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INTRODUCTION: "FOCUSING UPON QUIETUDE (*ZHUJING*)"

The emphasis by the Daoxue (道學, the learning of the Way, also termed as Neo-Confucianism) movement over the quiet-sitting meditation starts from Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–73), who grappled with three designations of "quietude" (*jing* 靜). Zhou maintained that the key for one to learn to be a sage is to achieve "no desires," and thus, one can "remain void when being quiet, and go straightforward when moving" (*Tongshu* 20: 29–30). Here, quietude means keeping oneself, first, psychologically calm, and second, physically still and vital. However, while characterizing the mysterious creativity of the ontological origin of the entire universe, the so-called Ultimate Limit (*taiji* 太極), Zhou said that *Taiji* "moves without movement and becomes quiet without quietude" and "that it moves without movement and becomes quiet without quietude does not mean that *Taiji* lacks movement and quietude" (*Tongshu* 16:26).

This complex characterization can be construed in an ontological way of thinking: since being ontologically prior to the empirical movement or quietude of created things, *Taiji* cannot be said as either moving or becoming quiet in the same sense as things do. Nevertheless, as the origin of all things which move and become quiet, *Taiji* cannot be stripped of the ability to move or become quiet either. Therefore, quietude in its third connotation refers to the all-encompassing creativity of *Taiji* which conditions all things in the world without itself being thus conditioned. Given these three designations of quietude, the central method of self-cultivation was phrased by Zhou as "focusing upon quietude" (*zhujing* 主靜) (*Taijitushuo*:6). Just as the quiet origin of *Taiji* endows everything with a unique nature and has all of them coexist and coevolve in the broadest ontological scale, *Tian* (天, heaven or the universe), a *Ru* practitioner of *zhujing* is expected to experience the psychological calmness and the physically still vitality via the practice of quiet-sitting, while simultaneously connecting themselves to the ontological quietude of the entire universe so as to be able to react to worldly things appropriately.

LUO HONGXIAN 羅洪先 (1504–64)

It was upon the semantic matrix carved out by Zhou Dunyi's writing that later Ru philosophers conceptualized the mesmerizing experience of quiet-sitting practice, often in ways unique to their own contemplative lifestyles. However, to clarify the intellectual context of Luo Hongxian's practice, another lineage of Ru thought needs to be considered. That is Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529)'s teaching of "attaining conscientious knowing" (*zhiliangzhi* 致良知), as well as his followers' varying interpretations of it in late Ming. Wang believes that there is an innate dimension of the human heart-mind (*xin* 心), termed as *liangzhi*, which provides individuals with spontaneous and infallible moral intuitions to varying situations. For Wang, *liangzhi* is coterminous with *Tian*—viz., the entire universe and its ontological origin (*Chuanxilu*:95–6). Whether to attain one's *liangzhi* becomes a decisive approach to self-cultivation for achieving the ideal state of sagehood envisioned by Zhou Dunyi. Against this historical background, there were four phases of Luo Hongxian's practice which unfolded as follows.

First, the Ru learning of Luo in his youth (Zhang 2011: 672–6) was under the influence of followers of Wang Yangming such as Wang Longxi 王龍谿 (1498–1583). It foregrounded the status of *liangzhi* as the ontological origin (*benti* 本體) of the universe, and relied upon the pervasive presence (*jiangzai* 見在) of *liangzhi* in all human transactions. Believing in the complete adequacy (*juzu* 具足) of *liangzhi*, this early lifestyle of Luo's appeared to be exceptionally self-confident and carefree, but it risked overlooking the necessity of hard work (*gongfu* 功夫) for maintaining the *liangzhi*.

Secondly, while turning into his forties and reflecting upon his early lifestyle, Luo said, "In the past, I held onto the status of the ontological origin (of *liangzhi*), and gave a free rein to all my perceptions and opinions. However, regarding the necessity of doing hard work to maintain the pervasive presence (of *liangzhi*), I did not realize I need to return to the silent (*ji* 寂) depth (of the heartmind). Consequently, I was preoccupied with various things, yet with nothing to have accomplished in my life" (*Dawanglongxi*:209). Evidently, Luo had discerned the gap between the ontological origin of the heart-mind and its de facto functions in everyday life. He urged to constantly practice quiet-sitting so as to have the heart-mind return to its void, quiet and all-encompassing depth at first, and then, react to concrete things in the outside world. This two-step method reminds us of Zhou Dunyi's original vision of Ru meditation.

However, what distinguishes Luo's quiet-sitting practice in his middle age is that Luo held onto the ontological way of thinking so consistently that he would not construe the "two steps" as temporarily separated from each other. Luo said, "When the heart-mind is not aroused (by external things), it does not imply any sequence of time. What is silent has no body to be seen . . . Therefore, we can describe the endeavor of concentrating, preserving, and accumulating [our vital-energies (*qi* 氣)] as aiming to remain calm, but we cannot say the calmness is equivalent to the ontological origin of silence. The feelings of delight, anger, sadness and joy arise in time, but we cannot say that these feelings lack the state of centrality prior to the heartmind getting aroused. Why so? This is because the heartmind has originally neither a time nor a body to be fixed in. Only after perceptions arise, can we use them to refer to varying states of the heartmind" (*Dukun bianlu chaoxu*:475). In other words, during the practice of quiet-sitting, one's heart-mind has not yet been aroused by any external things, and one can therefore concentrate, preserve, and accumulate their energies so as to respond to external things appropriately afterward. However, this does not mean that the inactive and active states of the heart-mind can be

treated as temporarily isolated from each other, as if humans always need to meditate prior to any action. Luo believes instead that the psychological calmness and physical vitality one feels during meditation is just a manifestation of the silent ontological origin of the entire universe, with “silence” here understood similarly to the ontological quietude elaborated by Zhou Dunyi. Therefore, just as the ontological origin of *Tian* functions in all states of being in the universe, a meditator shall carry their inner state of calmness and vitality consistently throughout all their transactions in the world. Per Luo’s view, the heart-mind of a Ru meditationer attempts to be in the states of being nonaroused and aroused at the same time, and hence, to be in the ontological state of quietude and the physical state of alternate moving and stillness simultaneously.

Thirdly, an abiding practice of quiet-sitting in conjunction with his uninterrupted Ru learning accumulated enough strength for Luo to reach a spiritual ecstasy in his early fifties. The following words written by Luo after a multiple-month mountain retreat were prevalently thought of by later Ru scholars as evidence that Luo had experienced the ontological root of the cardinal virtue of humaneness (*ren* 仁): “When quietude reaches its utmost extent, I suddenly felt that my heart-mind is void and silent, without anything (remaining as an obstacle). The heartmind penetrates (into the universe) endlessly. It is like vital-energies pervading the empty space, with no limit to stop, no inside or outside to point to, and no movement or stillness to distinguish. Everything in the above, below and within the four directions, as well as everything that has existed from the past to the present, is all blended into one single whole. (The heart-mind) does not dwell anywhere but is present everywhere . . . Some once said, ‘a humane person shares a total body with all things.’ The shared ‘total body’ (*tongti* 同體) implies what is in me is also in things, and the unity of things and me forms the same body” (*Dajiangdaolin*:298).

Fourthly, the previous quote derives from a moment of spiritual enlightenment in a Ruist term. However, what distinguishes Luo from his peers is not only that Luo was aware of the significance of continually practicing the ontological quietude in varying moments of everyday life so as to preserve the effect of such an ecstatic experience. Luo also emphasized the importance of empirical knowledge even after ecstasy. Luo said, “If one merely attains the knowledge (of the total body of humaneness) without furthermore investigating things, one cannot explore realities so as to accomplish tasks . . . (After seeing the all-encompassing total body,) one should make an endless endeavor to comprehend the pattern-principles (*li* 理) of things, and the key of this endeavor is to investigate things. It is not the case that one only needs to preserve what one has perceived in the consummate moment (of ecstasy)” (*Dajiangdaolin*:300). Clearly, in the mature stage of his thought, Luo no longer resorted to the pervasive presence of *liangzhi* as the anchor of everyday life. Luo instead advocated that one should continue to investigate the *li* of things so as to enrich the unifying experience of the shared total body of humaneness. Notably, after a lifelong dedication to Wang Yangming’s teaching of *liangzhi*, Luo tended to return to the philosophy of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and frame his practice of Ru meditation as such in his old age.

WANG SHIHUAI 王時槐 (1522–1605)

As born in the same province as Luo Hongxian, Wang Shihuai’s Ru meditation was definitively influenced by Luo, and emphasized the ontological nature of the practice consistently. Wang says that “one’s learning should not be divided by movement or stillness”; once one silently recognizes the original state of their heart-mind via the

practice of quiet-sitting, they would realize that “the state of being preoccupied with things and affairs all day long shares the same origin as the state of pursuing quiet-sitting on a cushion, and these two states are essentially no different” (*Dazhoushoufu*:345). Wang also distinguished himself from other contemporaneous Ru meditationers in that he constructed an intricate system of metaphysical moral psychology to articulate his contemplative practice. The following words represent the kernel of the system, and their annotated translations are presented accordingly:

The initiation of vitality (*shengji* 生幾) is where the myriad things between heaven and earth derive. It belongs to neither being nor nonbeing, and can be distinguished into neither substance nor function. Before the initiation, there is no state of nonarousal; after the initiation, there is no state of being-aroused . . .

The investigation of things and the attainment of knowledge are the results of purifying one’s consciousness (*chengyi* 誠意). Knowing is the substance of consciousness, and there is no knowing outside the consciousness. Things are the function of consciousness, and there is not even a thing outside the consciousness. The “consciousness” encapsulates all states (of the heart-mind), including the ones of silence, affection, substance, and function. This consciousness does not specifically designate changing ideas and deliberations. Rather, it refers to how the initiation of vitality proceeds (in the heart-mind) yet without acquiring any shape, and it lies between nonbeing and being. The so-called “solitude” means delving into the subtleties of the consciousness, and hence, is not different from the latter. The consciousness originally derives from the constant creativity (*shengsheng* 生生) (of the universe), but because the initiating power of vitality does not always replenish it, the consciousness sometimes cannot create. Therefore, one’s learning ought to start from concentration and regathering (their vitality). The practice of concentration and regathering is what the so-called “vigilant solitude” is all about, and it is really the key of focusing on the Way . . .

There are nothing but vital-energies in the universe. Even if heaven and earth are mixed into a formless whole, and all humans and things are eliminated, the remaining void is still filled with vital-energies . . . If someone says there is some antecedent thing which exists even beyond the shapes of vital-energy, where can then the pattern-principle (*li* 理) settle in? Therefore, (the everyday activities of) spraying, sweeping, reacting, and responding are just what exist beyond shape.

—*Yuheruding*: 371–2

The metaphysical aspect of the quoted Wang Shihuai is fairly traditional to the Daoxue movement: vital-energies are the basic stuff to plenish the entire universe, the generic traits and patterns of which are *li*. The most prominent *li* is “constant creativity, and this supreme *li* endows humans with a unique nature (*xing* 性). The whole purpose of Ru self-cultivation is, therefore, envisioned as manifesting the *xing* in everyday life.

However, there are profound theoretical innovations of Wang’s thought which are informed by his contemplative practice. First, during the moment of “solitude” (*du* 獨), a quiet-sitting Ru meditationer is “concentrating and regathering” their cosmic vitality so as to “focus on the Way.” Wang creatively terms this moment as the “incipient occasion” (*ji* 幾) of concrete human activities, and connects it to the constantly “initiating” power of the cosmic creativity of *Tian*. To understand *ji* in Wang’s term, it is crucial for us to attend to both its temporal and nontemporal characteristics. Temporarily, a moment of *ji* is the initial sign of any emerging event. However, since *ji* refers to those infinitesimal

moments of initiation which endures during the entire process of cosmic creation, the generating power of *ji* pervades all cosmic events, which also means that its sustaining power to a human individual's vitality is ubiquitous and nontemporal.

Understood as such an all-encompassing ontological force, *ji* cannot be depicted by any dualistic categories, such as being and nonbeing (*youwu* 有無), substance and function (*tiyong* 體用), nonarousal and being aroused (*yifaweifa* 已發未發), since any of the realities designated by these distinctions is all under the sway of *ji*. Therefore, the seemingly most mundane activities, such as spraying and sweeping one's garden, can become metaphysically the most sublime and sacred since they are, after all, manifestations of the *ji* of cosmic creativity. Considering quiet-sitting to be a convenient means for Ru practitioners to reconnect themselves to this cosmic power of *ji*, Wang termed his method of self-cultivation in general as "polishing the initiating occasion" (*yanji* 研幾) (*Shouyiwulijunliushixu*:48).

Secondly, traditionally, *yi* (意) in the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學) was interpreted by both Zhu Xi (vol. 6 *Daxuezhangju*:17) and Wang Yangming (vol. 6) as the "arousal of heart-mind" (*xinzhisuo* 心之所發), and hence, the cultivating effort of *chengyi* 誠意 was construed as making one's intentions "authentic"—viz., aligning with pattern-principles of things, whether these pattern-principles are thought of (by Zhu) as exceeding or (by Yangming) as always lying within one's present heart-mind. However, for Wang Shihuai, when the subtle, perpetual, and initiating power of *ji* bears on the human heart-mind, the cosmic power of *ji* is embodied as the purest state of human consciousness which underlies all forms of mental activities, including the *liangzhi* identified by Yangming and all other concrete ideas and deliberations over mental and physical objects. Wang Shihuai terms this pervasive consciousness as *yi*, and thinks that this vital foundation of human consciousness lies between the "nonbeing"—viz., the cosmic void comprising formless vital-energies—and the "being"—viz., the concrete mental activities which deal with worldly things.

In this way, Wang Shihuai completely reverses the relationship of *liangzhi* and *yi* in Wang Yangming's philosophy. Yangming's mature thought (*Daweishishuo*:217) deems the attainment of *liangzhi* (construed as the conscientious knowing) as the precondition of authenticating one's *yi* construed as intentions. However, for Shihuai, the attainment of *liangzhi* is just to bring *yi*'s underlying awareness of the cosmic vitality from implicit to explicit. Using the traditional ontological dyad of substance and function, Shihuai, therefore, depicts that the *liangzhi* is the enduring form of the substance of *yi*, whereas the knowledge of concrete things in the world is just its function.

Wang Shihuai designates the purpose of quiet-sitting as "purifying one's consciousness" in terms of keeping the subtle form of the cosmic vitality of *Tian* manifested and restorative in the human heart-mind. Arguably, Wang is the first Daoxue thinker who has used the term *yi*, in a way similar to the term's modern use such as in *yishi* 意識 (consciousness, awareness), to explicitly designate the underlying consciousness of all human activities.

GAO PANLONG 高攀龙 (1562–1626)

Three traits highlight Gao Panlong's contemplative writings: first, Gao's understanding of the significance of quiet-sitting evolved throughout his life, and he also furnished rich phenomenological descriptions of his meditative experiences in varying genres of literature such as poetry and prose. Secondly, living in the conclusive decades of the Daoxue movement, Gao sought to ritualize Ru meditation in a fixed format of time,

place, and agenda. His “A Syllabus for Living in the Mountains” and “Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal” (Gao 2018: 19–26) are exemplary in this regard. Thirdly, in the advanced stage of his contemplative practice, Gao conceived of the goal of Ru meditation as the achievement of “being normal-and-ordinary” (*pingchang* 平常). Resonating with the Centrality and Commonality (*zhongyong* 中庸), the state of *pingchang* intends to execute the norm—viz., the varying pattern-principles which indicate how diverse factors in given situations dynamically and harmoniously fit together, in the ordinary moments of everyday life. In consideration of the prevalence of the emphasis by global traditions over the mysterious and extraordinary nature of meditative experience, the culmination of Gao’s contemplative philosophy in *pingchang* speaks to the this-worldly oriented spirituality of Ruism exquisitely. Fourthly, regarding the method of achieving *pingchang*, Gao (2018: 34) says that “in everyday life, whenever we don clothes, put on our hats, or see and meet with one another, we do so with order and decorum. Through this practice, our heart-mind gradually trains itself over a long period, and then, just as gradually, it becomes normal-and-ordinary.” In other words, the sustaining practice of “reverence” (*jing* 敬) toward the appropriately ritualized details of everyday life leads to *pingchang*. More importantly, Gao thought that one’s ability of discerning appropriate ritualizations depends upon the final and utmost endeavor of self-cultivation elaborated by the Daoxue—viz., “investigation of things (*gewu* 格物)”—since it is only via *gewu* that the rationales of ritualization—viz., the pattern-principles (*li* 理) of things—can be discerned.

The fourth trait highlights the distinction of Gao Panlong’s contemplative lifestyle from the two Ru meditationers discussed previously. Gao systematically refuted the critiques offered by Wang Yangming and his followers to Zhu Xi, and sought to strengthen the lineage of the Cheng-Zhu learning of pattern-principle. One instance as follows suffices to illuminate such a distinctive role of Gao in the Daoxue movement.

In reliance upon the intuitive capacity of *liangzhi* to grasp pattern-principles of things in the world, Wang Yangming (*Chuanxilu*:2) once employed the dictum “no pattern-principle exists outside the heart-mind” (*xinwaiwuli* 心外无理) to repudiate the intellectualist tendency of Zhu Xi, who (Zhu Xi vol. 14, *Zhuziyulei* 3:298) insisted that the knowledge of pattern-principles of realities ought to be obtained prior to one’s moral actions toward them. However, to refute Wang’s critique and clarify Zhu’s instruction, Gao Panlong (1773 8a:24) says:

Pattern-principles belong to the heart-mind, and it is also up to the heart-mind to scrutinize the pattern-principles. However, if the heart-mind is not dedicated to scrutinizing (a pattern-principle), we cannot say that the heart-mind has possessed the pattern-principle. If a pattern-principle has not been scrutinized, the pattern-principle cannot be deemed as belonging to the heart-mind either . . . Everything has its own norm endowed by *Tian*, and we humans just need to abstain ourselves so as to treat things as they are in our everyday life.

In other words, Gao agrees with Wang in principle that “no pattern-principle exists outside the heart-mind.” However, Gao does not think that the pattern-principles are therefore able to be totally invented by the heart-mind. Instead, only when the heart-mind invests itself in scrutinizing the pattern-principles of existing things in the world, the ontological reference of “heart-mind” can be deemed as equivalent to the one of “pattern-principle.” To highlight this outwardly oriented method of scrutinizing pattern-principles, Gao (1773 8a:3–8) insists that even the pattern-principles of seemingly trivial things such

as a blade of grass or a piece of wood (*yicaoyiwu* 一草一物) ought to be investigated. This is because one would then be aware of how the life-generating power of the universe is concretely manifested in grasses and woods, and the awareness shall connect one to the power so as to nourish their own heart-mind (*yangxin* 养心). This puts Gao's thought in a direct opposition to Wang Yangming since Wang famously tells (*Chuanxilu*:120) that he turned into the inward learning of heart-mind because he once failed so miserably to investigate the pattern-principle of bamboo trees using Zhu Xi's method.

In a word, Gao Panlong exemplifies how a Ru meditationer is able to do meticulous intellectual work and access the sublime experience of spiritual transcendence simultaneously.

GU XIANCHENG 顾宪成 (1550–1612)

There are two major functions of Ru meditation conceptualized in the metaphysical-ethical framework of Ruism. On the one hand, the practice of quiet-sitting leads to one's awareness toward the transcendent traits of the constantly creating universe, *Tian*. On the other hand, quiet-sitting concentrates a Ru's vitality into the details of everyday life so that they can react appropriately to immanent worldly things. The first function was traditionally termed as "awakening" (*wu* 悟), whereas the second as "cultivating" (*xiu* 修). Zhu Xi's seemingly externalist approach to self-cultivation can be construed as a process from cultivating to awakening, since he (*Daxuezhangju*:20) interprets the *Daxue* as enjoining that the investigation of the pattern-principles of things in the world leads to one's awakening to the interconnectedness of all pattern-principles of *Tian*. Wang Yangming's internalist approach can be seen as a process from awakening to cultivating, since he (*Daxuewen*:967–73) advocates that *liangzhi* is innately aware of all pattern-principles of *Tian*. Once obtained, *liangzhi* motivates one to rectify worldly things.

As a co-leader of the Donglin Academy 东林书院, Gu Xiancheng was influenced by Gao Panlong's delicate contemplative writings, while Gu also sought to synthesize the disparate approaches of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming to self-cultivation. In particular, the relationship of "awakening" and "cultivating" was articulated by Gu in light of Zhu and Wang's disagreement.

In general, Gu Xiancheng (1877, *Renwenshangyu*:5) believes that without awakening (to the transcendent reality of *Tian*), the cultivating (of one's everyday behaviors) would be constrained by the nonultimate human concerns with mundane incidents, whereas without cultivating, awakening would be too ethereal to be grounded in the realities of the everyday world. Therefore, awakening and cultivating are as indispensable to each other as the two sides of the same cloth (*xiangbiaoli* 相表裏).

However, the spiritual states of awakening and cultivating transpire in time. Depending upon the stage one's self-cultivation reaches, the intricate relationship of the two states unfolds in varying ways. First, Gu (1877, *Xiaoxinzhazhaji* 11:2) believes that, before one gets awakened, one shall work hard at cultivating themselves so as to achieve the awakening. In this prior-to-awakening stage, one's cultivating efforts have to be sustained solely by their willpower, and thus, interruption and regression of the efforts are anticipated. Secondly, the moment of being awakened comes up suddenly, and no forced cultivating endeavor can determine exactly whether and when this moment shall arrive (1877, *Yushanshangyu* 1:8). Thirdly, after being awakened, the sublime experience of unity with *Tian* would motivate one to cultivate themselves constantly so as to manifest *Tian*'s creativity in the human world. This cosmic power of motivation furnished by *Tian*

shall render one's self-cultivating lifestyle freer and more easy-going, since one does not need to solely rely upon their willpower to sustain the lifestyle anymore (1877, *Xiaoxinzhazhaji* 11:2). Even so, cultivating is still crucial to one's postawakening life, because the state of being awakened may merely pertain to a mental perception of the transcendent truth. In order to extend the perception into one's whole personhood, one has to cultivate themselves endlessly (1773, *Shangxingjingsheji*:7-9). In a word, from outside, no matter whether one has been awakened or not, they would always appear to be preoccupied with cultivating themselves in various ways. But the moment of being awakened indeed furnishes a spiritual depth to their cultivating behaviors.

The disagreement on the method of self-cultivation between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming is reconsidered by Gu (1773, *Rixinshuyuanji*:9-11) accordingly. Gu identifies Zhu's approach as one from cultivating to awakening, with the effort of cultivating being prioritized, whereas Wang's as one from awakening to cultivating, with the state of awakening being prioritized. Ultimately, Zhu and Wang just focused upon different aspects of the relationship of awakening and cultivating. Gu also thinks that Ru scholars can benefit from these different emphases because each Ru is then able to take on an approach which fits for their unique situation. However, the downside of Zhu's approach is that, given its emphasis of cultivating over awakening, one's learning shaped by Zhu's can be too "constrained" (*ju* 拘) by rules and conventions. Comparatively, the downside of Wang's is that it may make one's learning "unhinged" (*dang* 蕩). In the time of the late Ming, Gu (1877, *Xiaoxinzhazhaji* 3:4-5) discerned that the flaw of Wang's was rampant among his followers and more influential, and hence, Gu would rather his fellow Ru follow Zhu's approach and stay to be constrained than following Wang's and remaining unhinged.

CHEN QUE 陈确 (1604-77)

During the transitional time of the Ming (1368-1644) to the Qing Dynasty (1630-1912), the grand metaphysical-ethical vision of the Daoxue movement underwent severe critiques by Ru literati. The necessity of quiet-sitting was also taken with a grain of salt. Chen Que exemplified this new trend of thought.

As indicated above, the practice of quiet-sitting in the Daoxue movement was conceptualized in a metaphysical framework of what we may term as "cosmontology." It means that Daoxue meditators uniformly considered that the universe, as an ever-changing and creating cosmic field, is the sole and only real world where human beings reside. However, they also advocated that there are "ontological layers" within this universe which demarcate different levels of pattern-principle, or varying configurations of contextualized harmony, from the utmost origin of creativity, *Taiji*, all the way down to the most minute details of human consciousness and worldly affairs. It is up to the existence of this multilayered cosmological worldview that functions of quiet-sitting, such as "awakening" and "cultivation," get articulated.

However, there are risks of such a metaphysical framework, the belief in which may generate undesirable consequences to one's everyday life. First, perfectionism. Daoxue meditators mostly conceptualized the goal of quiet-sitting as returning to the innately good human nature (*fuxing* 復性), which shares one original body (*benti* 本體) with all the harmonizing pattern-principles of *Tian* (*tianli* 天理) in the cosmic realm. If these meditators furthermore demand that all aspects of human life ought to completely comply with such a perfect dimension of human nature, it is hard to imagine how they would not

commit the fallacy of perfectionism. In particular, the pervasive existence of evil and imperfections in the human world would be difficult to square with. Secondly, quietism. The laser focus on the higher ontological layer of cosmic reality via the practice of quiet-sitting may nurture a tendency among meditators to remain detached from everyday realities, and not to even attempt to resist or rectify the imperfect or unrighteous ones. This quietist potential of quiet-sitting is particularly damaging to the ethical integrity of Ru meditators, since the charge of quietism by Daoxue thinkers against Buddhism and Daoism accompanied the entire history of the Daoxue movement.

Chen Que reflected on these potential defects of the Daoxue version of Ruism, and consequently, he came up with an interpretation of Ru classics which completely abandoned the cosmological metaphysics. In other words, if the Daoxue cosmology can be likened to the shape of an American football with rich ontological layers of cosmic realities in the middle, Chen depleted it to an almost flat plane. For Chen, there are no deeper or higher ontological cosmic realities beyond this *de facto* changing world. Accordingly, his views of anthropology are also vastly different from Daoxue thinkers.

First, Chen (*Xingjie*: 447–8) thinks there is no perfect human nature rooted in the ontological traits of *Tian* to which an individual ought to seek to return. Instead, following Mengzi (372–289 BCE)'s thought on the “incipient moral sprout” (*shanduan* 善端), Chen maintains that the goodness of human nature is manifested exclusively in the endless process of self-perfection. If an individual could not perfect themselves toward goodness and, instead, formed bad habits (*xi*), this would be how evil in the human world derives (*Qibingqingzhushuo*:455). Therefore, everything that bears ethical consequences is up to human efforts. There is no pristine state of human nature that an individual can dwell in (*zhi* 止).

Secondly, Daoxue thinkers conceived of the ontological bond of human nature with *Tian* as the original body of human beings. As enunciated above by Luo Hongxian, this original body of human beings relates to everyday life nontemporarily. However, Chen (*Yuliuboshengshu*:466–7) insists that if there is any original body of human beings, it is just the body with which humans are born. The self-cultivation of a Ru ought not to aim to recover the timeless original body of human nature via contemplative practices such as quiet-sitting, but to perfect their born embodied self endlessly through the entire process of their life.

Finally, in light of his refutation of the ideas of the perfect human nature and the ontological origin of human existence, Chen utterly denies the significance of quiet-sitting. For Chen (*Chanzhang*:445), the dictum of “half-day quiet-sitting, half-day reading” (半日靜坐, 半日讀書) of Zhu Xi, which was later taken by Daoxue thinkers as a general instruction of the method of Ru self-cultivation, is contaminated with Buddhist and Daoist quietism. Instead, the genuine endeavor of a Ru should be invested into the “learning at a plain status” (*suweizhixue* 素位之學) (*Guyan*:429). In other words, one remains content toward whatever status of life (such as being rich or poor, easy or difficult, happy or sad) is present to them, and then, perfects themselves toward a better version of their selfhood in an endless way. Using Chen's own words, one dedicated to learning at a plain status will “never loosen their endeavor of perfecting themselves and remaining content. While enjoying their leisure time, they would read and discuss books, whereas when they feel exhausted by it, they would walk and hum along so as to replace the practice of quiet-sitting” (*Xuezjie*:462).

From historical hindsight, the aforementioned risks of the Daoxue worldview are real, but not inevitable. As particularly indicated by Gu Xiancheng's thought on the relationship

between awakening and cultivating, the extraordinary religious experience of being awakened to the transcendent truth of *Tian* enhances a Ru meditator's dedication to perfecting themselves endlessly amid their everyday life. Therefore, Chen's perfectionist and quietist charge against the Daoxue movement as a whole is not entirely grounded. However, while affirming a depleted metaphysical vision of the world and accordingly denying the possibility and significance of ecstatic religious experience, Chen's commitment to the processual and realistic aspect of Ru self-cultivation speaks to, tellingly, the transition between the Song through Ming Daoxue movement into new forms of Ruism in the Qing Dynasty.

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