to the realization of the all-encompassing *Tianli*. More importantly, even once one has experienced the ontologically unified *Tianli*, there is still a need to explore how *Tianli* is manifested in evolving and concrete life situations. Cheng's overarching method for self-cultivation is to "jointly preserve reverence and righteousness". Here, "reverence" signifies a dedicated cosmic consciousness towards *Tianli*, while "righteousness" encourages doing what is right based on the truthful discernment of pattern-principles in specific situations (Song 2023, pp. 17–23).

In contrast, Yang Shi does not view *Tianli* as ontologically superior to *Qi*. He contends that *Tianli* can be wholly embodied within the tangible psychological state of the

heartmind during the practice of quiet-sitting. Yang thus does not subscribe to Cheng Yi's methodology of "focusing on reverence" and "nourishing centrality". Rather, he endorses the pursuit and preservation of the heartmind's centrality through the practice of quiet-sitting, subsequently extending it to moments when the heartmind is stirred with various emotions. Yang's moral psychology, particularly with respect to the concept of centrality, aligns more closely with Lü Dalin's approach rather than Cheng Yi's.[22]

Two additional pieces of evidence corroborate this comparative interpretation of Yang Shi's contemplative philosophy pertaining to quiet-sitting.

Firstly, Cheng Yi famously characterized the effort of reverence by saying, "Reverence involves taking One as the master, and One means no vacillation." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 169). As previously analyzed (Song 2023, p. 21), the concept of "Oneness" carries at least three layers of significance: a person practicing reverence needs to (2) nurture a persistent state of attentive awareness through (1) handling each immediate concern appropriately. This constant attentiveness shall ultimately (3) transform into a transcendent cosmic consciousness, anchored in the interconnected pattern-principle of the universe, or *Tianli*. However, such a pursuit of reverence may risk disconnecting from the practical matters of the everyday world. To counterbalance this, Cheng emphasizes that while maintaining a transcendent cosmic reverence towards *Tianli*, one should return to the mundane world to diligently investigate and act righteously.

However, since Yang Shi does not advocate for the ontological bifurcation between *Tianli* and concrete matters in the everyday world, his approach to practicing "reverence" and "righteousness" significantly differs from Cheng Yi's. Regarding Reverence, Yang Shi states,

> "If a scholar does not take reverence seriously, then there is no place to apply their mind. Reverence is about achieving One, and One means no vacillation (致一之謂敬，無適之謂一)." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 13, p. 18)

> "Reverence involves preserving One (守一), and one means no vacillation." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 21, p. 9)

> "As for the word of centrality (中), doesn't it mean to hold onto One (執一)?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 25, p. 6)

The critical distinction between Yang Shi's and Cheng Yi's interpretations of reverence hinges on Cheng's assertion that one must "take One as the master" across all moments of everyday life. This implies that no single empirical moment holds supremacy over the others, as none alone can fully grasp the unified Oneness of *Tianli*. However, for Yang Shi, as *Tianli* is entirely manifested in the distinct empirical moment of quiet-sitting, the act of reverence entails "achieving", "preserving" and "holding onto" the state of Oneness and centrality offered by such a manifestation. In Yang's practice, quiet-sitting is prioritized, serving as an anchor point in one's progressive endeavor of self-cultivation.

Moreover, as indicated above, Yang Shi proposes that once one attains the state of centrality in meditative practice, one would spontaneously have emotions align with their appropriate measures when one's heartmind gets stimulated. As per this proposal, the concept of "harmonization (和)" of emotions in the *Zhong Yong* simply corresponds to the preservation of centrality during emotional reactions to circumstances. It stipulates no additional exertion towards "harmonization" beyond maintaining this state of centrality. Correspondingly, Yang distinguishes himself from Cheng by advocating that there is no need for an extra effort of righteousness beyond that of reverence, since Yang deems that righteousness essentially signifies the preservation of the state of Oneness across diverse contexts beyond the confines of quiet-sitting. Yang's following remark offers more details:

> "The Classic of Change states, 'An exemplar human should straighten their inner self with reverence and align their outer conduct with righteousness'. Authentic sincerity and absence of deceit within one's heartmind represents the straightness. When this mindset is brought into action, the unyielding standards distinguishing between the significant and the trivial, the noble and the humble

> embody the alignment of righteousness. Reverence and righteousness are fundamentally intertwined, not separate entities (敬與義本無二). The primary emphasis is on reverence, from which righteousness emerges, hence the differentiation between the inner and the outer. In essence, righteousness is also reverence (其實義亦敬也). Mengzi once succinctly referred to righteousness as the act of expressing his reverence (行吾敬)[23]." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 11, p. 6–7)

Secondly, Cheng Yi, stressing the ontological precedence of pattern-principle over vital-energy, also maintains that the "fundamental state (體, ti)" of things precedes their "functions (用, yong)", as particularly evidenced by Cheng's conversation with Lü Dalin. In this dialogue, Cheng insists that the empirical moment of quiet-sitting pertains to the level of "function" of the human heartmind, and this moment alone cannot fully manifest the ontologically preceding "fundamental state" of the heartmind (Song 2023, pp. 30–31).

However, akin to his perspective that *Li* simply provides a holistic viewpoint to understand the patterns of the transformation and interaction of *Qi* components, Yang Shi does not perceive a relationship of ontological precedence between *Ti* and *Yong*. Yang articulates that,

> Master Cheng Yi of Henan professed, "The pattern-principle is one, while its manifestations are many". Grasping that the pattern-principle is one forms the bedrock of humaneness (仁), whereas understanding its diverse manifestations provides the foundation for righteousness. The concept of "diverse manifestations" aligns with Mengzi's precept: "Extend affection to those near us and benevolence (仁) to others, ultimately broadening our love to encompass all beings".[24] Given these differing contexts, the execution of humaneness naturally entails variations. If posed with the question: In this view, do the fundamental state and function stand separate? I would counter: The function has always remained intrinsically tethered to the fundamental state (用未嘗離體也). Examining this within the framework of a single body, each limb and the multitude of bones inherently possess their so-called fundamental state. Yet, when it comes to their function, one can't place shoes on the head, nor wear a hat on the foot. Hence, even within the discourse of the fundamental state, distinctions are fundamentally ingrained. (S. Yang 1792, vol. 11, p. 10)

Undeniably, Yang Shi's elucidation of the relationship between fundamental state and function, situated within the context of Cheng Yi's philosophical dictum—"the pattern-principle is one, its manifestations many"—effectively overturns the ontological precedence of the One over the Many. Yang asserts that each function wholly embodies the nature of the fundamental state, just as a part of the human body is a complete reflection of the entire body's mechanism. Given that Yang deems the situational virtue of righteousness (which compels humans to act appropriately in diverse scenarios) as intrinsic to the overarching virtue of humaneness, it's not surprising that Yang, as analyzed earlier, also argues that the pursuit of righteousness doesn't contribute anything beyond the effort of reverence towards the unified pattern-principle of *Tianli*, the metaphysical pillar of the virtue of humaneness.

To encapsulate, the divergence between Cheng Yi and Yang Shi concerning their respective self-cultivation methods of "focusing on reverence" and "focusing on quietude" can ultimately be traced back to their differing metaphysical inclinations towards the concepts of the One versus the Many. Cheng staunchly posits that the One is ontologically prior to the Many, albeit each component of the Many represents the One to a certain degree. Consequently, Cheng endorses taking the One as the master in every manifestation of the Many, thereby nurturing the ontological link between the One and the Many. Conversely, Yang contends that the One is merely a collective term for the interconnected Many, and hence, the One is wholly embodied in each part of the Many. The practice of quiet-sitting purifies the human heartmind, such that the state of centrality achieved during this meditative moment, being one among the Many, fully embodies the One. As a result, Yang

seeks to preserve this state, with the aim of progressively expanding it to encompass other instances of the Many.

5.2. A Diagram of Holding onto Centrality

Having elucidated the salient aspects of Yang Shi's philosophical system, specifically its moral psychology and metaphysics in the context of quiet-sitting practice, we will now proceed to visualize this intricate interplay of concepts. Refer to Figure 1, titled a diagram of "Holding onto Centrality according to Yang Shi (龜山執中圖)".

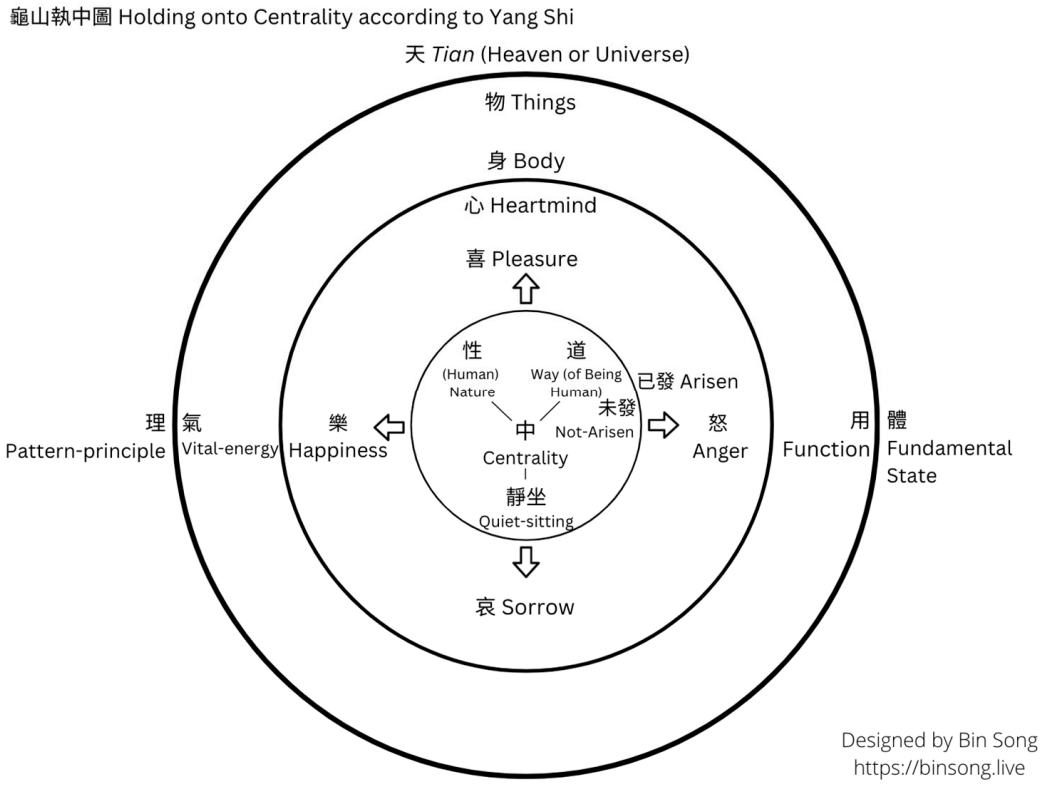

Figure 1. A chart of "Holding onto Centrality according to Yang Shi (龜山執中圖)".

The diagram represents Yang's philosophical principle that there is no ontological hierarchy among primary conceptual pairs. Arranged as three concentric circles within a flat, two-dimensional space, it underscores the intertwined and holistic nature of the universe and its constituents. *Tian* signifies the totality of the cosmos, akin to conceptualizing the fundamental state and the pattern-principle as the overarching functions and vital-energies permeating all things. Consequently, *Tian*, the fundamental state, and the pattern-principle provide a unifying perspective on the multitude of things, functions, and vital-energies, thereby serving as interchangeable terms to depict the same reality, represented by the diagram's largest circle.

Things in the world are defined by how they interact with the human body's boundaries, hence the middle circle symbolizes the human existence. Externally, this existence is perceived as a physical body, while internally it is experienced as the human heartmind.

The functional states of the heartmind are bifurcated into two phases, leading to the innermost circle representing the unaroused, emotionless state of the heartmind. The remaining area within the middle circle symbolizes the emotionally reactive states of the heartmind towards external stimuli.

Quiet-sitting enables the achievement of the heartmind's state of centrality, equating to (human) nature and the Way (of being human) in the *Zhong Yong*. Due to its profound significance in the entire system, "centrality" is the diagram's focal point. This central point converges all major concepts, as the state of centrality—as a functional moment of

the heartmind and a vital instance of the human body—penetrates into the omnipresent fundamental state and the singular pattern-principle of the whole universe.

Arrows stemming from the inner circle towards the four emotional states—pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness—represent the effort of harmonization. This effort preserves and expands the state of centrality attained through quiet-sitting in the heartmind's pre-emotional stage. Given its inherent alignment with the state of centrality, the state of harmonization is not explicitly labeled in the diagram.

5.3. The Original Difference Between the Cheng Brothers

To fully appreciate the divergence between Yang Shi's and Cheng Yi's contemplative philosophy, it's crucial to acknowledge that these differences are embedded in a subtle, yet profound disagreement within the Cheng Brothers themselves.[25]

In terms of metaphysics, there are few better examples to illuminate the differences between the Cheng Brothers than their distinct interpretations of the verse "One yin and one yang is called the Dao (一陰一陽之謂道)" from the *Xici* of the *Classic of Change* (Wang et al. 1999, p. 268). Cheng Yi says, "'One yin and one yang is called the Dao' implies that the Dao is neither yin nor yang (vital-energy). Dao is why (所以) yin and yang come to be so." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 67). Aligning well with the metaphysical framework of Cheng Yi's moral psychology analyzed above, this interpretation suggests that the interaction and alteration of yin and yang vital-energies do not constitute the highest plane of cosmic reality. Instead, it is the Dao, equivalent to *Tianli* in this context, that provides the ultimate explanation for the origin of yin/yang vital-energies. Thus, there persists a definitive and unwavering ontological primacy of pattern-principle over vital-energy, forming a central tenet that permeates the entirety of Cheng Yi's philosophy.

However, when interpreting the same verse and other related excerpts from the *Xici*, Cheng Hao posits,

> "'One yin and one yang is called the Dao' depicts the natural way of the universe (自然之道). 'Those which continue it are good', suggests that when the Dao unfolds, it performs its functions, analogous to how 'Initiation signifies the supreme good'. 'Those which complete it' ultimately foster their nature, as 'each rectifies their nature and destiny'. As a result, it is said in the Xici: 'The humane perceive it and call it humaneness, the wise see it and call it wisdom, while ordinary people utilize it daily yet remain oblivious to it, hence the path of the exemplary human is infrequent'. To sum it up, there is neither an absolute start nor an absolute end, there is neither a cause for existence nor for non-existence, and there is neither a definitive locus for existence nor for non-existence. (亦無始，亦無終，亦無因甚有，亦無因甚無，亦無有處有，亦無無處無)." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 135)

For Cheng Hao, the altering and interacting process of yin and yang vital-energies defines the broadest characterization of the universe. Central themes in the Ruist metaphysical ethical framework of the *Xici* portray this singular, all-encompassing process from diverse perspectives: those elements that uphold cosmic creativity are identified as 'good', each attains its 'nature' by completing a specific phase of the creative process, and different observers discern this process from their unique perspectives, with some stirred by the universal nature of the process to cultivate the virtue of humaneness, while others are influenced by the distinct nature of each entity to develop the virtue of wisdom.

Cheng Hao views that there is neither a temporal beginning nor end, and spatially, there is no fixed locale for an entity's existence or non-existence in the process of cosmic change. He believes the universe's components are in perpetual flux and transformation across the widest temporal scope. Most notably, Cheng Hao contends that this process occurs without a "cause (因)", distinguishing his view from Cheng Yi's interpretation, which mandates the Dao to account for the "why (所以)" or the rationale behind the way the process unfolds. As Cheng Hao interprets the Dao as equivalent to the yin/yang alteration process itself, the Dao, as well as *Tianli*, provides him with a holistic lens through which to perceive the process. This viewpoint from Cheng Hao prefigures the way Yang Shi

conceptualizes the relationship between pattern-principle and vital-energy, and between fundamental state and function, as previously analyzed.

Nevertheless, another verse from the *Xici* appears to lend support to Cheng Yi's concept of an ontological hierarchy in Ru metaphysics, as it states, "what lies beyond shape is called the Dao, what lies within shape is called the utensil-like things. (形而上者謂之道，形而下者謂之器)." (Wang et al. 1999, p. 292). In this context, the Dao could be understood as *Tianli*, a higher-order pattern-principle that engenders and governs the development and interaction of things within concrete forms, akin to utensils—an interpretation that aligns well with Cheng Yi's philosophy. Despite this, Cheng Hao interprets this verse in line with his own metaphysical ethics, which rejects such an ontological hierarchy, as demonstrated in the following two quotes:

> "The Xici states, 'What lies beyond shape is called the Dao, what lies within shape is called the utensil-like things'. It also says, 'One yin and one yang is called the Dao'. Yin and yang, despite being among the things within shape, are still referred to as the Dao. This language deftly illuminates the distinction between above and below. Ultimately, it is in this that the Dao lies (只此是道), and people need to silently discern it." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 118)

> "Indeed, what the sublime Tian carries is soundless and odorless. Its fundamental substrate (體) is called the Change (易), its pattern-principle is called the Dao, its functionality (用) is called the wondrous (神), what it mandates to humans is called (human) nature. To follow the nature is called the (human) way, to cultivate the (human) way is called the education. Mengzi even went further to elucidate the oceanic vital-energy (浩然之氣), perfecting all that have been said. … These Ruist teachings delve into the realms above and below, fully articulating all that is to be conveyed. In accordance, the Xici instructs, 'What lies beyond shape is called the Dao, what lies within shape is called the utensil-like things'. This teaching is cogent in its own right. Utensil-like things are also the Dao, the Dao is also utensil-like things. As long as the Dao is present, it isn't bound by time—neither the present nor the future—or by entities, whether it be oneself or others." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 4)

These two remarks underscore Cheng Hao's view that major concepts in Ruist metaphysical ethics depict the same foundational cosmic reality—the all-embracing and incessantly creative process of yin/yang interchange and transformation—from differing angles. More critically, they assert that there is no ontological hierarchy between concepts probing the holistic, macroscopic facets and those scrutinizing the discrete, microscopic facets of this single reality. In Cheng Hao's perspective, the Dao, representing the universally pervasive pattern-principle of ceaseless creativity, is fully embodied in and not confined to "this", or any particular utensil-like thing, each imbued with a unique configuration of yin/yang alteration and fusion. Simply put, the Dao is nothing but a holistic lens to perceive the most generic nature of existence and change in the universe. The resonance between Cheng Hao's and Yang Shi's philosophies is thereby manifestly clear, as Cheng's expression "it is in this that the Dao lies" distinctively evokes Yang's view that "the Ultimate Limit exists wherever we perceive 'here' to be".

Given Cheng Hao's distinct metaphysical perspective from Cheng Yi, it's reasonable to infer that his approach to Ruist self-cultivation would also harbor subtle differences from the latter. The following two teachings confirm this supposition:

> "Scholars should initially recognize humaneness (仁). A humane person, wholly and genuinely, forms a unified body with all things (仁者渾然與物同體). Righteousness, ritual-propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness are all facets of humaneness. Once recognizing this pattern-principle, we simply need to preserve it with sincerity and reverence; there is no necessity for defense or exhaustive exploration. If the heartmind slackens, guarding is required, yet if the heartmind remains vigilant, why the need for defense? If the pattern-principle has yet to

> be fully grasped, an exhaustive search is warranted. Once preserved over time, clarity emerges of its own accord, making an exhaustive search superfluous. This Dao holds no opposition with things, it's too grand to be named, and the functions of heaven and earth are all inherently mine. Mengzi stated, 'all things are potentially encompassed within me'. Only by returning to embody one's own authentic self can great joy be found. If the self one reverts to lacks authenticity, then it is as though there still exist two opposing entities. Attempting to unite the inauthentic self with anything else will result in disintegration, precluding the acquisition of joy. … Indeed, good knowing and good ability (良知良能) are never lost; it's simply that past habitual tendencies (習心) persist. Thus, nurturing the heartmind is imperative, and over time it can supplant outdated habits. This pattern-principle is profoundly simple, the primary concern lies in the potential inability to uphold it. Once it is embodied with joy, the worry of not being able to uphold it diminishes." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 17)

> "In the case of supreme humaneness (至仁), heaven and earth merge to form a single body, with everything in between—consisting of countless forms—acting as the four limbs and multitude of elements within this unified body. Who could regard the numerous components of their own body without feeling affection for them? A sage, reaching the pinnacle of humaneness, is solely capable of embodying this heartmind, never attempting to seek it in a fragmented and numerous manner externally. Therefore, the ability 'to draw upon nearby examples' was the method Kongzi used to demonstrate the concept of humaneness to Zigong. Medical texts describe numb and hardened hands and feet as 'inhumane limbs' because their pain doesn't impact the heartmind. These hands and feet are part of me, and if their discomfort goes unnoticed, wouldn't this be considered inhumane? Those in the world who are heartless and ungrateful essentially abandon themselves in a similar manner." (Cheng and Cheng 1981, p. 74)

The path of self-cultivation articulated by Cheng Hao in these quotations encapsulates the essence of what Yang Shi would later adopt in his contemplative lifestyle. Scholars must initially recognize the virtue of humaneness and then work to preserve it in every situation they encounter. This virtue is a full expression of *Tianli*, the universal pattern-principle, within human nature. By following and extending examples that are close at hand, such as the intimate connection between one's body and heartmind, one can embody this virtue, returning to their authentic self. Cheng Hao did not explicitly state that the practice of quiet-sitting is crucial to the self-cultivation process, characterizable as one of "returning, preserving, and expanding". As indicated by my previous research (Song 2023, pp. 3–11), it is likely that Cheng Hao considered multiple contemplative practices—such as quiet-sitting, observing the vitality of things, and checking one's pulse—as equally effective in recognizing the all-encompassing virtue of humaneness. Nevertheless, given that Cheng Hao's method of self-cultivation necessitates a temporal and embodied starting point, Yang Shi's emphasis on quiet-sitting appears as a natural evolution of Cheng Hao's method, rendering the latter more streamlined and practicable. Notably, the mood of "graceful poise" and "leisure and ease", discernible in Yang Shi's contemplative writings and poetry, aligns well with Cheng Hao's method of self-cultivation as well, since Cheng Hao implies that upon returning to one's authentic self, there is "no need for defense or exhaustive exploration". Interestingly, we do not observe similar traits of leisure and ease in Cheng Yi's writings.[26]

The distinction between Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi is no less significant than the one between Yang Shi and Cheng Yi. For Cheng Yi, there is no single temporal starting point for self-cultivation. The hierarchy of pattern-principle and fundamental state over vital-energies and functions entails that no single embodied everyday state can wholly manifest the ontologically superior Dao. In Cheng Yi's method, one needs to broadly and cumulatively learn numerous pattern-principles of things, maintaining a reverential attitude throughout to continually nurture the ontological bond between the human self and the

all-encompassing *Tianli*. Even if, during this accumulative process, one has an ecstatic moment of realizing the interconnectedness of all pattern-principles into one singular *Tianli*, Cheng Yi maintains the necessity of returning to concrete moments of everyday life to discern how to righteously manifest *Tianli* in evolving and renewing life situations.

To put it differently, if we use "vertical" to signify the unitary moment of humans unifying with the universe, and "horizontal" to denote the mundane moments of everyday life, Cheng Hao's path of self-cultivation begins vertically but expands horizontally later. Conversely, Cheng Yi's path is expansively horizontal at the outset, vertical in the middle, but reverts to being expansively horizontal again in the end. Given the evident affinity between Yang Shi and Cheng Hao in terms of their moral psychology, metaphysics, and self-cultivation methods, it's safe to assert that such a delineation of differences between Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi would equally apply to Yang Shi and Cheng Yi.

5.4. Yang Shi's Struggle to Reconcile the Philosophies of the Cheng Brothers

Yang Shi began his studies with Cheng Hao at 29, significantly earlier than his engagement with Cheng Yi. As such, it's understandable that his thought is more influenced by Cheng Hao. However, as evidenced previously, Yang remained dedicated to studying and transmitting Cheng Yi's teachings even towards the end of his life. Given the substantial differences between the philosophies of Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, it would be reasonable to expect that Yang would attempt to reconcile these differences. Yet, as the following instances illustrate, these reconciliatory efforts often culminated in the juxtaposition of two divergent lines of thought, thereby highlighting, rather than bridging, the differences.

Yang Shi's interpretation of the "investigation of things", as discussed above, demonstrates such a challenge in his philosophy. On one hand, Yang stresses the importance of extensive learning, in a manner akin to Cheng Yi. On the other hand, he contends that "things are too numerous to investigate thoroughly". Therefore, one should focus on returning to embody their authentic self through the practice of quiet-sitting, finding a temporal anchoring point for self-cultivation—a technique he gleaned from Cheng Hao. The problem with this juxtaposing method of reconciliation is that it fails to resolve the inherent logical conflict between the two systems. For Cheng Yi, the lack of a specific temporal starting point for self-cultivation stems from his metaphysical conviction that *Tianli* is ontologically superior to each and every concrete thing, a view with which Cheng Hao disagrees. Since Yang insisted on temporally prioritizing quiet-sitting as the anchor of self-cultivation, he was advocating an alternative view of metaphysics and moral psychology, which led to inconsistency in his thought.

Similarly, as quoted earlier, Yang Shi contended, "The rectification of the heartmind achieves its utmost limit in a state of tranquil stillness. This condition enables one to resonate with, and thereby connect to, everything under heaven". This declaration strongly echoes Yang's overarching approach to self-cultivation, which encourages returning to tranquility through quiet-sitting initially, followed by engagement with diverse life situations. However, when commenting on the same verse from the *Xici*, Yang also asserted, "Through a state of tranquil stillness, one can resonate with and connect to everything under heaven. This means stillness and motion form a unified entity. It is not that one must first achieve stillness and then address motion (非戾靜以之動也)". (S. Yang 1792, vol. 7, p. 8) If Yang rejected the precedence of stillness over motion concerning their temporal order in the self-cultivation process, he was aligning more with Cheng Yi's model than Cheng Hao's, creating a conflict between the two statements.

Another considerable difference between the models of self-cultivation proposed by Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi, which stems from their distinct metaphysical perspectives, lies in the following: Cheng Hao doesn't mandate any extra effort during non-anchoring moments of daily life beyond preserving the state of heartmind attained in an anchoring moment. Conversely, Cheng Yi asserts that due to the variable circumstances acting as unique manifestations of *Tianli*, a consistent intellectual effort to study each particular pattern-principle, paired with a practical endeavor to do each thing righteously, is always neces-

sary. Therefore, Cheng Hao's model prompts the collapse of distinctions among major concepts in Ruist metaphysical ethics, while Cheng Yi's model is characterized by meticulous conceptual analysis.

When Yang Shi asserted that "harmonization" is merely the spontaneous reaction of a "centered" heartmind, and that "righteousness is also reverence", he was evidently following Cheng Hao's model, hence blurring the lines between major concepts. Nevertheless, there are multiple instances when he also sought to pursue conceptual analysis in the style of Cheng Yi, resulting in conspicuous self-contradictions in his various statements. Two such examples are listed below.

Firstly, contrary to his earlier claim of righteousness being a form of reverence, Yang Shi also proposes that "Reverence is sufficient to straighten one's inner heartmind. However, when the heartmind is aroused by external things, its response may not always be timely or appropriate, hence the necessity of righteousness to align one's external behaviors" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 21, p. 9). This assertion aligns more closely with Cheng Yi's philosophy and contradicts his earlier claim.

Secondly, there is likely no instance of self-contradiction more apparent in Yang Shi's writings than his response to whether "authenticating intention" can bring about peace under heaven. In one occasion, aligning with his self-cultivation model of returning and preserving, Yang suggests that "authenticating intention" means "one can embody centrality before emotions arise, and one can achieve harmonization after these emotions manifest". He therefore concludes that authenticating one's intention "is adequate to establish peace under heaven (足以平天下)" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 12, p. 14).

However, on another occasion, after emphasizing the importance of authenticating intentions for self-cultivation, Yang Shi shifted his focus to the investigation of things, and posited:

> "The Great Learning discusses the way of authenticating intentions, rectifying the heartmind, and cultivating oneself in order to bring order to the state and the world. This process fundamentally rests on the investigation of things and its extension. To claim that authentic intentions alone are adequate to establish peace under heaven would render the classical laws, rituals, and cultural artifacts of the ancient sage-kings superfluous. As such, Master Cheng Hao once proposed, 'Only with the intent inspired by 'Guanju' and 'Linzi'[27] can one implement the regulations and measures of the Zhou officials', a sentiment that perfectly encapsulates this idea." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 21, p. 4)

Essentially, in this newly quoted statement, Yang Shi suggests that, in addition to "authenticating intentions", one must continuously "investigate things" and learn all necessary laws, rituals, and cultural artifacts to ultimately bring order and peace to the world. This assertion that "authentic intentions" alone are not sufficient directly contradicts his earlier statement. More significantly, while Yang is promoting a model of self-cultivation that aligns more closely with Cheng Yi's model here, he attributes his perspective to the influence of Cheng Hao. This inconsistency, whether intentional or not, underscores Yang's struggle to reconcile the differing philosophies of his two mentors.

Notably, given Yang Shi's significant role in preserving and transmitting the teachings of the Cheng Brothers to subsequent Daoxue learners, it's unlikely that these obvious inconsistencies and contradictions in Yang's writings went unnoticed. In this respect, Zhu Xi's observations on Yang's scholarship provide a telling example:

> "Yang Shi's recorded sayings and his own writings do not closely align. The overarching issue with his writings is their lack of consistent management: what he articulates in the beginning, he contradicts at the end (前面說如此，後面又都反了). This is because he simply adhered with the wording and phrasing, without achieving a deep understanding of the underlying concepts." (Zhu 2002, vol. 17, p. 3359)

> "Yang Shi's commentaries and writings lack a clear outline or central thesis (無綱要)." (Ibid., p. 3372)

> "Yang Shi's writings and discussions are like a hand tightly gripping an object only to suddenly drop it. This is due to his weak vital-energy (氣弱)."
>
> (Ibid., p. 3372)

In my estimation, such inconsistency arises not only from Yang Shi's unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the divergences between the Cheng Brothers' philosophies, but also from inherent difficulties within Yang's self-cultivation model of returning, preserving, and expanding. Specifically, two critical problems remain insufficiently addressed by this model:

First, why should the practice of quiet-sitting be prioritized as the anchoring point of self-cultivation? Given Yang Shi's view of the relationship between *Tianli* and everyday life moments (that is inspired by Cheng Hao), any such moment could fully manifest *Tianli*, as there's no involved order of ontological priority. In other words, besides quiet-sitting, other contemplative practices like various ritual performances should also be adequate for manifesting *Tianli*. Although Yang indeed occasionally suggests that the performance of sacrificial rituals can also restore authenticity (貴誠) and provide access to the one unifying *Tianli* (S. Yang 1792, vol. 11, p. 19), he does not offer a clear explanation as to why quiet-sitting should be the primary focus of practice.

Second, Yang Shi's self-cultivation model proposes that the "harmonization" of diverse emotions in response to varying situations is a natural and spontaneous consequence of the "centrality" of the heartmind, attainable through quiet-sitting. Consequently, "harmonization" becomes merely a form of preserving "centrality", requiring no additional effort. This model implies that all intellectual endeavors aimed at studying the concrete pattern-principles of things in the world become redundant once the experience of a unified and graded harmony of all things has been achieved through quiet-sitting. Cheng Yi's model of simultaneously preserving reverence and righteousness sidesteps this issue by emphasizing the necessity of continuously merging contemplative and intellectual efforts. However, I have not found any consistent resources within Yang's system to address this conundrum.

To conclude my reflections on these two issues in Yang Shi's self-cultivation model, it's important to note that Yang's emphasis on quiet-sitting is essentially a simplified and practical adaptation of Cheng Hao's original model, which initially calls for the recognition of humaneness without singling out a particular method to achieve this. Cheng Hao's model could indeed address the first identified issue, as he did not specifically designate quiet-sitting as the starting point of self-cultivation. However, Cheng Hao's model falls short when addressing the second issue; preserving the virtue of humaneness—which, according to Cheng Hao, should be fully recognizable in any chosen contemplative practice—inadvertently eliminates the need for a distinct intellectual effort required in investigating things. As my future research will elucidate, these inherent challenges within the models of returning, preserving, and expanding as proposed by Chang Hao and Yang Shi continued to captivate the minds of thinkers within the Daoxue movement. Eventually, Zhu Xi, the eminent synthesizer of the movement, reverted to Cheng Yi's approach, thereby formulating the orthodox version of Ru self-cultivation.

6. Interspiritual Implications

As demonstrated by his exposition of Daoist "heel-breathing" practices and his citation of Laozi in explaining Ruist meditative breathing, Yang Shi's approach to non-Ruist spiritual traditions aligns with the key characteristics of a rooted yet non-confessional open inclusivism that I previously outlined in (Song 2020). On one hand, Yang's Ruist beliefs are firmly rooted in his understanding of ancient Ru classics, but they are not constrained by pre-established dogmatic strictures. On the other hand, he freely employed terms and concepts from non-Ruist traditions to interpret his own Ruist perspective, allowing his beliefs to remain open and capable of selectively integrating wisdom and practices from other traditions. This open inclusivism suggests that Yang's advocacy for Ruism is based on an unbiased philosophical conviction, recognizing the existence of multiple traditions

that have explored significant matters and merit study. As Yang asserts, "The discourses of the Daoists on being and non-being, and the Buddhists on form and emptiness, are all endeavors to shed light on the most profound truths of the world (明天下至賾). They should not be differentiated merely based on who propounds them (非有人物之異也)" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 16, p. 11).

Within this broad framework of open inclusivism, Yang Shi's exploration of the central concept of "emptiness (空, kong)" in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism is especially noteworthy. Not only does it help to further elucidate the subtle but significant differences between major Daoxue thinkers such as Cheng Yi and Yang Shi, but it also enriches our understanding of the distinctions between Ruist and Buddhist techniques of sitting meditation, particularly in terms of how to calm the mind, as initially discussed above.[28]

Yang Shi emphasized that the Buddhist concept of emptiness is meant to delineate the most generic trait of realities in the everyday world. It does not propose any separate or alternative realm of reality and, therefore, it does not suggest any form of ontological nihilism. Yang's emphasis is particularly evidenced by his attempts to correct the misconceptions of two of his Ruist contemporaries, Wang Anshi and Zhang Zai.

Wang Anshi interpreted the concept of "emptiness" by stating, "In a pit, there is no earth, which implies that emptiness signifies the absence of image (無相). Likewise, the existence of a pit suggests that there is no need for a worker to continue digging, hence, emptiness conveys the absence of effort (無作). However, without the concepts of 'image' and 'effort', the notion of emptiness cannot be established." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 7, p. 1). In simpler terms, Wang believes that emptiness must be explained through denying the presence of tangible images and efforts, akin to how the emptiness of a pit results from the lack of earth's image and the effort of digging. Wang further declares, "True emptiness distances itself from humans. (真 空 者 离 人 焉)." (Ibid.).

In response to Wang's perspective, Yang Shi counters as follows:

> "The discussion of effort and image originates from Buddhist thought; we didn't find it in Ruism. As a Buddhist text states, "Emptiness equates to no-image, and no-image equates to no-effort". Hence, the concept of emptiness is not established by notions of effort and image. The kind of emptiness that results from digging a pit involves eliminating form to reveal emptiness; this, according to Buddhists, is a form of fragmented emptiness, not true emptiness (斷空非真空). Surely, how can the vast emptiness of the cosmos be excavated by a laborer? The concept of form and emptiness does not originate from Ruist teachings. Thus, it can be said that Wang Anshi has misunderstood both Buddhism and Ruism."
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 7, p. 1)

In his rebuttal, Yang Shi cites a notable verse from the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa (維摩詰所說經), translated by Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什), famed for its explanation of the Buddhist "nondualism (不二法門)" (Kumārajīva n.d., p. 406). Yang underscores that if the Buddhist concept of emptiness were to be established by denying the existence of any tangible image or effort, it would reduce the Buddhist teaching to dualism, a stance explicitly repudiated by the Vimalakīrti Sūtra. Rather, emptiness signifies that all images and efforts in the everyday world are in constant flux and deeply interconnected, making it impossible to characterize any image or effort as possessing an unchanging and isolated selfhood. So, instead of negating the existence of concrete images or efforts, the nondualistic concept of emptiness stresses that the human language of image and effort falls short of capturing the true nature of these ever-changing and interconnected realities. In this specific sense, emptiness equates to no-image and no-effort.

Given that the authentic concept of emptiness does not segregate realities into two dichotomous states—the everyday existence and its opposite non-existence—Yang argues that it is not a fragmented or discontinuous type of emptiness. Yang further critiques Wang's assertion, saying, "Wang believes that 'true emptiness distances itself from humans'. This creates a separation between emptiness and form and, therefore, is not a

genuine understanding of emptiness" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 7, p. 1). Yang also refers to this incorrect interpretation of emptiness as "obstinate emptiness (頑空)" (Ibid., vol. 13, p. 23).

Intriguingly, Yang also drew upon his nondualistic understanding of emptiness to critique Zhang Zai's criticism of Buddhism. Relying upon his belief that the vast void of the universe is nothing other than the all-pervasive vital-energy (虛空即氣), Zhang once critiqued the Daoist and Buddhist metaphysical views in his "To Rectify Ignorance (正蒙)" as follows:

> "If one claims that the void can generate vital-energy, then the void would be boundless, while vital-energy would be finite, leading to a clear disjunction between the fundamental state and its functions. This perspective falls into the Laozist argument on nature as 'existence born from non-existence (有生於無)',[29] neglecting the constant integration of existence and non-existence. If one contends that all appearances are things observed within the vast void, then things and the void would not contribute to each other. It would be the case that shape is from shape, nature is from nature, shape and nature, Tian and humans do not depend on each other to exist. This leads to the Buddhist fallacy that sees mountains, rivers, and the earth as illusions." (Z. Zhang 1985, p. 8)

To Zhang Zai's critiques of Daoist and Buddhist metaphysics, Yang Shi responds in the following,

> "Laozi states that existence is born from non-existence, and further discusses the interdependent arising of existence and non-existence, but fails to understand their unity. Zhang Zai's To Rectify Ignorance states that if one contends that all appearances are things observed within the vast void, then things and the void would not contribute to each other, ultimately leading to the Buddhist fallacy that views mountains, rivers, and the earth as illusions. However, the term 'mountains, rivers, and the earth' precisely designates the existence of these things. It's acceptable to use this term (to describe the void), making Zhang's critique of the Buddhist on illusion inadequate." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 16, p. 11–12)

If the void is interpreted as a state of cosmic evolution where no vital-energy has been produced, then it suggests a temporal precedence of non-existence over existence. This does not align with Yang Shi's Ruist view that the interplay between yin and yang vital-energies is a constant phenomenon in the universe, thereby negating any temporal priority between existence and non-existence. In this context, Yang concurs with Zhang's critique of Laozi's Daoist metaphysics.

However, Yang Shi disagreed with Zhang Zai's critique of Buddhism. Yang viewed that Zhang misconstrues the Buddhist concept of void—closely related to the concept of emptiness—as referring to a state of non-existence in the world where no tangible entities can be identified. According to Zhang, Buddhists perceive "mountains, rivers, and the earth" as illusions because they believe the void is the only true existence, making any entity observed within this void illusory and non-existent. Conversely, Yang accurately comprehends the Buddhist concept of void or emptiness as nondualistic. He contended that human observations are deemed by Buddhists as illusory because these perceptions fail to recognize the constantly changing and interconnected nature of entities, not because those observed things do not exist. In this regard, it's precisely within the existence of "mountains, rivers, and the earth" that the genuine nature of void or emptiness is manifest and embedded.

Recognizing that the concept of emptiness does not negate the existence of worldly entities, Yang Shi acknowledges the challenge in distinguishing Buddhism from Ruism's metaphysical realism, a dilemma underscored by Zhang Zai's insufficient critique of Buddhism. Yang therefore posits:

> "The teachings of Ruism and Buddhism, when extended to their logical extremes, exhibit only slight and subtle differences (所差眇忽). Grasping the meaning of Buddhism can prove challenging due to its elusive terminology; it's not easily

countered without an intimate understanding of its principles. Despite Zhang Zai's comprehensive and profound discernment, he could not conclusively refute it. The chance for others to do so is even slimmer. It might be advisable to leave it undiscussed. Yet, if one immerses oneself deeply in the study (of these two traditions) and personally grasps their tenets (深造而自得之), their disparities will naturally reveal themselves." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 16, p. 13)

Hence, to fully comprehend Yang Shi's discernment of the subtle yet significant disparities between Ruism and Buddhism, it is imperative to identify the specific aspects where Yang Shi's Ruist worldview aligns with or contrasts against Buddhism. Three categories of Yang Shi's sayings and writings on Ruism and Buddhism will be discussed: those highlighting similarities, those exploring both similarities and differences, and those focusing on differences.

6.1. Similarity of Ruism and Buddhism

An exceptional remark by Yang Shi, highlighting the congruity between Ruism and Buddhism, reads as follows:

"Shapes and forms are where the heavenly nature lies. As long as something exists, it has inherent norms. Entities are constituted by shapes and forms, which are manifestations of the heavenly nature (物即是形色即是天性). Only sages, who truly comprehend and embody this nature, can actualize their appropriate form and adhere to these inherent norms. Indeed, shapes and forms must have a basis for their existence, which is precisely what sages adhere to. Asserting that shapes and forms are the heavenly nature is tantamount to stating that form is emptiness (色即是空)." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 13, p. 20)

As depicted in Figure 1, the pairs of metaphysical-ethical concepts in Yang Shi's system interact in a manner similar to "an organic whole" relating to "its holographic or fractal parts". The nature of the whole can be fully expressed in each of the parts, and there is no ontological precedence of the whole over the parts. As such, the relationship this above quote describes between concrete things, each of which possesses their particular configuration of shapes and forms, and their heavenly nature, parallels the relationship of "vital-energies" to "heavenly pattern-principle" and "functions" to "fundamental state" as represented in Figure 1.

For Yang Shi, this connection between entities and the heavenly nature mirrors the nondualistic bond between emptiness and form in Buddhism, as referenced in the earlier quotes. In essence, emptiness offers a holistic viewpoint to illuminate the shared characteristic of all mutable and interconnected things in the world, while emptiness itself doesn't hold any ontological supremacy over these things; thus, emptiness does not denote any realm of realities separated from the existing ones. Hence, Yang cites a verse from the well-known Chinese Mahayana Buddhist text, the *Heart Sutra*, "form is emptiness" (Xuan Zang n.d., p. 649) to elucidate the relationship between entities and the heavenly nature in Ruism.

6.2. Similarities and Differences of Ruism and Buddhism

While establishing the shared elements of Ruism and Buddhism, Yang Shi often swiftly pivoted to emphasize their distinctions:

"Shapes and forms are indeed the heavenly nature. Therefore, actualizing the form equates to fulfilling the nature, a task only sages are capable of. This aligns with the Buddhist teaching that 'form is emptiness'. Our sages perceive this as the naturally given principle of all under heaven and elucidate it using ordinary things and affairs. This approach renders the teachings accessible and free of intimidation for those who encounter them. However, deviant teachings (異端之學) perceive themselves as profound doctrines. Their adherents, despite employing hundreds and thousands of words, fail to fully express their mean-

> ings. Consequently, scholars are left uncertain about where to direct their pursuits, leading them further astray from the Way. This delineates the distinction between Ruism and Buddhism." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 8, p. 23)
>
> Someone asked, "The Xici states that if Qian and Kun are eliminated, the Change becomes invisible. In this case, would the Change not belong to non-existence?" Yang Shi responded, "The Change is certainly not non-existent". The questioner further inquired, "Is there any reflection of Zhang Zai's discussion on Laozi's non-existence and existence here?" Yang Shi answered, "Indeed, just mentioning non-existence (in Laozi's manner) immediately leads to the notion of annihilation. In contrast, when the Buddhists discuss emptiness, they then have to exert substantial effort to explain that emptiness is not empty (釋氏説空又曰非空到了費力). It is most fitting for the sage to simply discuss the Change."
>
> (Ibid., vol. 13, p. 15)

Yang, in the second quote, reiterates his view that both Ruism and Buddhism advocate for the existence of things in the world. This sets them apart from Daoism, which prioritizes the non-existence of things. However, as indicated in both quotes, Yang contends that while Ruism and Buddhism concur in affirming that the shared, essential trait of a whole (i.e., *Tianli* in Ruism and emptiness in Buddhism) is fully manifested in each of its parts, they diverge in their teaching styles. Ruism utilizes everyday instances to make its subtle metaphysical teachings accessible, whereas Buddhism exerts significant effort to directly discuss metaphysics, which often makes it difficult for ordinary people to fully grasp its teachings.

Nevertheless, for Yang Shi, the divergence between Ruism and Buddhism extends beyond their differing pedagogical styles in discussing similar metaphysical perspectives. According to him, these perspectives themselves embody substantial differences. Yang elucidates this point in a correspondence with Chen Yingzhong (1057–1124), a scholar-official committed to interpreting Ruist ideas in the *Classic of Change* through the particular lens of Huayan (華嚴, Flower-Adorned) Buddhist thought:

> "Your elucidation of the grand principle of the three gates of the Dharma realm, extensively referencing and profoundly expounding upon the essence of both Ruism and Buddhism, allows even the unenlightened to listen and benefit greatly. I am indeed fortunate. Nonetheless, there are aspects I respectfully question and dare to inquire about.
>
> The Xici states that the yao (爻, a line of hexagram) has differing ranks, and hence, various things intermingle with one another. Consequently, the Tuan (彖, judgment) text of Hexagram Bi (賁, Decoration) states, 'The soft arrives to embellish the hard. The hard is separated to the top to embellish the soft'. The hard and soft intermingle, which explains why Bi symbolizes 'culture'. The colorless white, as a form of decoration, is capable of receiving colors. Decoration, in this sense, possesses no color but make colors manifest as colors. (白賁, 受色者也; 賁無色, 色色者也) Only an existing substrate can receive, and only the colorless can decorate. Hence, the Word of Yao concludes with 'White Decoration', and the Explaining Hexagrams (說卦) also declares 'decoration is colorless'. All of these can be comprehended as 'pervasive fusion (普融)'.
>
> However, cultivating friendships through culture, and nurturing the virtue of humaneness via friendship are the concerns of scholars. If you interpret the Hexagram Bi as implying 'gathering forms and returning to emptiness (會色歸空)', I fear this interpretation may not be present in our Ruist text (viz., the Classic of Change)." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 19, p. 9–10)

The Hexagram Bi is composed of the lower Trigram Li (離, Attachment or Fire) and the upper Trigram Gen (艮, Stop or Mountain). The lower one has a yin line nestled between two yang lines, while the upper one has a yang line positioned atop two yin lines. Because the yin line finds itself in the midst of yang lines and the yang line ascends to rest above

yin lines, the *Word of Judgment* depicts the overall situation as an intermingling of hard and soft, symbolizing the act of decoration and, more broadly, the phenomenon of culture. (Wang et al. 1999, pp. 104–05) The underlying reason why the intermixing of yin and yang can symbolize culture is that culture involves the infusion of human elements into non-human nature, thus refining or "decorating" the raw and untamed non-human nature.

Emphatically, the Ruist thought, as conveyed by the text and commentaries of the *Classic of Change*[30], suggests that there's a limit or ideal for the act of culturally decorating non-human nature or raw human dispositions. Specifically, such decoration should not be excessive; the evolution of human culture needs to strike a balance between uniquely human efforts and non-human nature. In the context of Yang Shi's Daoxue thought, this balance between non-human nature and human nature is best embodied in the perspective of *Tianli*—that is, the overarching harmonization of various elements in the world, each with its distinct nature yet co-evolving with the others.

The ultimate limit or ideal of cultural decoration is epitomized in the *Word of Yao* pertaining to the top line of Hexagram Bi, which describes the highest form of decoration as akin to a "white decoration" (Wang et al. 1999, p. 108). In the realm of painting, a white substrate is devoid of color, but it has the capacity to both accept various colors and enable those colors to manifest as colors. This bears resemblance to the relationship between *Tianli* and the diverse elements in the world, as interpreted by Yang Shi. In this relationship, the sphere of *Tianli* corresponds to the unsummed totality of the ever-changing and renewing things in the world, yet it also sheds light on why all unique things in the world can connect broadly with each other and co-evolve. Therefore, in Yang's interpretation, the image of the colorless white, signifying a form of decoration, symbolizes the ideal state of the evolution of human culture—that is, a comprehensive balance and harmonization between non-human nature and the human realm within the vast metaphysical framework of *Tian*.

Understood as such, the relationship between the colorless white and the colors, as well as the one between *Tianli* and tangible things, would parallel what Buddhists refer to as "form is emptiness". Yang employs a specific term, "pervasive fusion (普融)"—alternatively phrased as "perfect fusion (圓融)" in the Huayan lineage of Chinese Buddhism—to describe this relationship.

While a thorough examination of the Huayan metaphysics falls outside the scope of this paper, a pointed quote from the founding Huayan master Fa Shun or Du Shun (557–640)'s explanation of "perfect fusion" would suffice to illustrate its essence:

> "The two domains of things and pattern-principle (事理) perfectly fuse into one realm. There are two gates. One is the gateway of the mind's genuine suchness (真如), the other is the gateway of the mind's arising and ceasing. The gateway of the mind's genuine suchness corresponds to the pattern-principle, and the gateway of the mind's arising and ceasing corresponds to the things. This refers to the two views of emptiness and existence (空有), freely and perfectly fusing into each other. They are different in that one is hidden and another is apparent, but in the end, there are no hindrances between the two. This speaks of non-duality. All things deriving from co-dependent origination apparently exist but are also empty. Emptiness is not empty and returns to existence (空即不空, 復還成有). Existence and emptiness are not two." (Fa Shun n.d., T45n1867)

Clearly, the so-called "perfect fusion" of emptiness (空) and existence (有), as explained by Du Shun, precisely corresponds to the relationship between emptiness and form as described by Yang Shi in the context of his debates with his Ruist contemporaries. In other words, emptiness refers to the fact that all things within the realm of existing realities are in constant flux and widely interconnected, and hence, none of them possesses an inherent selfhood separate from the extensive network of codependent origination. Emptiness does not negate the existence of things; its scope is precisely equivalent to the unsummed totality of all existing things. Given that Yang Shi already proposed the relationship between emptiness and form as a fitting explanation for the relationship

between *Tianli* and things, it's unsurprising that he deemed the Huayan concepts of "pervasive fusion" or "perfect fusion" appropriate for illuminating this connection as well, which mirrors the relationship between colorless white decoration and colors in Hexagram Bi.

However, in his correspondence with Chen Yingzhong, immediately after asserting the formal congruence of the relationship between the essential and phenomenal traits of reality as understood in both Ruism and Buddhism, Yang Shi turned his attention to their substantial differences. Citing a verse from Confucius's *Analects* 12:24, Yang emphasized that the cultural activities alluded to by Hexagram Bi are intended for those who cherish learning and education (i.e., "scholars") to form friendships and ultimately cultivate the virtue of humaneness. This was not a Buddhist process of "gathering forms and returning to emptiness".

In light of his interpretation of the virtue of humaneness, which, as previously analyzed, is not only the cardinal ethical virtue in Ruism but also represents the all-encompassing metaphysical principle of *Tianli*, Yang Shi's emphasis on the difference between Ruism and Buddhism essentially affirms that, despite Huayan Buddhism's usage of "things (事)" and "pattern-principle (理)" to represent the phenomenal and essential aspects of reality, the metaphysical content and ethical implications of what is referred to as "pattern-principle" in Buddhism and Ruism are significantly different.

The metaphysical distinction has already been implied in our previous discussion: Buddhist emptiness refers solely to the constant flux and interconnectedness of all realities, and it negates the intrinsic selfhood of any entity the definition of which may extend beyond the relationship among entities. As specifically discussed by Yang Shi in relation to "things or entities (物)", the Ruist concept of *Tianli* refers to an all-encompassing cosmic field teeming with vital-energies that generate, differentiate, and harmonize all entities. Each entity possesses a unique pattern-principle or norm that explains the configuration of components into an irreducible selfhood or individuality, which fits within its environment. Therefore, Yang would not agree that the Ruist pattern-principle is "empty" in the Buddhist sense.

Yang Shi's discussion of the ethical distinction focuses on the Buddhist virtue of compassion and the Ruist one of humaneness, further illuminating the underlying metaphysical distinction:

> "You've presented the profound wisdom of Huayan Buddhism … Although I've perused the text[31] previously, I may not have fully comprehended it, yet I've garnered a broad understanding of its key themes. The concept of 'giving (布施)' is frequently discussed, to the extent of stripping one's heart and marrow without any reservations—clearly showcasing a vast generosity of the heartmind. Your letter puts forth the idea that '(in the Buddhist view) one's giving should not be narrow, and one's aid should not be meager'. Indeed, isn't this the case?
>
> Nevertheless, each time I read Mengzi's work and encounter discussions about Mozi's relentless determination to benefit the world, despite his 'rubbed head and bruised heels'.[32] I can't help but sympathize with his plight (未嘗不憫其為人). What other motives could possibly drive Mozi? At the core, his goal is also 'not to be narrow in his giving, and not to meager on his aid'. This clearly sets him apart from those in the world who are single-mindedly self-serving. Yet Mengzi lambasts him relentlessly, even going so far as to compare him to beasts and birds.[33] Was Mengzi perhaps too harsh in his condemnation?
>
> The reason is that when an exemplary person (君子) practices generosity in the world, they each aim only to act appropriately according to what is right (各欲當其可而已). Yu empathized with those drowning in the world as if he himself were drowning, while Ji related to the world's hunger as if he himself were starving. They didn't enter an open door of their own homes. They didn't favor their own sons, even allowing their hands and feet to develop calluses without considering it a sickness. To an exemplary person, this is not deemed excessive. Yan Hui lived in a shabby alley, subsisting on meager meals and water, appearing

> foolish all day.[34] Still, an exemplary person would not say he was lacking. The reason being, Yu and Ji, despite their disheveled hair and crowns, assumed the responsibility of venturing out to rescue others, while Yan Hui was in a situation where he needed to shut himself in. Therefore, Mengzi stated, 'if they were in each other's position, they would act similarly'.[35] If Yan Hui, Yu, and Ji did not act according to what was right, they would resemble Yang Zhu and Mozi, actions that an exemplary person would not approve of. The precedents set by the ancients are unambiguous.
>
> Today, high-ranking officials and ministers serve side by side in court. Some, who are entrusted with the responsibilities of the world, instead deem themselves too unenlightened and insignificant to contribute to society. They justify closing their doors, refusing to step forward and shoulder the world's burdens to avoid personal distress. This isn't so much an exercise of freedom to disregard the world, but rather, a rigid adherence to the examples set by the ancients. If they justify their own faults with hopes of rectifying those of future generations, I fear this constitutes an overthinking characteristic of the educated and knowledgeable. These excuses could eventually obscure the understanding and implementation of the Way, let alone prevent the mistakes of future newcomers."
>
> (S. Yang 1792, vol. 19, pp. 7–8)

At the beginning of this letter, Yang Shi concedes that Buddhist compassion resembles Mozi's practice of impartial love. Both differ from purely selfish pursuits, thus deserving some sympathy from a Ruist perspective. However, Yang identifies two significant divergences.

Firstly, as Buddhist compassion hinges on the metaphysical belief that nothing possesses selfhood, its attendant acts of generosity doesn't emphasize the distinct characteristics of each giver as cultivated to address each unique situation. Conversely, the Ruist *Tianli* underscores the individuality of each entity within broad interconnections. Hence, the societal role a person plays, and their distinct personality traits, matter when deciding how to practice generosity appropriately. Political leaders such as Yu and Ji shall put the needs of the wider community above those of their own families during a social crisis, demonstrating unwavering and courageous efforts in rescue missions. Spiritual seekers like Yan Hui, who lived humbly and powerlessly, can reside in a shabby alley, lead a simple lifestyle, and dedicate themselves to self-cultivation. This difference underscores that the virtue of righteousness is integral to that of humaneness, making the Ruist practice of generosity distinct from the Buddhist one.

Secondly, if an individual occupies a position that requires proactive service to the community, Ruist humane ethics demand courage from them to break social norms and conventions when needed for the greater good. In this context, Ruist ethics stress autonomy as individuals are obligated to rely on their own willpower to "implement the Way", reminiscent of Kongzi's teaching in the Analects: "It is humans who can enlarge the Way, not the Way that can enlarge humans." (Kongzi (Confucius) 2003, 15.29, translation adapted).

In a word, while Yang Shi expresses some sympathy for the unselfishness inherent in Buddhist generosity, he criticizes it from a Ruist perspective. He argues that the act of giving should account for the differing personalities and social roles of individuals, and should be rooted in respects for autonomy that encourages the self-governance of a robust personhood.

The following statement by Yang Shi concisely summarizes both the similarities and differences between Ruism and Buddhism, making it a fitting example for analysis to conclude this section. Yang Shi states:

> "The six classics do not mention 'no heartmind (無心)', only the Buddhists speak of it. They also do not mention 'fixing the nature (修性)', only Yang Xiong (53BCE–18CE) speaks of it. The heartmind cannot be absent, and the nature does not need

> to be fixed. Hence, the Classic of Change speaks of 'cleansing the heartmind' and 'fulfilling the nature', the Record of Rites speaks of 'rectifying the heartmind' and 'revering virtue and nature', while Mengzi speaks of 'preserving the heartmind' and 'nourishing the nature'. Though Buddhists indeed demonstrate an intention to tunefully follow the Dao and virtue, their approach falls short in terms of the pattern-principle and righteousness. (佛氏和順於道德之意蓋有之，於理義則未也)." (S. Yang 1792, vol. 10, pp. 2–3)

Yang Shi's belief that human nature doesn't require fixing is well understood from Figure 1. Human nature, capable of fully expressing *Tianli*, merely needs to be revered, nourished, and fulfilled through self-cultivation. Moreover, Ruism does not endorse the nondualistic Buddhist concept of "no heartmind"—this is also clear from Figure 1. The human heartmind possesses a unique and authentic self that reflects human nature rooted in *Tianli* and is therefore far from empty. Nevertheless, Yang's description of Buddhism's intention as "tunefully following the Dao and virtue" warrants further examination.

Yang Shi's description paraphrases verses from the *Explaining Hexagrams* section in the *Classic of Change*: "In the past, when the sages composed the Change, … they tunefully followed the Dao and virtue, conducting themselves in accordance with righteousness (和順於道德而理於義). They fully explored pattern-principles and fulfilled their nature, ultimately realizing their destiny." (Wang et al. 1999, pp. 323–25). As for "tunefully following the Dao and virtue", the text explains further, "In the past, when the sages composed the Change, they intended to follow the pattern-principle of nature and fate. Therefore, they established the Way of heaven as yin and yang, the Way of earth as softness and hardness, and the Way of humans as humaneness and righteousness." (Ibid., p. 326). Therefore, the "Dao" in the original context of the quoted verses represents the most generic traits of cosmic realities (such as yin and yang, softness and hardness) from a holistic, "beyond shape" perspective. Conversely, "virtue" signifies the ideal traits of human nature (such as humaneness and righteousness), as examined from a localized perspective within the human world, namely a perspective "within shape".

The Buddhist understanding of the ultimate generic trait (emptiness) of cosmic realities and the primary virtue (compassion) of ethics notably differs from the Ruist Dao and virtue, as shown in our previous analysis. Therefore, when Yang Shi describes Buddhism as intending to "tunefully follow the Dao and virtue", it likely aligns with his approval of the formal metaphysical structure of "form is emptiness". That is to say, Buddhism's recognition of the essential trait of changing realities, fully manifested in these realities' concrete forms, bears a formal similarity with the Ruist insight that the Dao of the universe is fully manifested in the virtue of human beings. Relatedly, the Buddhist primary virtue of compassion also shares some similarity with the Ruist humaneness in the sense that neither of these virtues is selfish.

However, Yang Shi is clear about their differences: Buddhism "falls short in terms of the pattern-principle and righteousness". In other words, even if Huayan Buddhism also uses the term "pattern-principle" to denote the ultimate generic trait of changing realities, the inner connotation of pattern-principle differs substantially from the Ruist understanding. Consequently, the awareness of being the right person performing righteous deeds in unique situations isn't integral to the Buddhist concept of compassion, as it is to the Ruist concept of humaneness.

In summary, Yang Shi's final perspective on the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Ruism can be distilled as follows: within the metaphysical framework of pattern-principle vs. concrete things in the world, Ruism aligns with Buddhism in the sense that the metaphysical principle is fully manifested in the existence of empirical entities. However, Ruism diverges from Buddhism in three key ways: (1) the pedagogical methods used to convey these shared metaphysical views differ; (2) their understanding of the respective content of metaphysical pattern-principles varies; and (3) their ethical commitment to manifesting pattern-principle when interacting with empirical entities is subtly, yet significantly different.

6.3. Difference of Ruism and Buddhism

The above analysis indicates that, in Yang Shi's view, the differences between Ruism and Buddhism significantly outweigh their similarities. Consequently, we can find extensive statements from Yang that focus solely on these differences, even going as far as to discuss the harm caused by Buddhism. A prime example can be found in his letter to Lu Sizhong:

> "My humble and undistinguished self often privately ponders the departure of the sages. For over a thousand years, scholars and officials have been drawn outwardly by power and wealth, few standing for their authentic selves (鮮克為己者). Fortunately, some of us are beginning to independently forge our paths, not bending our aspirations to societal norms. We progress together, aspiring to ultimately each reach our destination. Recently, I was disconcerted to learn of your intent to shave your head to become a Buddhist monk, a path significantly diverging from my expectations. This concern keeps me awake at night, leading me to rise and sigh in frustration.
>
> Buddhism has been a long-standing detriment to the Central Kingdom (佛之為中國害久矣), with scholars devoted to ancient teachings persistently resisting it. Figures like Han Yu of the Tang dynasty and contemporary scholars like Sun Mingfu, Shi Shoudao, and Duke Ouyang stand as examples. However, these individuals lacked the insight to illuminate the Way of the ancient kings and perpetuate Kongzi's and Mengzi's teachings. Their commitment to the Way seldom remains unswerving, leaving them ill-equipped to confront Buddhism. It's like trying to extinguish a cartload of firewood with a cup of water; it's bound to be ineffective.
>
> Since my arrival in the capital and subsequent association with You Zuo to visit the two Master Chengs from Henan, I've had the opportunity to delve into their profound teachings. Although I have not yet glimpsed into the essence of sagely learning, I am not susceptible to deviant doctrines. Now, there is nowhere that the Way, as we refer to it, does not apply, particularly the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, or husband and wife. Consequently, within the relationship between a ruler and subjects lies the righteousness of the ruler and the subjects. Within the father-son relationship exists the benevolence of the father and the son. In the husband-wife dynamic, there is a distinction between the roles of the husband and the wife. This is how our sages came to understand that the application of the Way is universal, permeating every aspect of our existence.
>
> Moving away from this and towards that implies a selective mind, but when such selectiveness is applied in pursuit of the Way, doesn't it actually lead us further from the Way? If they (Buddhists) are unable to accommodate the relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, or husband and wife, doesn't that make their Way extraordinarily narrow? Furthermore, Buddha's teachings claim that his Way can break the cycle of life and death, which is why those immersed in his teachings flock to him. They view life and death as the fundamental cause of suffering that they wish to escape, but is this truly the Way? Can such a belief hold true?
>
> The ancient path of Great Learning requires us to first illuminate the innate goodness (of human existence) inherent in Tian. Once you understand this inherent goodness, then the mysteries of life and death, spirits and ghosts naturally unravel. This is the Way expounded by the sages in the Classic of Change, and there is no need to lose oneself in heretical teachings and seek outside of it (不必徇邪說而外求也). Mengzi once said, "Those who have fulfilled their heartmind know their nature, and knowing their nature, they know Tian".[36] Therefore, you should first strive to fulfill your heartmind. The distinction between Ruism and Buddhism will then become clear, and you will undoubtedly trust my words.

> Will those who follow Buddha find the Way? Abandoning human relationships and defying the Tianli can never lead to the Way. If they desire fortunate outcomes and pursue personal gain through Buddhist practice, they're no different from those in the world who frequent public offices, chasing after fame and profit. Not a single aspect of their actions is correct (左右無一可者), yet they persist. Were this occurring during the reign of the ancient kings, such behavior would have invited punishment. Is this appropriate conduct for a person of your worth and integrity?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 18, pp. 1–3)

Having stressed that Buddhist ethics lack the concept of an "authentic self" emphasizing the cultivation of righteous character traits to address varied situations, Yang Shi's critique towards Buddhism in this letter, in light of his friend's intention to become a Buddhist monk, comprises three major points: Buddhist ethics undermine the fulfillment of one's societal duties: as a righteous ruler or subject, a benevolent parent or child, and a distinguished spouse. Buddhist ethics foster an escapist attitude that views life and death as the primary cause of suffering. And the idea of karmic retribution in Buddhist practice implies a self-interested motivation.

Yang Shi's final comparative judgment of the two traditions is as follows:

> "The fundamental discrepancies between Ruism and Buddhism are nuanced. If one acquires a clear understanding of the Way in Ruism, then Buddhism is perceived to fall beneath it (佛在其下矣). Currently, some argue that the Way of Ruism is subordinate, reflecting their lack of comprehension of the magnitude of our Way. Considering that Buddhists either neglect to read Ruist texts or do not profoundly explore their meanings if they do read them, and given that Ruists tend to undermine their own significance, how then can the Way be genuinely elucidated?" (S. Yang 1792, vol. 19, p. 5)

6.4. Reconsidering the Difference Between Buddhist and Ruist Meditation

Given that the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Ruism, as perceived by Yang Shi, have been clarified, we can conclude that although Yang Shi's approach to self-cultivation, which pivots on the consistent practice of quiet-sitting meditation, bears resemblance to Buddhism, the metaphysical and ethical worldview underlying his practice is substantially different. In particular, we are now better equipped to study Yang Shi's proposed technique of calming the mind as "thinking appropriately", which is meant to be distinguished from the Buddhist method of mindfulness.

To what extent is the Ruist "thinking appropriately", as proposed by Yang Shi in Section 4.2, similar to Buddhist mindfulness? Metaphysically, Yang emphasizes that the relationship between *Tianli* and things is similar to the relationship between emptiness and forms, suggesting that one should pay close attention, without prejudices imposed by an egoistic heartmind, to how the ultimate trait of reality (*Tianli*, or emptiness) is manifested in each formed thing in the mundane world. Ethically, Yang agrees that Buddhist compassion is similar to Ruist humaneness, as both virtues are meant not to be selfish. Therefore, we can view the unprejudiced attention paid to realities as a shared example of compassion and humaneness.

Considering both metaphysical and ethical perspectives, we can conclude that Yang Shi's Ruist method of "thinking appropriately" and the Buddhist practice of mindfulness resemble each other in that both methods aim to nurture the bare attention of the human mind to realities as they are. This implies that one's mind should neither cease thinking nor become fixated on any particular mental object, as both the Buddhist and Ruist worldviews commonly acknowledge the constant change of realities. In other words, if we interpret Yang's interlocutor's proposed mindfulness method of "having thoughts without engaging any particular thought" as a way to remain consistently attentive to changing realities, Yang Shi would agree that this can also be practiced by Ruists.

Nevertheless, Yang Shi is explicit in asserting that the content of the Ruist understanding of pattern-principle is decisively different from that of Huayan Buddhism. Whether

pattern-principle refers to the generic traits of changing realities as a whole (*Tianli*) or to the specific configuration of components that form the norm of a thing, Yang sees a fundamental distinction. Ethically, Yang is also clear that Buddhist compassion differs from Ruist humaneness. Ruist humaneness requires the accompaniment of the virtue of "righteousness", which urges an individual to cultivate enduring character traits necessary to autonomously navigate specific ethical situations.

Thus, while the mindful practice of "having thoughts without engaging any particular thought" may be an initial stage of contemplation that nurtures an attentive and unprejudiced mind, Yang Shi intended a Ruist method of calming the mind that would be drastically different from Buddhism after such a stage. Yang would ask the meditator to focus on two things: the sensation of the universe as a co-evolving whole (*Tianli*) and how to perform each human action correctly, as justified by realizing *Tianli* in specific life situations.

In short, on four major fronts—general approach (focused on quiet-sitting meditation), technique (of calming the mind), metaphysics, and ethics—Yang Shi's Ruist contemplative lifestyle bears a formal and superficial resemblance to Buddhism, but substantial differences prevail.[37]

7. Conclusions

A few brief remarks in response to the researchers mentioned at the onset, along with suggestions for future directions in the study of Ru meditation, will serve as the conclusion.

Contemporary Ru historians and philosophers are correct to group Yang Shi and Cheng Hao together, distinguishing them from Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi's approach to Ru contemplative philosophy, which encompasses at least three distinct subjects: metaphysics, moral psychology, and the methodology of self-cultivation. While Zhu Xi's case is reserved for future studies, my analysis above highlights the reason for these groupings. Cheng Yi advocated the ontological priority of pattern-principle over vital-energy and asserted that no empirical state of the heartmind fully manifests *Tianli*. In contrast, both Cheng Hao and Yang Shi denied this priority and affirmed a fractal relationship between *Tianli* and enlightened empirical states of the heartmind. Accordingly, Cheng Yi's methodology of self-cultivation starts horizontally, reaches vertically midway, and then returns to the horizontal, mundane world. In contrast, Cheng Hao and Yang Shi's method begins vertically and expands horizontally. The denial of the ontological priority of pattern-principle over things makes Cheng Hao and Yang Shi's metaphysics, in comparison to Cheng Yi's, closer to Huayan Buddhism's view of perfect fusion. However, while acknowledging this closeness, Yang Shi was also adamant in demonstrating the fundamental differences between his Ruism and, specifically, Huayan Buddhism.

Affirming that both horizontal and vertical dimensions intertwine in Yang Shi's and Cheng Yi's philosophies, my view differs from the widely followed interpretation of Mou Zongsan, who categorizes Yang Shi as part of a "vertically run" lineage and Cheng Yi as part of a "horizontally extended" system. In my view, by denying the ontological priority of *Tianli* over things, Yang's philosophy is less transcendent than Cheng Yi's.[38] Therefore, there is no solid basis for Mou Zongsan to describe Yang's methodology as "transcendent and experiential corroboration via introspective intuition" or to assert that Cheng Yi relied solely on outwardly-oriented intelligence to know things in a horizontally extended way.

My analysis indicates that Yang Shi's intuitive grasp of *Tianli* during quiet-sitting is clearly shaped by the concept of all-encompassing harmonization taught in the ancient classics and is not devoid of discursive knowledge. My previous research on Cheng Yi also shows that Cheng Yi emphasizes the role of "experiential understanding (體會)", which goes beyond merely outwardly-oriented empirical knowledge, in the investigation of things. (Song 2023, p. 23) Cheng Yi's approach to self-cultivation also includes a crucial transcendent dimension, maintaining reverence toward *Tianli*.

Therefore, while Mou and the following scholars are correct in distinguishing Yang Shi and Cheng Yi within different lineages of Daoxue learning, their characterizations of these two systems of Ru philosophy require more nuance and sophistication.

The fact that Yang Shi based his methodology of self-cultivation on quiet-sitting serves as a significant counterexample to Peng Guoxiang's historical claim that quiet-sitting was not considered "the fundamental self-cultivation" in Ruism. More importantly, Yang's methodology, supported by his moral psychology and metaphysics, aims for broader goals of achieving the centrality of human nature and enhancing morality through an all-encompassing cosmic consciousness—goals with which Peng Guoxiang's analysis would agree. Since Yang regarded quiet-sitting as the most important method of self-cultivation for serving the more fundamental goals of moral life, his practice also provides a refutation of Peng's prescriptive claim that quiet-sitting should not be considered a fundamental Ru self-cultivation.

Nevertheless, as my analysis indicates, Yang Shi's model of self-cultivation contains unresolved intrinsic problems. He did not sufficiently explain why quiet-sitting should be the privileged starting point of self-cultivation within Cheng Hao's framework, and his attempt to reconcile the differences between Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao is largely unsuccessful. This points to an inherent difficulty within Daoxue Ruism in addressing the transcendent commitment to the One *Tianli* while attending to the immanent, rightful Many deeds in the everyday world. Therefore, to further clarify the contemplative nature of the Ru tradition, future research could focus on how these issues were addressed within the Southward Way lineage and, in particular, how they influenced Zhu Xi's philosophy of quiet-sitting.

Additionally, researchers may explore how the Ruist method of "thinking appropriately" could be applied in clinical, therapeutic, or other practical contexts, as distinct from Buddhist mindfulness.[39]

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

1 In line with scholarly reflections on the nomenclature of world traditions, particularly in the field of comparative religious studies and consistent with my other publications, this article will refer to "Confucianism" as "Ruism" or the "Ru tradition". Similarly, "Confucian" or "Confucianist" will be referred to as "Ru" or "Ruist". When used as a noun, the plural of "Ru" or "Ruist" is "Ru" or "Ruists". "Ru (儒)" denotes a civilized human, the traditional term used for self-identification before the 19th-century invention of "Confucianism" by Western missionaries and scholars.

2 All translations of Chinese materials derive from my own, unless otherwise noted.

3 The text also indicates that this event happened at 1081, when Yang was 29 years old, and Cheng Hao was 50.

4 Please refer to (Murray 2021) and (Shi 2012) for literature review on the study of Ruist quiet-sitting.

5 Simplified Chinese is derived from the quoted source. Otherwise, this paper will use Traditional Chinese as the default.

6 These definitions are implied by the prevalent imagery of the "Tree of Contemplative Practices" attributed to The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, with concept and design by Maia Duerr and illustration by Carrie Bergman, available at https://maiaduerr.com/tree-of-contemplative-practices/, accessed on 1 September 2024. For a discussion on the formal definitions of these two terms, see (Komjathy 2017, pp. 311–12).

7 Biographical facts about Yang Shi mentioned in this section derive from (X. Zhang 1677). A more detailed English biography of Yang can be found in (Jameson 1990, pp. 266–77).

8 This refers to Zhang Shixian.

9 Ancient fables recount that a dragon and a turtle, each bearing a distinct map, emerged from the Luo and Yellow rivers. Ancient sages like Fu Xi (伏羲) used these maps to create the basic symbols of the *Zhou Book of Change* (周易). This fable can be found in ancient Ru classics, such as the *Appended Texts* (繫辭) of the *Classic of Change* (易經). Throughout this article, I will only mention the titles of the classics quoted by Yang Shi in his writings, without providing additional citation details.

10 This verse refers to *Analects* 15.6, in which Confucius instructs his student Zi Zhang to continually contemplate the importance of virtues.

[11] Pattern-principle, also known as principle or Pattern (理, li), is an unusually dense concept in the Cheng-Zhu Learning of Pattern-principle. In (Song 2023, p. 6), I define *Li* as what "elucidates the manner in which different cosmic and human phenomena arise and coalesce in a dynamic and coherent manner and thus pervades all phenomena in the universe, including the human realm". The difference in the ontological status of *Li* between Cheng Yi and Yang Shi will be discussed later.

[12] Further philosophical analysis of the tension between quiet-sitting meditation and classics reading in Yang Shi's contemplative lifestyle can be found in Section 5.4.

[13] It is unclear which book is being referred to, as there were multiple Daoist texts titled *Yuandao* (元道) during the Song dynasty.

[14] This refers to the "Great Master (大宗師)" chapter in the *Zhuangzi*.

[15] "The Change" refers both to the *Classic of Change* and the realities of change that the *Classic* reveals. Words attributed to Kongzi by Yang Shi in this dialogue are drawn from various chapters of the *Classic of Change*, particularly its *Appended Texts*.

[16] *Dao De Jing*, Wang Bi version, Chapter 5.

[17] *Analects* 16.10.

[18] My understanding of the connection between mindfulness and early Buddhism has been greatly informed by (Gethin 2011) and (Dreyfus 2011).

[19] *Mengzi* 4B.

[20] "I" refers to the recorder of the conversation.

[21] I've utilized the terms "emotions" and "feelings" interchangeably for translating情, but with subtle differences. "Emotions" leans more towards the circumstantial aspect of 情, while "feelings" cater more to its subjective facet.

[22] (Liu 2015) observes the similarity between Yang Shi and Lü Dalin in their interpretation of "centrality", which aligns with my analysis here.

[23] *Mengzi* 6A.

[24] *Mengzi* 7A.

[25] As mentioned at the beginning, there is a longstanding tradition in contemporary Ru scholarship that examines the differences between Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao. My contribution to this discussion is to compare Yang Shi's contemplative philosophy with that of the Cheng Brothers, particularly focusing on Yang's philosophy of quiet-sitting in relation to the Cheng Brothers'. In addition to the literature mentioned above, my understanding of the differences between the Cheng Brothers is particularly informed by (Pang 1992, pp. 341–414) and (Zhao 2018).

[26] This observation aligns with Huang Baijia's characterization of the differences in the Cheng Brothers' respective temperaments and dispositions in (Huang et al. 1648, vol. 13, p. 4).

[27] Two poems from the *Book of Odes* express the genuine emotions and authentic intentions of people on occasions such as weddings or family feasts.

[28] The following analysis of Yang Shi's reflections on the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Ruism forms part of the central contemplative theme of the article. It primarily focuses on how Yang Shi perceives these similarities and differences and how this perception illuminates his Ruist approach to calming the mind. This paper does not aim to explore how Buddhists might respond to Yang Shi's reflections or whether such reflections are acceptable from a Buddhist perspective. I will leave this question for future research. I thank Anonymous Reviewer 2 for prompting me to clarify this point.

[29] *Dao De Jing*, Wang Bi version, Chapter 40.

[30] For instance, this thought is discernible in both (Wang et al. 1999, p. 108), and Cheng Yi's commentary of the *Classic of Change* (周易程氏傳, Cheng and Cheng 1981, pp. 807–11).

[31] This is likely refer to 華嚴經 *Mahāvaipulya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra.*

[32] *Mengzi* 7A.

[33] *Mengzi* 3B.

[34] *Analects* 6.11.

[35] *Mengzi* 4B.

[36] *Mengzi* 7A.

[37] Charlene Tan is the most prolific writer promoting the Ruist approach to contemplation within the context of educational theory. In (Tan 2019), she suggests translating Zhu Xi's concept of reverence (*jing*) directly as mindfulness. However, in later works that increasingly highlight the differences between Ruist and Buddhist approaches to mindfulness, Tan revised the translation to "respectful attention" (Tan 2020) or "respectful mindfulness" (Tan 2023, pp. 70–71). Based on the above analysis of Cheng Yi and Yang Shi's approach of "thinking appropriately" to calm the mind—distinct from both the Buddhist approach to mindfulness and the vernacular use of "mindfulness" influenced by Buddhism—it is indeed commendable not to translate *jing* as mindfulness. Nevertheless, Tan's constructive work on the application of Ruist contemplative practices in contemporary education primarily draws upon the *Analects* and other classical Ruist sources. Since Daoxue Ruism has its unique approach to contemplative practices based on reinterpretations of these sources, further incorporation of Daoxue texts would undoubtedly enrich Tan's practical and constructive insights.

[38] A more detailed engagement with Mou Zongsan's discourse on the transcendent dimension of Ruism can be found in (Song 2018, pp. 29–32).

[39] Tentative efforts in this regard have already begun, as seen in (Liao 2019).

References

Alvear, David, Joaquim Soler, and Ausiàs Cebolla. 2022. Meditators' Non-academic Definition of Mindfulness. *Mindfulness* 13: 1544–54. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Bishop, Scott R., Mark Lau, Shauna Shapiro, Linda Carlson, Nicole D. Anderson, James Carmody, Zindel V. Segal, Susan Abbey, Michael Speca, Drew Velting, and et al. 2004. Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11: 230–41. [CrossRef]

Chan, Wing-Tsit, trans. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chen, Lai. 1991. Xinxue chuantong zhongde shenmizhuyi wenti 心学传统中的神秘主义问题 [Questions of Mysticism in the Heart-mind lineage]. In *Youwu zhijing: Wangyangming zhexue de jingshen* 有无之境：王阳明哲学的精神 [*Realms of Being and Nonbeing: The Spirit of Wang Yangming's Philosophy*]. Beijing: Ren Min Chu Ban She, pp. 390–415.

Cheng, Hao, and Yi Cheng. 1981. *Ercheng ji* 二程集 [*Collections of the Cheng Brothers*]. Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju.

Dreyfus, Georges. 2011. Is Mindfulness Present-Centered and Non-Judgmental? A Discussion of the Cognitive Dimensions of Mindfulness. *Contemporary Buddhism* 1: 41–54. [CrossRef]

Fa Shun. n.d. *Huayan Wujiao zhiguan* 華嚴五教止觀 [*Calming and Insight in Huayan's Five Teaching*]. CBETA, T45, n1867. Available online: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T1867_001 (accessed on 1 September 2024).

Gethin, Rupert. 2011. On Some Definitions of Mindfulness. *Contemporary Buddhism* 1: 263–79. [CrossRef]

Huang, Zongxi, Baijia Huang, and Zuwang Quan. 1648. *Songyuan xuean* 宋元學案 [*Scholarly Cases in Song and Yuan*]. 何绍基刻本 The Version of He Shao Ji. Available online: https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&res=2097&remap=gb (accessed on 1 September 2024).

Hui Neng. 1963. Platform Sutra. In *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Translated by Chan Wing-Tsit. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 430–40.

Jameson, Melanie A. C. 1990. South-returning Wings: Yang Shih and the New Sung Metaphysics. Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA.

Komjathy, Louis. 2017. *Introducing Contemplative Studies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kongzi (Confucius). 2003. *Confucius Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Edward Slingerland. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, trans. n.d.a 402–412. *Jingang Boruo Boluomijing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 [*The Diamond Sutra*]. CBETA, T08, n0235. Available online: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T0235_001 (accessed on 1 September 2024).

Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什, trans. n.d.b 406. *Weimojie Suoshuojing* 維摩詰所說經 [*Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*]. CBETA, T14, n0475. Available online: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T0475_002 (accessed on 1 September 2024).

Leventhal, Dennis A. 1978. Treading the Path from Yang Shih to Chu His: A Question of Transmission in Sung Neo-Confucianism. *Bulletin of Sung and Yüan Studies* 14: 50–67.

Liao, Junyu. 2019. Jiangou rujia zhengnianxue-yiliujishan sixiang weiwenben 建構儒家正念學—以劉蕺山思想為文本 [The Construction of the Ruist Learning of Mindfulness in Reliance upon Liu Jishan's Texts]. Paper presented at "第十五屆現代生死學理論建構學術研討會" [The Fifteenth Conference for the Construction of a Contemporary Discourse of Life and Death] at 南華大學生死學系 [Nanhua University Department of Life-and-Death Studies], Taiwan, May 17–18.

Liu, Jingju. 2015. Yangshi zhonglun fawei 杨时 "中" 论发微 [On Yangshi's Thought of Centrality]. *Zhongguo zhexueshi* 中国哲学史 [*History of Chinese Philosophy*] 1: 76–82.

Mabuchi, Masaya. 2016. "Quiet Sitting" in Neo-Confucianism. In *Asian Traditions of Mediation*. Edited by Halvor Eifring. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 207–26.

Mou, Zongsan. 1999. *Xinti yu xingti* 心体与性体 [*The Body of Heartmind and the Body of Nature*]. Shanghai: Shang Hai Gu Ji Chu Ban She.

Murray, Judson B. 2021. Confucian Mysticism. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Available online: https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-695 (accessed on 1 September 2024).

Nakajima, Ryuzo 中嶋隆藏. 2011. *Jingzuo: Shijian Yu Lishi* 靜坐：實踐與歷史 [*Quiet-sitting: Practice and History*]. Translated by Chen Weifen. Hsinchu City: Guo Li Qing Hua Da Xue Chu Ban She.

Pang, Wangli. 1992. *Ercheng zhexue tixi* 二程哲学体系 [*The Philosophical Systems of the Cheng Brothers*]. Beijing: Bei Jing Hang Kong Hang Tian Da Xue Chu Ban She.

Peng, Guoxiang. 2021. Rujia chuantong de jingzuo gongfulun 儒家传统的静坐功夫论 [Discourse of Quiet-sitting Self-cultation in Ruism]. *Xueshu yuekan* 学术月刊 [*Academic Monthly*] 5: 39–53.

Rhys Davids, T. W. 1910. *Dialogues of the Buddha*. London: Henry Frowde, vol. 2.

Shi, Zhentao. 2012. Dongya jingzuo yanjiuzhi gaikuang 東亞儒家靜坐研究之概況 [Review of the Study of Quiet-sitting in Eastern Asian Ruism]. In *Dongyade Jingzuo Chuantong* 東亞的靜坐傳統 [*Tradition of Quiet-sitting in East Asia*]. Edited by Yang Rubin, Mabuchi Masaya and Halvor Eifring. Taipei: Guo Li Tai Wan Da Xue Chu Ban Zhong Xin, pp. 27–62.

Song, Bin. 2018. A Study of Comparative Philosophy of Religion on "Creatio Ex Nihilo" and "Sheng Sheng" (Birth Birth, 生生). Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, Boston, MA, USA.

Song, Bin. 2020. Comparative Theology as a Liberal Art. *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 31: 92–113.

Song, Bin. 2023. A Study of Cheng Yi's Quiet-Sitting Meditation and Other Contemplative Practices in the Confucian Context. *Journal of Contemplative Studies* 18: 1–46. [CrossRef]
Tan, Charlene. 2019. Rethinking the Concept of Mindfulness: A Neo-Confucian Approach. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 2: 359–73. [CrossRef]
Tan, Charlene. 2020. Mindfulness and morality: Educational insights from Confucius. *Journal of Moral Education* 50: 356–67. [CrossRef]
Tan, Charlene. 2023. *Mindful Leadership for Schools: Wisdom from Confucius*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
Wang, Bi, Kangbo Han, and Yingda Kong. 1999. *Shisanjing zhushu Zhouyi zhengyi* 十三经注疏 周易正义 [*Commentary of Thirteen Classics: The Correct Meanings of the Zhou Book of Change*]. Beijing: Bei Jing Da Xue Chu Ban She.
Xuan Zang, trans. n.d. 649. *Boruo Boluomiduo Xinjing* 般若波羅蜜多心經 [*Heart Sutra*]. CBETA, T08, n.0251. Available online: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T0251_001 (accessed on 1 September 2024).
Yang, Guoyi. 2019. Liangsong zhiji lixuede jingyuhe yanbian 两宋之际理学的境遇和演变 [Situations and Development of the Pattern-principle Learning between Northern and Southern Song]. *Hebei daxue xuebao* 河北大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) [*Journal of Hebei University (Philosophy and Social Science)*] 4: 1–7.
Yang, Rubin. 2004. Songrude jingzuoshuo 宋儒的靜坐說 [Quiet-sitting Discourse among Song Ruists]. *Taiwan zhexue yanjiu* 台灣哲學研究 [*Taiwan Philosophical Studies*] 4: 39–86.
Yang, Rubin. 2005. Lun "guan xinuaile weifaqian qixiang" 論 "觀喜怒哀樂未發前氣象" [On "Contemplating the Ambience before Emotions Arise"]. 中國文哲研究通訊[*Zhong Guo Wen Zhe Yan Jiu Tong Xun*] 3: 33–74.
Yang, Shi. 1792. *Guishan Ji* 龜山集 [*Collections of Yang Shi*] 欽定四庫全書本 The Version of Qin Ding Si Ku Quan Shu. Available online: https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&res=853 (accessed on 1 September 2024).
Zhang, Xia. 1677. *Song yangwenjing gong guishan xiansheng nianpu* 宋杨文靖公龜山先生年谱 [*Chronicle of Yang Shi*]. Available online: https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&res=101651 (accessed on 1 September 2024).
Zhang, Zai. 1985. *Zhanzai Ji* 張載集 [*Collections of Zhangzai*]. Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju.
Zhao, Zhengtai. 2018. Jinglun shiyuxia erchengzi gongfulunde yitong "敬" 论视域下二程子工夫论的思想异同 [Comparison of the Cheng Brothers' Discourse of Self-cultivation in the Perspective of Reverence]. *Dongyue Luncong* 东岳论丛 11: 69–75.
Zhi Yi. n.d.a *Liumiao Famen* 六妙法門 [*The Six Subtle Dharma Gates*]. CBETA, T46, n1917. Available online: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T46n1917_001 (accessed on 1 September 2024).
Zhi Yi. n.d.b *Xiuxi Zhiguan Zuochan Fayao* 修習止觀坐禪法要 [*The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation for Beginners*]. CBETA, T46, n1915. Available online: https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T1915_001 (accessed on 1 September 2024).
Zhu, Xi. 2002. *Zhuzi Quanshu* 朱子全書 [*Complete Works of Master Zhu Xi*]. Shanghai: Shang Hai Gu Ji Chu Ban She. Hefei: An Hui Jiao Yu Chu Ban She.