



好雨知時節，當春乃發生。隨風潛入夜，潤物細無聲。野徑雲俱黑，江船火獨明。曉看紅濕處，花重錦官城。

己丑秋月重寫杜甫詩意

**Ru Literature:**

**Enjoying the Rain on a Spring Night**

**Translated and Annotated by Bin Song**

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## Book Description:

*Ru Literature: Enjoying the Rain on a Spring Night* is an annotated translation of selected literature from the Ru (Confucian) tradition, including poems, lyrics, letters, treatises, conversations and governmental edicts. For English-speaking Ru beginners, it is intended to furnish an introduction to the basics of the Ru tradition. For friends who know more about Ruism, it is hoped it will help to advance their learning through readings of philosophical depth and aesthetic palatability.

## Dedication

To Br. Lawrence A. Whitney, LC+

He has helped me to know the true meaning of many English words, such as friendship.

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## Preface

In this book, “Confucius” will be known as Kongzi, his venerated pinyin name. The terms “Ru” and “Ruist” will be used in place of “Confucian.” Likewise, “Ruism” will be used in place of “Confucianism.” Lastly, the term “Neo-Confucianism,” which is normally used to describe new developments within Ruism during the Song and Ming Dynasties (960-1644 C.E), will be replaced with “Song and Ming Ruism.”

As a comprehensive way of living, the Ru tradition is not only philosophical, but it also has a distinctive literary dimension. Throughout its history, Ru thinkers were passionate to express their philosophical ideas using a variety of literary genres: poems, lyrics, essays, biographies, dramas, novels, etc. However, because of the lamentable division of disciplines in the current world of academia, philosophy and literature are rarely studied and appreciated together. This divests English-speaking Ru learners of the opportunity to be introduced to the depth of Ru philosophy through the joy of reading Ru literature; hence, the rationale for this book.

Some of the pieces included in this book have alternative English translations, while others are new. Regardless, I have selected pieces for translation and annotation with a special Ru taste, and therefore, even for those whose translations are already available, I

believe mine can bring fresh perspectives.

The themes of these selections, as representatives of *Ru* literature, are inclusive: politics, ethics, education, nature, environment, hermit life, meditation, metaphysics, the school institution of Ru academies, etc. I chose the title for this book from Du Fu's poem "Enjoying the Rain on a Spring Night" because it so nicely captures the meaning of the Chinese character Ru 儒, also the name of the Ru tradition, which is not yet familiar to most English readers.

As with most of my English translations of Ru literature, the formation of this book relies upon friendship. The usual procedure for the birth of each translation is that I furnish the initial draft with my annotations, and then send it to friends who are also native English speakers. After I gather enough feedback from them, I will eventually decide which translations are the most fit using the following major criteria: philosophical accuracy, readability, and aesthetic beauty. I would like to express my genuine gratitude to all the contributions which were so generously and kindly provided by these friends: Lawrence A. Whitney, LC+, David Schiller, Benjamin Butina, Don Buchwalter, Paul Blair, Andrew Linscott, Nikola Stanojevic, and Rhoda Serafim. Their presence in my life brings a blissful comfort during this time when the Ru tradition in the English-speaking world is growing.

I must also offer my thanks to all those who reviewed the manuscript of this book. Their kind words and critical insights have been of great value both to this book, and to my own Ru way of life.

Bin Song 宋斌, 2018.

Along Charles River



Chapter One: Kongzi (551-479 B.C.E)

大同

大道之行也，天下為公。選賢與能，講信修睦。故人不獨親其親，不獨子其子，使老有所終，壯有所用，幼有所長，鰥寡孤獨廢疾者皆有所養。男有分，女有歸。貨惡其棄於地也，不必藏於己；力惡其不出於身也，不必為己。是故謀閉而不興，盜竊亂賊而不作，故外戶而不閉，是謂大同。

**A Society of Great Harmony**

**When the Great Way is followed intentionally, all under heaven is distributed appropriately.**

**People with virtues and merits are selected for public office, trust is cherished, and courtesy is cultivated. The people do not only love their own parents and children, they properly love other people's parents and children as well. The elderly are attended until death; adults are employed; children are raised. Concerning widowers, widows, orphans, the aged with no children, the disabled, and the ailing:**

**they are all nourished. Males and females are bonded in marriage; their talents and jobs are matched.**

**It is detestable for possessions and resources to be thrown away upon the ground.**

**However, when gathering them, people would not store them solely for selfish use. It is detestable that people refrain from using their strength to fulfill their duties.**

**However, when people do use their strength, it is not solely for personal gain.**

**Therefore, intrigues and deceptions can gain no foothold to arise. There are neither robbers nor thieves; neither is there any mob nor rebellious bandits. The doors of households appear to be closed, but they are never locked.**

**This is a society of great harmony.**

Commentary:

“A society of great harmony” is the highest social ideal of Kongzi (Confucius). The passage is in the chapter of “Li Yun” (禮運, the Unfolding of Ritual-Propriety) from the

*Classic of Rites* (禮記).

## Chapter Two: Zhu Geliang (181-223 C.E)

### 誠子書

夫君子之行，靜以修身，儉以養德。非淡泊無以明誌，非寧靜無以致遠。夫學須靜也，才須學也，非學無以廣才，非誌無以成學。慆慢則不能勵精，險躁則不能冶性。年與時馳，意與日去，遂成枯落，多不接世，悲守窮廬，將復何及！

### **An Exhortation Letter to My Children.**

**Be calm.**

**Then you can cultivate yourself.**

**Be frugal.**

**Then you can nourish your virtues.**

**This is the way to become a Ruist noble-person (君子, *Junzi*).**

**Not living a pure and simple life**

**—you cannot make certain your will.**

**Not having a quiet and peaceful heart**

**—you cannot reach afar.**

**Being learned**

**—this requires one to be quiet.**

**Being talented**

**—this requires one to learn.**

**Without learning**

**—your talent cannot be broadened.**

**Without a firm will**

**—your learning cannot be accomplished.**

**Being lazy and lax**

**—you will not strengthen your spirit.**

**Being narrow-minded and impetuous**

**—you will not build your character.**

**When your age increases with time,**

**Your mind will fade along with your days.**

**Your body will wither like a houseplant.**

**Most likely,**

**you will be unable to handle your own affairs in the world.**

**You will just stay in a drab room beset with foul moods.**

**What else can you do then?**

Commentary:

Zhu Gelian (諸葛亮, 181-234 C.E ) was the prime minister of the state of Shu (蜀) in the Three-State period (220-280 C.E) of China. Because of his great accomplishments in politics, military skills, technologies, social management, philosophy and literature, Zhu was commemorated heartedly by later generations of Ru.

This “Exhortation Letter to My Children” was composed at Zhu’s old age. Through plain but profound words, Zhu emphasized the importance of living a simple life for one’s self-cultivation in order to become a learned and talented Ru. Also, he admonishes his

children to start this process as early as they can in case the inevitability of aging would not allow them to do so.

Through this letter, we find that the Ruist emphasis upon the “simpleness” of one’s life is all about “focusing,”: focusing upon the right thing, learn and do it persistently, and then, you will be good at it. In Song and Ming Ruism, this Ruist method of self-cultivation urging one to be continually focusing and mindful towards what is right and worthy is nicely captured by one character “敬” – “reverence.”

### Chapter Three: Li Bai (701-762 C.E)

#### Introduction:

In the *Analects* 6:13, Kongzi taught his student, Zi Xia, to learn to be a “gentleman scholar” or, more accurately, a noble Ru (君子儒), rather than a petty Ru (小人儒). That a Ru could be either a petty person or a noble person is due to the ambiguity of the Chinese word Li, 禮. 禮, usually translated as “ritual” or “rite”, refers to all “civilized symbols,” or “civilizational codes” in Ruism.

A symbol can be used just for the sake of the symbol. For example, pedants can read books just for the sake of reading, without any further concern about how their bookish knowledge might be put into practice to genuinely benefit human society. But symbols can also be used for more authentic purposes: as a uniquely human, that is humane (仁, ren), language of human behaviors, symbols can be employed to bring renewing forms of dynamic harmony to one’s environing social and cosmic realities. A Ru who learns Li for this latter purpose is a truly “noble” person. For those unfortunate Ru who learns Li otherwise, Kongzi has a title for them: a “petty Ru.”

Kongzi’s criticism to petty Ru was resonated by Li Bai’s humorous poem “Mocking Ru from the Place of Lu.” Before reading my translation and notes, I hope my readers could keep in mind that this mockery comes from a poet whose thought was influenced by Ruism. Therefore, it is different from the type of Daoist criticism which was made by Laozi in his *Dao De Jing* towards Ruism. For Laozi, Li, meaning civilized symbols, are

intrinsically problematic. However, for a “noble Ru,” humans ought to correctly learn Li in order to make their good use.

### 嘲魯儒

魯叟談五經，白發死章句。問以經濟策，茫如墜煙霧。足著遠遊履，首戴方山巾。  
緩步從直道，未行先起塵。秦家丞相府，不重褒衣人。君非叔孫通，與我本殊倫。  
時事且未達，歸耕汶水濱。

### Mocking Ru from the Place of Lu

**When the old men of Lu (i) spoke of the Five Classics (ii),  
they exhausted every detail of its passages and verses until  
all their hair turned gray.**

**Yet, when you asked them about how to govern and benefit society,  
they remained ignorant as if falling into smoke and mist.**

**Wearing shoes for long travel,  
they carried a hat like a square hill.**



Always choosing the straight road,  
and walking with slow steps,  
yet, even before they moved their feet,  
dust and dirt had already been stirred up.

The bureau of Qin's primary minister  
would not employ people wearing long and loose robes (iii).

You gentlemen are not like Shu Suntong (iv), so  
I am indeed different from you.

Since you cannot understand current affairs in the world,  
why not come back to the bank of the River Wen (v)  
and plow your field?

Notes:

(i) Lu (魯) was once a state in the Spring and Autumn Period of Zhou Dynasty (770-476 B.C.E) where Kongzi was born. Throughout Chinese history, the place of Lu was a spiritual and cultural center for the Ru tradition.

(ii) The five classics are one set of Ru canon including the *Classic of Odes*, the *Classic of Documents*, the *Classic of Rites*, the *Classic of Change* and the *Annual of Spring and Autumn*.

(iii) Li Si (李斯, 284-208 B.C.E) was the primary minister of Qin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.E). As an authoritarian legalist, Li Si supported the emperor of Qin to burn books and bury alive scholars in order to enhance the emperor's authority. "People wearing long and loose robes" refer to Ru literati. Although the historical details of the so-called "burning books and burying alive Ru" (焚書坑儒) event were complicated, people can still, through the event's title, feel how dark and cruel this historical moment meant to Ruism.

(iv) Shu Suntong (叔孫通), as a renowned Ru scholar, was employed by the first emperor, Gao Zu, of Early Han Dynasty (202 B.C.E - 8 C.E) to re-design rites and norms in the imperial court for sustaining the political order of the newly established dynasty. In order to fulfill his mission, Shu Suntong searched for help from knowledgeable Ru in the place of Lu. However, there were Ru from Lu who were reluctant to work with Shu, and they said to Shu Suntong: "Now the kingdom has just ended its war. Dead people have not yet been buried. Wounded people have not yet stood up. Yet, you intend to start

performing rites and musics. This is not compliant with the ancient rules, so I would not like to follow you. I beg you to leave soon, and please don't contaminate my fame." Shu Suntong mocked at them accordingly: "You are really narrow-minded Ru, and don't really know how to adjust yourselves to the changes of the time." Bringing willing Ru from Lu back to the capital of Han, Shu Suntong succeeded to re-design rites and norms for the court, and made therefore a great contribution to stabilizing early Han's regime. [The story was told by Si Maqian (司馬遷, 145-90 B.C.E) in his "Records of the Grand Historian" 史記.] In this and the following verses, Li Bai likened himself to Shu Suntong and mocked the narrow-minded Ru which he met from the place of Lu in his time.

(v) The River Wen is in the place of Lu.

#### Commentary:

Li Bai (李白, 701-762 C.E) was a great Chinese poet in Tang Dynasty (618-907 C.E). Different from another great contemporaneous poet Du Fu (杜甫, 712-770 C.E) whose thought is mainly influenced by Ruism, Li Bai's mind is more complicated. On the one hand, he was greatly influenced by Daoism and thus, longed for a life of spiritual freedom belittling people's political engagement. However, at times, he also aspired for working for the dynasty and then, using his knowledge and skills to "govern and benefit" his country. In this poem, "Mocking at Ru from the Place of Lu," Li Bai likened himself to another great Ru scholar in Han Dynasty in order to show that he tried to be a genuine

Ru. In this way, his mockery of pedantic Ruist scholars from Lu resonates with Kongzi's instruction to his student Zi Xia: you must learn to be a noble Ru, rather than a petty Ru.

I

春夜喜雨

好雨知時節， 當春乃發生。

隨風潛入夜， 潤物細無聲。

野徑雲俱黑， 江船火獨明。

曉看紅濕處， 花重錦官城。

**Enjoying the Rain on a Spring Night**

**A good rain (i) knows the right season.**

**Just in time, it arrives in spring.**

**When the wind is past, it falls unnoticed through the night,**

**Moistening things (ii) , delicately and without a sound.**

**Along wilderness pathways, the clouds are completely black.**

**A boat on the river, the light from its fires alone shines brightly. (iii)**

**At daybreak, look for the crimsons, the moist places -**

**The flowers will be heavy and luxuriant in the Official Brocade City! (iv)**

Notes:

(i) The “good rain” portrayed in this poem is a lovely metaphor for the ideal of Ruist moral self-cultivation: a Ru (儒), or a Ruist noble-person (君子, Junzi). One of the Ruist four books, Zhong Yong [中庸, Being Centered in the Everyday World ((I ascribe the credit of this translation of Zhong Yong’s title to David Schiller))], says that a Junzi who practices the virtue of Being Centered in the Everyday World can attain to what is “appropriate” or “pertinent” in a timely manner (時中, shizhong). It means that a Junzi, relying on his or her study and practice of human civilization, can become capable of realizing dynamic harmony in society according to evolving life situations. In the poem, “a good rain” is characterized by the poet as if it “knows” the season when it is most needed, and it arrives to moisten things and brings life into being in a generous and timely way. A Junzi’s moral response to evolving life situations should be to try to achieve, based upon an extensive process of diligent learning and moral self-cultivation, a “timely centeredness,” just like a “the good rain” in the poem.

(ii) “Being soft” and “moistening” are two meanings for the Chinese character Ru (儒), as I explained somewhere else, and they speak to the reason why Ruist followers after Kongzi selected this character as the name for the entire tradition. In this sense, we can take these two verses as an exquisite poetic expression of the Ruist ideal of being a Ru.

(iii) Clouds in the wilderness are dark, and only the light from the fires on the riverboat shine brightly. This shows that the poet continues to listen to, feel and enjoy the rain throughout the night. The rain moistens things and enlivens lives in a generous and

benevolent way in just the way that a Junzi shines brightly when he or she realizes dynamic harmony in the world.

(iv) “Official Brocade City” is another name for the city of Cheng Du (成都) because of its well-known economic output of beautiful brocade. The last two verses describe the poet’s anticipation of the red and moist landscape of Cheng Du after the rain has ended the next morning. As a result of “the good spring rain,” the flowers become heavy with wetness and luxuriant with blossoms (this implies there is a double meaning in the Chinese character 重 which means both heavy and prolific). Thus, after the “timely” rain, Cheng Du becomes an even more beautiful, flower-filled city. The poem is thus a magnificent image of “dynamic harmony,” brought about in human civilization in a lovely city, and in the natural world by a timely, seasonal, and “knowing good rain,” just as a knowing Junzi is able to realize dynamic harmony in the world. Aren’t these images worth enjoying?

Commentary:

This poem was composed in 761 CE when Du Fu, after a long period of wandering in central and western China, had finally settled down in the city of Cheng Du. A timely rain, of course, was particularly important for the agricultural economy in ancient China. Hence, although there is no mention of the word “enjoy” 喜 in the poem, we can feel the genuine joy at the arrival of the “good rain” from the poet’s heart, for we know from his other poems that as a committed Ruist, he always cared for the well-being of his fellow human beings no matter whether his personal life was difficult or easy.

## II

### 絕句

兩個黃鸝鳴翠柳，一行白鷺上青天。

窗含西嶺千秋雪，門泊東吳萬里船。

### Quatrain

**Two yellow orioles sing among shining green willows. (i)**

**A chain of white egrets mount azure skies. (ii)**

**My window embraces the western mountains (iii)**

**with their thousand years of snow. (iv)**

**Beyond my gate a boat lies moored,**

**waiting for ten thousand *li* to East Wu. (v)**

Notes:

(i) In early spring, the green color of the willows looks bright. This is why Du Fu uses the Chinese character 翠 (the bright, shining green of the kingfisher's feathers), rather than 綠 (chlorine or emerald green).



(ii) The exquisite vision presented in these first two verses is really beyond description. First, the verses are extremely well-organized and rhythmic: “two,” “yellow orioles,” “sing,” “shining green willows” correlate respectively to “a chain” “white egrets,” “mounts,” and “azure skies.” Second, the correlating characters speak to a variety of landscaping factors: numbers, shapes, colors, sounds, dynamics (still or moving), space (near and far, earth and sky), etc. Third, the picturesque landscape looks simple, energetic, harmonious and full of a “will for life” (生意). This is an extraordinary aesthetic feeling describing the entire cosmos in the season of early spring which comes from the depths of a Ru’s heart. Because of the simplicity and profundity of an extremely palatable way of human life that the aesthetics of the poem tries to convey, I deliberately use the least complex English words for its translation.

(iii) “Western mountains” refers to the high mountains far to the west of the city of Cheng Du.

(iv) In early spring, new life emerges; the snow melts near the poet’s cottage. But the snow remains in the high mountains where it has never melted for thousands of years. This speaks to the ever renewing and creating cosmic energy described in the first two verses which is never exhausted! There is an eternal dimension of the constant creativity of *Tian* (the Ruist conception of the cosmos), and that the window of the poet’s cottage is portrayed as being able to “embrace” (the literal meaning of 含 is “to keep in the mouth”) this dimension speaks to how broad-minded and deep-spirited the poet is.

(v) This last verse is the most important. It demonstrates that, as a committed Ru, Du Fu longs to resume a Ruist political engagement and social contribution. There are several

layers of meaning in this verse. First, during the An Shi rebellion (755-763 CE, some details of which are described in the commentary below), it had been impossible to take a boat along the Yangzi river, traveling from Cheng Du in the geographically higher southwestern China to the lower area of East Wu in southeastern China, since this was a war zone. Now, since the war has just ended, the fact that people could now travel afar made the poet joyful. Second, East Wu was once one of the states in the Three-State period of China (220-280 CE), and its leader was Sun Quan (孙权, 185-252 CE). Sun Quan has been seen by later historians as an able and enlightened political leader who, joining his state with Liu Bei's State of Shu, succeeded in defeating the invasion of Cao Cao's (155-220 CE) State of Wei into southern China. In Du Fu's time, after the rebellion ended, Du Fu imagined that he could travel thousands of *li* (*li* is a unit of length in ancient China, which is about half a kilometer) to the area of East Wu. This is saying that Du Fu hoped that the political leaders of his time would, like Sun Quan, cultivate themselves and revive the Tang dynasty. Meanwhile, the poet also wished that he himself would be able to contribute his knowledge and skills to such a revival. Matching the temporal image of the third verse, the spatial image of the final one broadens further the poem's vision, and speaks to the poet's deeply held Ruist sentiment that makes him always long to contribute to the well-being of his fellow human beings through substantial social and political engagement.

Commentary:

For the Tang Dynasty, the An Shi rebellion launched by local warlords to challenge the emperor's central authority became an historical turning-point which marked off the dynasty's transformation from prosperity to decline. The rebellion caused great social and political chaos, and was finally quelled by the government in 763. In the spring of this year, Du Fu was living in his cottage in Cheng Du, to which he had moved several years earlier in order to avoid the war zones in central China. Overjoyed by the central government's success, Du Fu wrote this beautiful landscape four line (quatrain) poem. In my view, this is a perfect poem for Ru contemplation even today.

According to the definitive metaphysical texts of Ruism such as those of Kongzi' (551-479 BCE) *Appended Texts of the Classic of Change*, and Zhou Dunyi's (1017-1073 CE) *Diagram of Ultimate Polarity*, a Ru feels the entire universe to be a constantly creative process, a spontaneous emergence of renewable cosmic events. Given this, Ru try their best to manifest this sublime cosmic creativity within the human world in a uniquely human, that is, in an humane (仁, *ren*) way, in order to build a dynamically harmonious society in which every human being can enjoy the achievements of human civilization and thereby live a fulfilled human life. Under this metaphysical view, we can more appropriately understand the implied Ruist meaning of Du Fu's poem: in early Spring when the cosmic vital-energy of *Tian* is at its most dynamic and promising, a Ru is portrayed as enjoying a humble life in his cottage, understanding and planning his career over a temporal range of "thousands of years" and in a spatial span of "tens of thousands

of *li*.” In a Ruist terms, we can say the poem is a magnificent expression of the spirituality of a Ru noble-person (君子, *Junzi*).

Chapter Five: Liu Yuxi (772-842 C.E)

陋室銘

山不在高，有仙則名。水不在深，有龍則靈。斯是陋室，惟吾德馨。苔痕上階綠，草色入簾青。談笑有鴻儒，往來無白丁。可以調素琴，閱金經。無絲竹之亂耳，無案牘之勞形。南陽諸葛廬，西蜀子雲亭。孔子雲：何陋之有？

**Inscription on My Humble Dwelling.**

**A mountain need not be high,**

**But an immortal (仙, xian) living there will make it well-known.**

**A lake need not be deep,**

**But a dragon dwelling there will make it lively and alluring.**

**My home is indeed humble, but the sweetness of my virtue (德, de) perfumes it.**

**Traces of fresh moss inch along, coloring my doorsteps.**

**Light shimmers in off the grass, leaving the curtains vibrant green.**

**Distinguished Ru are coming to talk and laugh with me.**

**Among my guests, there are no unlearned commoners.**

**I can enjoy playing my simple zither (琴, qin), and reading the classics.**

**No noisy instruments assault my ears; no official documents weary my body.**

**Zhu Ge had a cottage (like mine) in Nan Yang, and Zi Yun had a pavilion in Xi Shu.**

**As Kongzi once said: “As long as a noble person (君子, junzi) abides there, how  
could a place be humble?”**

Commentary:

Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡, 772-842 C.E) was a distinguished Ru living in the Tang Dynasty. Of all his literary, social and political achievements, he is especially commemorated by the Ru tradition as an important figure of the “ancient prose movement” led by Han Yu (韩愈, 768-824 C.E).

In his efforts to promote reform, Liu vehemently denounced the Tang Dynasty government during his political career. As a result, he was demoted to remote areas on several occasions. His “*Inscription on My Humble Dwelling*” was written during one of these demotions.

Unlike a Daoist recluse (the ‘Immortal’ mentioned at the beginning of the poem is an ideal Daoist practitioner), Liu Yuxi shows great confidence in his own moral standing, and thus relies upon a typically Ruist way of life to endure his time of political inactivity. As shown in the *Inscription*, in a humble situation, a Ru will try to build dynamic harmony with his or her environment. Meanwhile, through persisting in moral self-

cultivation, a Ru will patiently and joyfully wait for an opportunity to exert a positive moral influence upon larger and larger areas of human society. In *Zhong Yong* (中庸, Being Centered in the Everyday World)’s words, a Ru’s spiritual state is depicted as “being able to enter no place where a Ru is not satisfied by him or herself” (无入而不自得) .

Zhu Ge (诸葛亮, 181-234 C.E) and Zi Yun (杨雄, 53 B.C.E -18 C.E) were both distinguished Ru who had achieved the same spiritual state as Liu Yuxi, viz., enjoying a happy life in a humble dwelling. The last quote is from the *Analects* 9:14. In relation to this verse in the *Analects*, the spiritual state of Yan Hui (颜回), the best student of Kongzi who once lived in a “humble alley” but was able “not to change his joyful mood” (the *Analects* 6:11), particularly resonates with Liu Yuxi’s spiritual self-portrait in this *Inscription*.

## Chapter Six: Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073, C.E)

### Introduction:

For ancient Chinese thought, the icon of lotus is not only meaningful for Buddhists. It also takes an important role in Ruism (Confucianism). In the following, I translate and note Zhou Dun-yi's essay "On Loving the Locus" for my readers to appreciate the Ruist love of lotus.

### 愛蓮說

水陸草木之花，可愛者甚蕃。晉陶淵明獨愛菊，自李唐來世人甚愛牡丹。予獨愛蓮之出淤泥而不染，濯清漣而不妖。中通外直，不蔓不枝，香遠益清，亭亭淨植，可遠觀而不可褻玩焉。予謂菊，花之隱逸者也；牡丹，花之富貴者也；蓮，花之君子者也。噫，菊之愛，陶後鮮有聞。蓮之愛，同予者何人？牡丹之愛，宜乎眾矣。



## On Loving the Lotus

Among the flowers of water, land, herb and wood, many are loveable. During the Jin, Tao Yuan-ming loved only the chrysanthemum. Since the Tang, people have greatly loved the peony. I love only the lotus, because it rises from the mud but is not stained. It is bathed by clear waves, but is not seductive. Inside, it is open; outside, it is straight. It neither sprawls nor branches. The farther away one is, the purer is its fragrance. Upright and elegant, it establishes itself cleanly. It can be beheld at a distance but cannot be toyed with. I say the chrysanthemum is the recluse among flowers, the peony is the wealthy among flowers, and the lotus is the noble person among flowers. Aye, the love for the chrysanthemum is seldom heard of after Tao. As for the love for the lotus, is there anyone like me? Ah, but love for the peony is popular among the people.

Commentary:

Zhou Dunyi is the founding Ru philosopher of Song and Ming Ruism. Using the image of “lotus,” this essay depicts the personality of the “noble person” (君子, *junzi*), an ideal for Ru moral self-cultivation, and puts it in comparison to another two ideal personalities: one for Daoists and the other for ordinary materialistic people. Some of the translation is adapted from Feng Xin-Ming’s.

Chapter Seven: Zhang Zai (1022-1077 C.E)

芭蕉詩

芭蕉心盡展新枝，新卷新心暗已隨。  
願學新心養新德，旋隨新葉起新知。

**On the Basjoo Tree**

**The basjoo tree**

**perfects its core**

**to unfurl a new stem.**

**Unnoticed, a new curl of**

**a new core**

**is already emerging.**

**I love to learn**

**with a renewing mind-heart**

**to cultivate new virtues,**

**so that,**

**soon after a new leaf,**

**a new stem of knowledge**

**will arise.**

Commentary:

Zhang Zai (1022-1077 CE) was a pioneering Ru philosopher of the so-called *Dao Xue* (Learning of the Way, 道學) movement, which is usually called Neo-Confucianism in English. Zhang is famous for his treatise, *The Western Inscription* (西銘), in which he grounds the Ru virtue of filiality (*xiao*, 孝) on the cosmic piety of human beings towards the heavens and the earth.

In this exquisite poem, *On the Basjoo Tree*, Zhang Zai uses the image of a *Basjoo* tree to express his Ruist thinking concerning the relationship between the world and human beings. For Ruists, the cosmos, called *tian* (天), is an all-encompassing process of continuous novelty and creativity. Correspondingly, the ethical commitment of human

beings is thought of as a constant renewal process of learning such that a condition of dynamic harmony (*he*, 和) is continually being created in the evolving situations of human society.

The biological peculiarity of the *Basjoo* tree is that what looks like its trunk is actually composed of curled-up stems packed together, so that when one curled stem becomes mature, a new leaf is unfurled and its stem then grows into a new branch of the plant. For Zhang Zai, this feature of the *Basjoo* tree represents perfectly the core of Ruist aesthetics: the world continually renewing itself. Thus, in the second half of the poem, Zhang Zai says he loves to learn with the *Basjoo* tree and in that way to continue to nurture and renew his virtues and to uncover new knowledge about the world.

Some use of puns or word-play in Chinese is crucial for the poem's diction. In Chinese, 心 (*xin*) can mean "mind," "heart" or "core." It is used by Ruists to refer to the undivided central capacity of human consciousness and encompasses its intellectual, emotional and volitional dimensions. Therefore, a standard English translation of the Ruist idea of *xin* is "mind-heart." Because *xin* also means "core" in Chinese, the curled-up stems making up the trunk of the *Basjoo* tree is portrayed by Zhang Zai as its *xin*, and its continual unfolding symbolizes a renewing of the human mind-heart that longs for continual learning and self-cultivation. Also, the Chinese term for "stem" (*zhi*, 枝) has the same pronunciation as the Chinese term for knowledge (*zhi*, 知). So, as each new stem is unfurled, it symbolizes a virtuous Ruist learner who has garnered a new piece of knowledge. Please pay attention to the fact that for Zhang Zai, knowledge and virtue are intertwined in the self-cultivation of a human being, and so these renewals are

manifestations of the transformation of one's own mind-heart. This reminds us of the first three paragraphs of *Great Learning* (*Daxue*, 大学), which lays out a detailed procedure for Ruist self-cultivation based upon attaining knowledge (致知), rectifying one's mind-heart (正心), and illuminating one's bright virtues (明明德).

Another important lesson from Ruist poetry is that in the perspective of comparative literature, Ruists are fond of using the same image to express multiple meanings. For example, "lotus" is an image heavily used in Buddhist literature to express Buddhism's commitment to eliminating desires and anxieties and thereby to search for release from the suffering process of reincarnation through Buddhist practice. However, in Zhou Dunyi's "On Loving the Lotus" (Chapter Six), the lotus is described as "Inside, it is open; outside, it is straight" "It neither sprawls nor branches," and in this way the lotus becomes a Ruist image, symbolizing the Ruist moral ideal of an upright and honest noble-person (*junzi*, 君子). Similarly, the *Basjoo* tree is an icon also popular in Buddhist literature where its trunk is actually "empty" once you account for all the unfolding stems. But in Zhang Zai's poetry, the *Basjoo tree* becomes an icon expressive of the Ruist metaphysical insight concerning the constant creativity of *Tian* (cosmos) and the Ruist ethical commitment to the constantly being renewed self-cultivation of human beings.

## Chapter Eight: Zhu Xi (1130-1200 C.E)

### I

#### Introduction:

I translate and annotate Zhu Xi's (1130-1200, C.E, arguably the greatest Ruist philosopher after Kongzi) "Exhortation for Adapting Breath" to show how Zhu Xi meditated in a Ruist way.

### 序

予作調息箴，亦是養心一法。蓋人心不定者，其鼻息噓氣常長，吸氣常短，故須有以調之。鼻數停勻，則心亦漸定。所謂持其志，無暴其氣也。

### Preface (i)

**I compose "Exhortation for Adapting Breath," which is about a method for nourishing one's mind-heart (心, xin). When people's mind-heart doesn't feel settled, their exhaled breath is usually too long, and their inhaled breath is usually too short. Therefore, we need to adapt it. After one's breath becomes slow and balanced, our mind-heart will also be gradually settled. This is what Mencius means by "keep one's mindfulness, and not destruct one's breath" (ii).**

Notes:

(i) This preface is not included in the *Complete Works of Zhu Xi* (Zhuziquanshu). I saw it in some online version of Zhu Xi's writings and thus, translate it for the readers' reference.

(ii) Mencius's words is from the *Mencius, Gongsunchou A*. Clearly enough, Zhu Xi understands his way of meditation as following the tradition of Ruist meditation initiated by Mencius's practice of 'Nourishing One's Oceanic Vital-energy' (養浩然之氣). In the context of Zhu Xi's meditation, the breath-air which he contemplated can be seen as a concrete form of oceanic vital-energy (氣, Qi).

#### 調息箴

鼻端有白，我其觀之。隨時隨處，容與猗移。靜極而噓，如春沼魚。動極而翕，如百蟲蟄。氤氲開闢，其妙無窮。誰其屍之，不宰之功。雲臥天行，非予敢議。守一處和，千二百歲。（《朱子全書》二十四冊）

#### **Exhortation (i) for Adapting Breath (ii).**

**There is something white**

**on the end of my nose.**

**I contemplate it. (iii)**

**Whenever I am and**

**Wherever I am,**

**Whether I stay still or move,**

**I do not need to be anxious.**

**Do feel peace. (iv)**

**When stillness gets to its utmost, exhale slowly;**

**the breath is like fishes swimming in a spring pond.(v)**

**When movement gets to its utmost, inhale slowly;**

**the breath is like hundreds of animals hibernating in the winter. (vi)**

**The all-pervading breath-air (vii) goes out and in.**

**It is so wonderful, without a boundary.**



**Is there anyone dominating the process?**

**It is accomplished in a non-dominant way. (viii)**

**It feels like lying on the clouds,**

**and walking in the sky.**

**I dare not talk of it. (ix)**

**Observing the Oneness and residing in harmony,**

**may we live to two hundred, or even a thousand years! (x)**

Notes:

(i) “Exhortation” (箴, zhen) is a genre of Ru writing. Though usually very short, it exhorts people, usually including oneself, to do something extremely important.

(ii) Meditation through adapting one’s breath is not to control it. After a stage of adjustment and discipline, meditation may lead to a spontaneous way of breathing which is beyond human expectation and control. This is the major reason I translate 調息 as “adapting breath.”

(iii) The method of Zhu Xi's meditation is contemplating his breath. The method comprises several steps: When you close your eye with a slice of vision remaining, some vague light will appear on the end of the nose. Looking at the end but without really looking at one specific point, you can concentrate your attention to where the breath goes in and out. Then, feeling and adapting the way of breathing, is how meditation starts. In certain circumstances such as when the room temperature is moderate, you can even see the exhaled breath which gradually turns white, when you go into deep meditation.

(iv) The meditation through contemplating one's breath can be performed at any time and at any place. One salient feature of Ruist meditation, according to Zhu Xi, is that it does not make meditators prefer stillness to movement. Instead, meditation is treated as an efficient way to have people calm down and be mindful whether they are actually dealing with real affairs in the world or not. For Zhu Xi, the meditational skill described here enables one to concentrate their attention to the pattern-principles (理, li) of things (a pattern-principle refers to the dynamic and harmonious way how a set of cosmic or social realities fit together) and then, facilitate one's further engagement in the world. We will know further details about Zhu Xi's understanding of meditation in the following of this chapter.

(v) This and the following verses describe how Zhu Xi feels about his breathing during meditation. After a deep and slow inhale, our body will still for one moment, and then it begins to exhale and move again. The exhaling air is slow, delicate, peaceful, and warm, so Zhu Xi likened it as "fishes swimming in a spring pond."

vi) Exhaling accompanies the movement of body. Once the movement stops, inhaling follows. Again, the inhaling air is slow, deep, and gradually spreads into a variety of organs within our body. This is a peaceful and efficient process of eliciting and storing energy from outside, so Zhu Xi likens the breath as “hundreds of animals hibernating in the winter.” Please pay attention to Zhu Xi’s “cosmic consciousness” during meditation, by which he understands the process of exhaling and inhaling as resonating with what happens to nature in spring and winter.

vii) After a sufficient time of breathing according to the aforementioned method, meditators may feel the breath-air inhaled and spread throughout the body, and the air outside the body, as merging into each other. At this moment, the breath-air’s going outside-and-inside may take place in a spontaneous way. In this stage of meditation, although meditators’ awareness continues to function, the awareness has attuned itself to this spontaneous process. Once this unitary feeling emerges, meditators will have some extraordinary experiences. The term “all-pervading breath-air” reminds of Mencius’s term “oceanic vital-energy.”

viii) The spontaneity of breathing in such an enjoyable way goes beyond the meditators’ control, although human awareness can still perfectly function. That’s the reason why it is described by Zhu Xi that meditational experience is achieved in a non-dominant way.

ix) When the breath-air stored inside one’s body and the air outside get merged so intimately and delicately, meditators may feel they are “lying on the clouds” and “walking in the sky.” Zhu Xi is marveled by this experience, and thus, “dare not talk of

this.” Personally, I have similar experiences during meditation. Its beauty and comfort is indeed beyond description.

x) The all-pervading cosmic vital-energy is the One, and meditation through contemplating one’s breath is to achieve harmony between one’s individuality and that cosmic vital-energy. For Zhu Xi, the meditational practice can make people’s body healthy, and thus, increase our longevity. In other words, the Ru way of life, as partially embodied in Zhu Xi’s practice of meditation, nourishes both people’s mind-heart and body.

## II

Introduction:

Zhu Xi’s “Exhortation for Adapting Breath” can be understood in the context of the Ruist meditative practice of quiet-sitting (靜坐, jingzuo). In the following, I translate and comment on one of Zhu Xi’s conversations with his students to explain Zhu Xi’s understanding of quiet-sitting.

一之問：“存養多用靜否？”曰：“不必然。孔子卻都就用處教人做工夫。今雖說主靜，然亦非棄事物以求靜。既為人，自然用事君親，交朋友，撫妻子，禦僮仆。不成捐棄了，只閉門靜坐，事物之來，且曰：‘候我存養！’又不可只茫茫隨他事物中走。二者須有個思量倒斷始得。”

頃之，復曰：“動時，靜便在這裏。動時也有靜，順理而應，則雖動亦靜也。故曰：‘知止，而後有定；定，而後能靜。’事物之來，若不順理而應，則雖塊然不

交於物以求靜，心亦不能得靜。惟動時能順理，則無事時能靜；靜時能存，則動時得力。須是動時也做工夫，靜時也做工夫，兩莫相靠，使工夫無間斷，始得。若無間斷，靜時固靜，動時心亦不動，動亦靜也。若無工夫，則動時固動，靜時雖欲求靜，亦不可得而靜，靜亦動也。動、靜，如船之在水，潮至則動，潮退則止；有事則動，無事則靜”。此段，徐居甫錄。

說此次日，見徐，雲：“事來則動，事過了靜。如潮頭高，船也高；潮頭下，船也下。雖然，‘動靜無端’，亦無截然為動為靜之理。如人之氣，吸則靜，噓則動。又問答之際，答則動也，止則靜矣。凡事皆然。且如涵養、致知，亦何所始？但學者須自截從一處做去。程子：‘為學莫先於致知。’是知在先。又曰：‘未有致知而不在敬者。’則敬也在先。從此推去，只管恁地。” 砥（朱子全書，十四冊）

**Yi Zhi asked: “In order to preserve and nourish (the living-substance of human life), do we need to be still most of the time?”**

**Zhu Xi answered: “Not necessarily. Kongzi always taught people to cultivate themselves in situations that are of direct relevance to one’s life. Now, although some Ru master taught that self-cultivation should focus upon being quiet (i), this does not mean that one should give up affairs and things in order to pursue quietude. Since we are humans, it entails that we shall serve parents, assist governors, communicate with friends, foster our children, comfort our spouses, and supervise house servants. It is implausible that we could give up all of these, and then, close the door and sit quietly. If things and affairs come, can we just say: “No!**

**Please wait! I am now preserving and nourishing myself”? Nevertheless, we cannot follow these things and affairs with an indifferent or confused mind either. Between these two poles (ii), we should think and have an appropriate judgement (about the correct method to preserve and nourish our human life). ”**

**After a while, Master Zhu continues: “Whenever moving, quietude is there. The state of movement has its due measure of quietude. If we can respond to affairs according to the concerned pattern-principles, even if we move, we can still be quiet. (iii) Therefore, the Greater Learning says: ‘Knowing where to dwell in, and then, one can become settled. Becoming settled, and then, one can be quiet.’ (iv) When things and affairs come, if we cannot respond to them according to the concerned pattern-principles, our mind-heart cannot achieve quietude. This is the case even if we isolate ourselves from those things and thus intentionally search for quietude. Only under the condition that we follow the concerned pattern-principles during our movement, can we become quiet when no human affairs arrive. On the other hand, if we can preserve (the living-substance of our life) during our stillness, we shall be more functional during our movement.**

**Hence, we must intentionally cultivate ourselves whenever we are moving or still. In other words, we must make our cultivating efforts continual, and thus, do not segregate our life into its still moments and its moving ones. If we can make these continuous efforts, we are quiet when we are still, and furthermore, we can also become unperturbed even when we are moving. This implies that we can be quiet even when we are moving. If we do not continually exert our cultivating effort, we**

are perturbed when we are moving, and even if we long for quietude when we are still, we cannot achieve that quietude. This means we can be perturbed even when we are still. Our physical movement and stillness is like a boat floating on the river. Tides come, and then the boat moves. Tides retreat, and then the boat stills. In the same way, we move when affairs come. We still when affairs get settled.” (This part of conversation is recorded by Xu Jufu)

One day after finishing this conversation, Master Zhu met Xu, and said: “We move when affairs come. We are still when affairs get settled. This is like a boat on the river. Tides high, then the boat is also high. Tides down, then the boat is also down. Nevertheless, because ‘The alternation of movement and stillness is all-pervasive’ (v), there is no reason for us to separate the pattern-principle for our movement and the one for our stillness. For example, we are still when we finish one round of inhale, but we become moving again when we exhale. For questions and answers between teachers and students, we move when we answer questions, while we are still when we finish the answer. All things ought to be understood as such. (vi) Hence, as for the cultivating effort of ‘moistening and nourishing’ and ‘attaining one’s lucid awareness,’ (vii) where should we start? I think scholars should start from one place and extend it. Master Cheng said: “Nothing is prior to ‘attaining one’s lucid awareness’ for one’s learning.” He also taught: “No effort of ‘attaining one’s lucid awareness’ does not rely upon reverence”. Therefore, being reverent, is the priority for all our cultivating effort. From here, we can extend our learning without any obstacle.” (Recorded by Di)

Notes:

(i) “Focusing upon being quiet” was the teaching of Zhou Dunyi.

(ii) “Two poles” refer to two inappropriate statuses of human spirituality: “being obsessed in physical stillness” and “being unmindful in physical movement.”

(iii) Here, the Chinese character Jing 靜 is differentiated by Zhu Xi into two distinctive meanings: physical stillness and spiritual quietude. According to Zhu Xi, as long as people’s thoughts and behaviors abide by the concerned pattern-principles in evolving life situations, people can achieve a peaceful state of spiritual quietude whenever they are physically moving or still. A pattern-principle (理, li) is the dynamic and harmonious way how a set of cosmic or social realities fit together. For example, in order to have a good parental relationship, parents must be kind to their children, which includes providing necessary guidance and instruction, and children must respect their parents, which entails correcting parents’ wrong-doing in a respectful way. In this sense, the virtue of “parental kindness” (慈) and the one of “filial” (孝) are the pattern-principles for parental relationships. Only if we are diligently cultivating these virtues, can we become spiritually quiet and peaceful when we deal with affairs about our parental relationships. In my translation, I deliberately render physical jing as “stillness” and spiritual jing as “quietude” in order to indicate the crucial different meanings of jing intended by Zhu Xi.

(iv) According to Zhu Xi’s understanding, the place that the *Greater Learning*, one of the Ruist Four Books, teaches Ru learners to “dwell in” is the solid pattern-principle of human life which I explained in note (iii)



(v) The quote is from some Ru masters' understanding of the endless unfolding of cosmic changes. For example, Cheng Yi (1033-1107 C.E) holds this view.

(vi) The pattern-principle for our physical movement is continuous with the one for our physical stillness. More importantly, the features of alternating movement and stillness pervade all moments of human life. Therefore, there ought not to be a discontinuity for our cultivating effort to focus upon the concerned pattern-principles and thus, to preserve and nourish the living-substance of our human life. When we are still, we can practice quiet-sitting according to its pattern-principle. When we are moving, we need to focus upon another set of pattern-principles. Regardless, all these pattern-principles share one common goal: making all moments in our human life dynamically and harmoniously fit together.

(vii) The meaning of “moistening and nourishing” is the same as the aforementioned “preserving and nourishing.” They share the same target: to nourish the healthy, energetic living-substance of one's human life. In Ruist terms, this cultivating effort must be combined with another one: “attaining one's lucid awareness” of the concerned pattern-principles. The reason why Zhu Xi broached these two terms in relation to the topic of quiet-sitting is that Cheng Yi once summarised the Ru cultivating method in two verses: “Moistening and nourishing (one's living-substance of life) needs ‘reverence’, while advancing one's learning consists in attaining one's lucid awareness (of pattern-principles)” (涵養須用敬, 進學在致知).

Commentary:

In my view, this conversation is Zhu Xi's most refined exposition of his view on quiet-sitting.

For Zhu Xi, quiet-sitting is a convenient practical method for enhancing one's mindfulness and preserving one's physical health. However, the reason why quiet-sitting can achieve this must be understood in a more general methodology of Ruist self-cultivation. In other words, as for its spiritual function, leading to a healthy and enlightened way of human life, quiet-sitting is of convenient use, rather than of ultimate use.

Ultimately, the Ru self-cultivation should start from "being reverent" 敬. At first, we need to be reverent towards our learning. This is a condition for one to achieve a lucid awareness of concerned pattern-principles in evolving life situations. Then, we need to be reverent towards our acting-out of the concerned pattern-principles. Once pattern-principles are followed and intentionally acted out, we shall be really successful to preserve and nourish our human life. This is the case whether we are physically still when we are practicing quiet-sitting or physically moving when we are dealing with things and affairs.

In a word, Zhou Dun-yi's cultivating method of "focusing upon being quiet" (主静) is transformed by Zhu Xi as one of "focusing upon being reverent" (主敬). In this transformation lies the kernel of Zhu Xi's understanding of the Ruist spiritual practice of quiet-sitting.

### III

#### Introduction:

I translate and annotate Zhu Xi's "On Ren" to show how Zhu Xi understood the cardinal human virtue of Ren (仁, humaneness). In my view, this is one of the most comprehensive explanation of the virtue Ren in Ruism.

#### 仁說

天地以生物為心者也。而人物之生，又各得夫天地之心以為心者也。故語心之德，雖其總攝貫通，無所不備，然一言以蔽之，則曰仁而已矣。請試詳之：

蓋天地之心，其德有四，曰元亨利貞，而元無不統；其運行焉，則為春夏秋冬之序，而春生之氣無所不通。故人之為心，其德亦有四，曰仁義禮智，而仁無所不包；其發用焉，則為愛恭宜別之情，而惻隱之心無所不貫。故論天地之心者，則曰乾元、坤元，則四德之體用不待悉數而足；論人心之妙者，則曰“仁，人心也”，則四德之體用亦不待遍舉而該。

蓋仁之為道，乃天地生物之心，即物而在。情之未發，而此體已具；情之既發，而其用不窮。誠能體而存之，則眾善之源、百行之本莫不在是。此孔門之教所以必使學者汲汲於求仁也。

其言有曰：“克己復禮為仁”，言能克去己私，復乎天理，則此心之體無不在，而此心之用無不行也。又曰：“居處恭，執事敬，與人忠”，則亦所以存此心也。

又曰：“事親孝，事兄弟，及物恕”，則亦所以行此心也。

又曰：“求仁得仁”，則以讓國而逃，諫伐而餓，為能不失乎此心也。

又曰：“殺身成仁”，則以欲甚於生，惡甚於死，為能不害乎此心也。此心何心也？

在天地則塊然生物之心，在人則溫然愛人利物之心，包四德而貫四端者也。

或曰：“若子之言，則程子所謂愛情仁性，不可以愛為仁者非與？”曰：“不然。

程子之所訶，以愛之發而名仁者也。吾之所論，以愛之理而名仁者也。蓋所謂情性者，雖其分域之不同，然其脈絡之通，各有攸屬者，則曷嘗判然離絕而不相管哉？

吾方病夫學者誦程子之言而不求其意，遂至於判然離愛而言仁，故特論此以發明其遺意，而子顧以為異乎程子之說，不亦誤哉？”

或曰：“程氏之徒言仁多矣，蓋有謂愛非仁，而以萬物與我為一，為仁之體者矣；亦有謂愛非仁，而以心有知覺，釋仁之名者矣。今子之言若是，然則彼皆非與？”

曰：“彼謂物我為一者，可以見仁之無不愛矣，而非仁之所以為體之真也。彼謂心有知覺者，可以見仁之包乎智矣，而非仁之所以得名之實也。觀孔子答子貢博施濟眾之問，與程子所謂覺不可以訓仁者，則可見矣，子尚安得復以此而論仁哉？抑泛言同體者，使人含糊昏緩而無警切之功，其弊或至於認物為己者有之矣；專言知覺者，使人張皇迫躁而無沈潛之味，其弊或至於認欲為理者有之矣。一忘一助，二者蓋胥失之。而知覺之雲者，於聖門所示樂山能守之氣象尤不相似，子尚安得復以此而論仁哉？”

因並記其語，作《仁說》。（《朱子全書》二十四冊）

## On Ren (仁)

**The being of Heaven and Earth consists in creativity. When things and people come into existence, they are endowed by Heaven and Earth with their natures. Because**

of this, the human mind-heart—within which human nature is embodied—has virtues which embrace all, penetrate all and thus, lack nothing. Nevertheless, one word can sum them up: Ren (仁, *humaneness*). Let me try to explain in detail.

There are four virtues for the creativity of Heaven and Earth: initiation, permeation, harmonization, and integration. The virtue of initiation governs them all (i). In their operation, these virtues are manifested in the four seasons—the vital-energy of spring permeates them all (ii).

Correspondingly, there are four virtues for the human mind-heart: Ren, righteousness, ritual-propriety, and wisdom—the virtue of Ren embraces them all. When these virtues come forth and function, they are manifested in the human feelings of love, obligation, respect, and judiciousness—the feeling of commiseration pervades them all (iii).

Therefore, when discussing the creativity of Heaven and Earth, if we simply say, “the initiative power of Qian (*Heaven*), the initiative power of Kun (*Earth*),” then its four virtues and their functions are encapsulated.

For discussing the magnificence of the human mind-heart, if we simply say, “Ren is what the human mind-heart is,” then its four virtues and their functions are summarized (iv).

So, the virtue of Ren is actually what the human mind-heart—which is produced and sustained by the creativity of Heaven and Earth—consists in. It functions when

**the human mind-heart engages with things. When feelings are not aroused, the virtue is already there. When feelings are aroused, it functions inexhaustibly.**

**If we can sincerely embody and preserve the virtue of Ren, then we have in it the fountain of all goodness and the root of all deeds. This is why the teachings of the Confucian school (Ruism) urge scholars to pursue, keenly and unceasingly, the virtue of Ren.**

**Ruism teaches, “Master oneself and return to ritual propriety.”(v) This means, if we can eliminate selfishness, and recover the principle of Tian within ourselves, then this mind-heart will reach everywhere and its function will always be operative.**

**It also teaches, “Be respectful when you are at home, be dedicated when you work, and be trustworthy when dealing with people.”(vi) These are ways to preserve this mind-heart.**

**It also teaches: “Be filial when serving parents, be discreetly obedient when serving elder brothers, and be empathetic when engaging with all kinds of things.”(vii) These are ways to practice this mind-heart.**

**It also teaches: “(Bo Yi and Shu Qi) sought Ren and then, they found it.” (viii) This teaching is about Bo Yi, who declined a throne and left the state in favor of his younger brother Shu Qi. The brothers also remonstrated against King Wu’s rebellious expedition, and after failing to persuade him, they chose to starve to death. That they were determined to do this is because they didn’t lose this mind-heart. (ix)**

It also teaches, "Sacrifice life in order to accomplish Ren."(x) This implies that we desire something more than life and hate something more than death in order not to injure this mind-heart. What is this mind-heart all about? It is rooted in the all-encompassing creativity of Heaven and Earth, and in the human world, this mind-heart loves people and nurtures things. It incorporates the four virtues (i.e., Ren, righteousness, ritual-propriety, and wisdom) and bonds together the four moral incipient sprouts (i.e., the feeling of commiseration, the feeling of shame and disgust, the feeling of deference, and the feeling of distinguishing right and wrong) (xi) .

Someone asked: "According to your words, is it not wrong for Master Cheng (xii) to say that love is a particular feeling while Ren is the human nature and therefore, love should not be regarded as Ren?"

I answer, "Not so. What Master Cheng criticized was to use the human status when the feeling of love is aroused to portray what is Ren *per se*. What I argued is to use the principle of love to portray Ren *per se*. For human nature and human feelings—although they belong to different existential spheres—connect to each other like arteries and veins in the same body (xiii). How can they become sharply separated and have nothing to do with each other? Scholars recite Master Cheng's words without understanding their meaning to the extent that they even talk about Ren as being something separate from love. I worry about this, and therefore, made the above exposition in order to reveal the lost meaning of Master Cheng's teaching. You think of my view as divergent from Master Cheng, isn't this wrong?"

Someone asked, “The followers of Master Cheng have given many explanations of Ren. Some say that love is not Ren, and regard the oneness of all things and one’s self as what is Ren *per se*. Others maintain that love is not Ren, but explain Ren in terms of awareness possessed by the mind-heart (xvi). If what you say is correct, are they all wrong?”

I answer, “From what they call the oneness of all things and one’s self, it can be known that Ren involves love for all, but this oneness is not what is Ren *per se*. From the fact that the mind-heart possesses awareness, it can be seen that the virtue of Ren includes wisdom, but this is not how the Ren *per se* can be named. If you look up Kongzi’s answer to (his pupil) Zi Gong’s question whether conferring extensive benefits on and thus, helping all the people will constitute Ren (xv) and also Master Cheng’s view that Ren ought not to be construed in terms of awareness, you will see the point. How can you still explain Ren in these terms?

“Furthermore, if the oneness of things and one’s self is superficially talked of, that will lead people to be indistinct and inattentive so that no effort is made to keep alert. The harmful effect—and there has been—may be to mistake exterior things for one’s own self. If Ren is construed in the specific term of awareness, that will lead people to be anxious, impatient, and impetuous so that the process of moral self-cultivation lacks depth. The harmful effect—and there has been—may be to mistake one’s desire as moral principle. In the first case, the mind-heart is oblivious, but in the second case, the mind-heart is agitated and disturbed. Both are wrong. Further, as for the construal of Ren in terms of awareness, this view is especially



**incongruent with Kongzi’ teachings that a person of Ren has the temperament of loving mountain (xvi) and that only the virtue of Ren can preserve what human knowledge has been aware of (xvii). How then can you still explain Ren in this way?”**

**It is because of all this that I record their questions and compose this essay on Ren.**

Notes:

(i) Tian (天, heaven) is an all-encompassing constantly creative cosmic power. Its creativity has four generic features: (1) Tian creates the world from nothing and initiates the world as a process of continual creation, and in this sense, Tian’s creativity is initiative (元, yuan). (2) Tian creates everything, so Tian’s creativity is permeative (亨, heng). (3) Everything created by Tian is and becomes together within Tian, so Tian’s creativity is harmonizing (利, li). (4) Tian creates the world as a whole, and also, every creature is endowed with a nature to integrate itself, so Tian’s creativity is integrative (貞, zhen). These four basic features of Tian’s creativity are called by Zhu Xi its four ‘virtues’ (德, de). Also, Zhu Xi uses “Heaven and Earth” to refer to Tian. This is legitimate, because seeing from the human perspective, Tian is manifested as two parts: heaven and earth. Tian’s creativity is accordingly manifested in the co-creativity of heaven and earth. Furthermore, Zhu Xi thought the virtue of “initiation” governs all other virtues. This is because without the initiative power of Tian, there would be no world, and as a consequence, all other generic features of Tian’s creativity would lose their ground. Zhu

Xi's thought is based upon the statement of the hexagram for Hexagram Qian in the *Classics of Change* (易經): “元, 亨, 利, 貞”.

(ii) Principle (理, li) and Vital-energy (氣, qi) is a basic dyad of categories in Zhu Xi's thought, which is arguably comparable to the one of Form and Matter in Greek philosophy. The most generic features of the four virtues of Tian's creativity are referred to by Zhu Xi as the “Principle of Tian” (天理) in the later part of the essay. These principles of Tian are manifested in the action of the cosmic vital-force during the course of four seasons.

(iii) The feeling of commiseration (惻隱之心, the *Mencius 2A*), according to Mencius, is what one spontaneously feels when one sees a baby about to fall into a well. For Mencius, this is the moral incipient sprout of the cardinal human virtue of Ren, which Mencius thinks is what human nature is all about. For Zhu Xi, he maintains Mencius's thought and thinks that the feeling of commiseration is also one incipient form of the human feeling of universal love. However, in a more delicate way than Mencius, Zhu Xi furthermore grounds the feeling of love upon the virtue of Ren, and then, in turn, grounds the virtue of Ren upon the all-encompassing creativity of Tian.

(iv) Here we encounter another basic dyad of categories in Ruism: Ti (體, living-substance) and Yong (用, function). The ti of a thing is what the thing per se consists in, while its yong is one thing's manifested functions when it engages with other things. For example, using Zhu Xi's example in his other works, the ti of an ear is the ear itself as one organ of human body, while the yong of an ear is its ability to hear. In the context of

this essay, the human feelings of love, obligation, deference, and judiciousness are thought of by Zhu Xi as the yong of the four human virtues: Ren, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. Quite obviously, for Zhu Xi, every virtue has its ti and yong. For example, for Ren, its ti is universal human love which is rooted in the all-encompassing creativity of Heaven and Earth. But its yong is the particular human feeling of love, including, for example, the feeling of commiseration.

(v) The Analects 12:1.

(vi) The Analects 13:19

(vii) This quote is a combination of the *Classic of Filial Devotion* 孝經, ch. 14 and perhaps Cheng Yi's teaching on empathy.

(viii) The Analects 7:14

(ix) Bo Yi and Shu Qi are sons of a king in a state during the Shang Dynasty. When their father left the throne to Shu Qi, he declined in deference to his elder brother Bo Yi, but Bo Yi would not violate the order of his father and therefore, chose to flee. Later, when King Wu (r. 1046-1043 B.C.E) overthrew the Shang dynasty in spite of their remonstrance, and founded Zhou Dynasty, they would not eat the food of Zhou and starved to death. Their remonstrance was arguably unjustified because King Wu's rebellion was thought of by early Ru as legitimate since it aimed to overthrow a ruthless tyrant, the King Zhou of Shang Dynasty. However, because of the sense of duty that Bo Yi and Shu Qi showed to their father, to each other and to their country, their deeds were

almost unanimously praised as being of high moral values by early Ru texts such as the *Analects* and the *Mencius*.

(x) The Analects 15:8.

(xi) The Mencius 2A

(xii) Master Cheng refers to Cheng Yi (1033-1107 C.E) or Cheng Hao (1032-1085 C.E), two pioneering Ru philosophers for Song and Ming Ruism who lived in Northern Song Dynasty.

(xiii) Xing (性, nature) and Qing (情, feeling) is another dyad of categories for Ruism. It corresponds to the aforementioned dyads 'ti-yong' and 'li-qi' in Zhu Xi's thought. For Zhu Xi, human nature consists in the ti, also the li of the human mind-heart, viz., the four human virtues of Ren, righteousness, ritual-propiety and wisdom. In relation, human feelings are the yong, the manifested functions of vital-energy, of human nature. For Zhu Xi, these two aspects of human existence can never be separated.

(xiv) These two views are perhaps influenced by Buddhism.

(xv) The Analects 6:28.

(xvi) The Analects 6:21

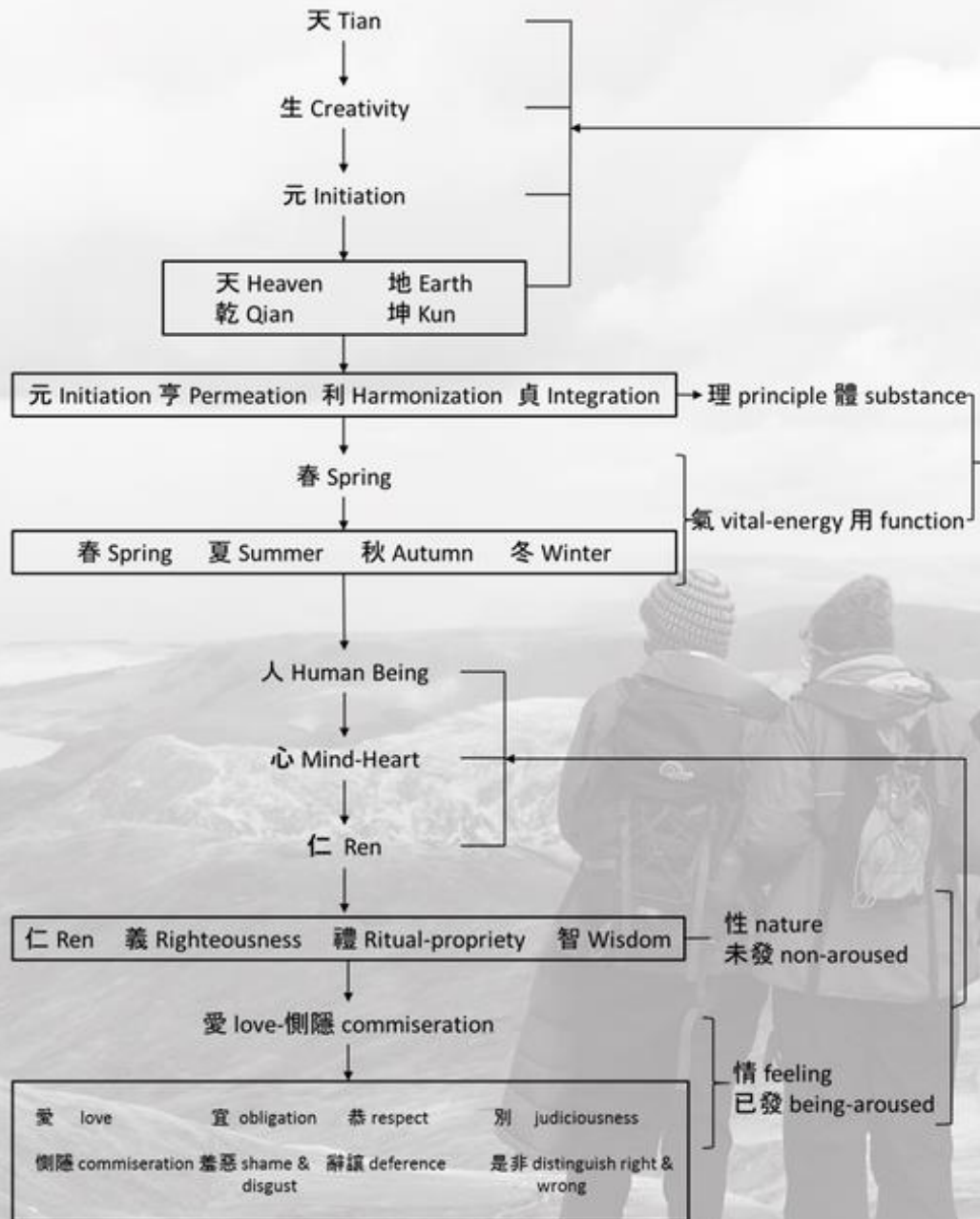
(xvii) The Analects 15:32.

Commentary:

In order to more clearly explain Zhu Xi's essay, *On Ren*, I have created *The Chart of Ren According to Zhu Xi* (please see next page). Through reading the texts and pondering the chart, I believe at least three goals can be achieved for contemporary readers of the Ru tradition: (1) They will understand how the most analytic mind in the Ru tradition thinks of the cardinal human virtue, Ren, 仁. (2) The reading will dissipate their doubt that Ruism may be just a social ethics, without any substantial metaphysical dimension undergirding its ethical teaching. (3) They will understand none of these metaphysical terms or thoughts was borrowed from Daoist or Buddhist traditions, as many

# A Chart of Ren According to Zhu Xi

## 朱子仁說圖



By Bin Song & Ben Butina

stereotypical sayings about Song and Ming Ruism claimed it to be. The truth is that Ruism is a continuous living tradition of “ethical metaphysics” or “metaphysical ethics”, from Kongzi, through Zhu Xi, until now.

With all the rich meanings of terms in mind, I will try my best to explain this chart briefly. In order to understand the chart, Ru learners need to start by following the arrows. Once understood, the chart could be contemplated from anywhere. So, let’s begin:

The nature of Tian is creativity. Creativity means initiation. The initiative power of Tian is manifested in the one of Heaven (Qian) and the one of Earth (Kun). There are four virtues of the creativity of Heaven and Earth: initiation, permeation, harmonization and integration. The virtue of initiation governs them all. These four virtues are manifested in the action of cosmic vital-energy during the course of four seasons. The vital-energy of spring permeates them all.

These four virtues are the principle and living substance of Tian’s creativity, while the four seasons manifest the vital-energy and function of Tian’s creativity. Therefore, for discussing the creativity of Tian, once we say “the initiative power of Qian (heaven), the initiative power of Kun (earth),” then both the four virtues and their functions are encapsulated.

The lower part of the chart is about human beings. It has a parallel structure to the upper section of the chart. Human beings are born from the process of cosmic creativity of Tian. Human nature is embodied in the human mind-heart, and it is the virtue of Ren.

There are four virtues for the human mind-heart: Ren, righteousness, ritual-propiety, and wisdom. The virtue of Ren embraces them all. When the human mind-heart is aroused and engages with things, the four virtues of human mind-heart are manifested as four human feelings.

There are two alternative ways to name these four feelings. For Zhu Xi, they are the feelings of love, obligation, deference, and judiciousness. For Mencius, they are the feelings of commiseration, shame and disgust, deference, and distinguishing right and wrong. Using Mencius's words, these four feelings can be called the four incipient sprouts of human virtues. Zhu Xi's alternative way to name the feelings derive from Mencius, but is more succinct. One apparent exception is the feeling of obligation, which is different from the one of shame and disgust. However, they are actually based upon the same virtue, righteousness—they connote different aspects of this virtue. When we feel we ought to do something, we have the feeling of obligation; but when we do something we ought not to do, we may feel shamed and disgusted by ourselves. Overall, the feeling of love or commiseration pervades all the other feelings.

The four virtues of human mind-heart are the principle, the substance, the nature and the non-aroused status of human mind-heart. The four human feelings for Zhu Xi and the four moral incipient sprouts for Mencius manifest the vital-force, the function, the feeling, and the aroused status of human mind-heart. Therefore, for discussing the magnificence of the human mind-heart, once we say "Ren, is what the human mind-heart is," then both its four virtues and their functions are summarized.



Zhu Xi's essay *On Ren* illustrates the cosmological root of the cardinal human virtue, Ren. In this sense, his thought could be seen as an ethical metaphysics.

## Chapter Nine: Xin Qiji (1140-1207 C.E)

### Introduction:

When Zhu Xi died, Xin Qiji, one of Zhu Xi's best friends and also one of the greatest lyricists in ancient China, was courageous enough to weep and present an eulogy in Zhu's funeral despite the fact that the official ban of Zhu Xi's thought as "false learning" was still enforced. I translate and comment Xin Qiji's lyric to show how a genuine Ru friend commemorated Zhu Xi's death.

### 感皇恩 • 讀莊子聞朱晦庵即世

案上數編書，非莊即老。會說忘言始知道；萬言千句，不自能忘堪笑。今朝梅雨霽，  
青天好。一壑一丘，輕衫短帽。白發多時故人少。子雲何在，應有玄經遺草。江河流日夜，何時了。

### **Feeling Grateful to the Emperor (i) • Hearing of Zhu Hui-an's Death while Reading the *Zhuang Zi* (ii)**

**Several books are on my desk,**

**written by either Zhuang Zi or Lao Zi. (iii)**

**They say we can only know the Way**

**once we have forgotten words; (iv)**

**But they wrote thousands of words,**

**and thousands of sentences (v):**

**they themselves are unable to forget them!**

**I really ought to laugh. (vi)**

**This spring morning**

**the drizzle has ceased.**

**The sky has become sunny and blue;**

**it is pleasant. (vii)**

**One valley, one hill;**

**a light garment, and a short hat. (viii)**

**The more your hair turns gray,**

**the more old friends dwindle.**

**Where is Zi Yun?**

**His profound writings are still kept by some. (ix)**

**The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers run day and night;**

**when have they ever stopped? (x)**

Notes:

(i) Lyrics from the Song dynasty (960-1279 C.E.) typically had two names: a “tune name” which specified the melody to be used when singing the lyric, and a “lyric name” which summarized its meaning. Each particular “tune name” constrained the lyricist to a fixed meter and rhythm. Xin Qiji's choice of the tune name “*Feeling Grateful to the Emperor*” is ironic because it was the emperor who, at that time, had banned Zhu Xi's thought as “false learning 偽學.” This ban remained in effect even at Zhu Xi's death. Xin Qiji intended to be sarcastic by choosing this tune name for his lyric.

(ii) Zhu Hui-an is Zhu Xi. Hui-an 晦庵 is his style name.

(iii) When Xin Qiji received word of Zhu Xi's death, he was reading the *Zhuang Zi*. This then became an occasion for Qiji to compose a lyric lamenting and honoring Zhu Xi's death on the basis of his understanding of the difference between the philosophies of Daoism and Ruism.

(iv) It says in the *Zhuang Zi* : “The purpose of words is to convey meanings. Once their meanings are apprehended, words ought to be forgotten.” Similarly, the *Dao De Jing* teaches that the Way which is spoken is not the genuine Way, and that the Name which is said aloud is not the eternal Name. Despite sharing similar philosophical vocabularies, Ruism and Daoism are oriented towards fundamentally different worldviews.

Philosophical Daoism represents a primitivist critique of all projects aiming for higher human civilization. Therefore, in order to return to the purportedly most energized, perfect, and primitive human society, Daoists tend to downplay all kinds of means to higher human civilization, including language, government, technology, education, etc. In contrast, Ruism represents a cautious, yet progressive attitude towards sustainable forms of higher human civilization. As a result, while Daoism teaches that people ought to “forget words (忘言),” Ruism sees “establishing good words (立言),” “establishing good works (立功),” and “establishing moral worths (立德)” as the three most important methods for an ordinary human being to achieve their “cultural immortality.” (Please refer to the “Twenty-Fourth Year of The Duke of Xiang” in the *Zuo Commentary of The Spring and Autumn Annua.l*) From a Ruist point of view, words do not simply convey meanings; they also mediate human behaviors so as to bring a humane and harmonious society into being. This, ultimately, is why every generation needs to learn and speak

words correctly, according to their evolving social contexts. It is also the reason why, together with “good works” and “moral worths,” saying or writing “good words” is a sign of a person’s cultural immortality since, according to the Ruist view, this is how the Way is followed by human beings in the human world.

(v) There are more than eighty chapters in the *Dao De Jing*. The text of *Zhuang Zi* is even longer. Therefore, although Lao Zi teaches one not to speak in order to attain the genuine Way, and Zhuang Zi instructs one to forget words, they themselves are nevertheless prolific and loquacious writers. By pointing out this irony, Xin Qiji clearly expresses his Ruist stance: no, Zhuang Zi! Especially when a virtuous philosopher friend dies, we cannot believe that we ought to forget his words.

(vi) “I” (Xin Qiji) really ought to laugh, but “I” cannot because of Zhu Xi’s recent death.

(vii) Multiple readings of these purely descriptive verses are possible: 1) they symbolize the lyricist’s new understanding of Zhuang Zi; 2) the lyricist finally feels consoled because he knows how his friend has become immortal: Zhu Xi’s words, works, and moral worth would survive long after his death; or 3) through the images of “drizzle,” “morning” (whose antonym is “night”), and “sunny” (whose antonym is “cloudy”), we

can imagine that the lyricist must have suffered greatly when he learned of his friend's death.

(viii) This may describe where Zhu Xi once lived and how he dressed, or may describe the lyricist's case. Regardless, the corresponding relationship between "one valley" and "one hill," and between "garment" and "hat" symbolize the rare, yet genuine friendship between people such as Zhu Xi and Xin Qiji. After Zhu Xi's death, Xin Qiji was among the few acquaintances of Zhu Xi who dared to write an eulogy and attend Zhu Xi's funeral. More details in this regard can be found in the commentary below.

(ix) Zi Yun is the style name of Yang Xiong (楊雄, 53-19 B.C.E), a great Ruist of the early Han dynasty. He wrote many important Ruist philosophical works which later generations of Ruists, including Xin Qiji, continued to read. The lyricist likens Zhu Xi to Yang Xiong in order to express his admiration for Zhu Xi, as well as his confidence that Zhu Xi's cultural achievements will make him as immortal as Yang Xiong.

(x) The lyricist likens Zhu Xi's cultural immortality to the everlasting running of the great rivers.

Commentary:

Xin Qiji (辛棄疾) was a great lyricist of the Southern Song dynasty. In addition to his literary achievements, he was also a military leader and civil official. Throughout his entire career, Xin Qiji was committed to recovering the northern territories lost by the Song to the rival Jin dynasty. In this sense, he was a great Ruist whose talents showed a rare combination of military leadership, civil governmental skills, and literary achievement.

Xin Qiji was a close friend of Zhu Xi. Biographical passages in the *History of Song* 宋史 record the memorable friendship between these two great Ruists:

“Qiji once traveled to the mountain of Wuyi together with Zhu Xi. Qiji composed the *Nine Folding Song for Paddling an Oar* 九曲櫓歌 as a result. Zhu Xi also painted the calligraphic inscriptions “*Enabling oneself to return to Ritual-Propriety*” (克己復禮) and “*Get up early in the morning and go to sleep late in the night*” (夙興夜寐) for two rooms in Xin Qiji’s house. When Zhu Xi died, the official ban on Zhu Xi’s thought as ‘false learning’ was still strictly enforced. No students or friends dared to attend Zhu Xi’s funeral. Instead, Qiji composed an eulogy and went to weep at Zhu Xi’s funeral. The eulogy read: ‘The man who is immortal can make known his name for thousands of



generations. Who says that you, Master, have died? Sublime and awe-inspiring, your virtue keeps you yet alive! ””

Unlike other famous poets and lyricists of ancient China, such as Li Bai (李白 701-762 C.E), or Su Shi (蘇軾 1037-1101 C.E), who freely incorporated ideas from Ruism, Daoism, and Buddhism into their poems and lyrics, Xin Qiji remained a staunch Ruist who deliberately detached himself from Daoist teaching. In this translated lyric, Xin Qiji expresses his deep sorrow at Zhu Xi’s death, together with a great admiration for and confidence in Zhu Xi’s cultural accomplishments.

## Chapter Ten: Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529 C.E.)

### Introduction:

Wang Yang-ming was the most important Ru philosopher after Zhu Xi during Ruism's development in the Song and Ming Dynasties (960-1644). Although standing in line with Zhu Xi on championing an organic body of Pattern-principle (理, li) pervading both the cosmic and the human world, Wang Yang-ming tends to emphasize that people ought to seek these pattern-principles within their own mind-heart (心), rather than conforming their behaviors to the pattern-principles which are thought of as existing separately in the outside world. Later Ru learners usually termed Ruist thought under the influence of Wang Yang-ming as the "school of mind-heart," and Zhu Xi's as a "school of pattern-principle."

Despite his philosophical disagreement with Zhu Xi, during his life Wang Yang-ming was equally dedicated to promoting Ruist learning through a uniquely Ruist educational institution – Shuyuan (書院, literally "book yard," and my preferred translation is "Ru academy"). Compared with the school system maintained by the government, the salient feature of Ru academies during the Song and Ming Dynasties was their status of total or semi-independence. Financially, they were funded either privately or jointly by local

communities and governments. Through implementing the following three major roles, the various Shuyuan became the most powerful social engine to sustain the rising, and eventually dominant, profile of Ruism in late imperial China's intellectual and spiritual landscape: 1) Shuyuan prepared students for civil examination. 2) It belongs to an academia inheriting, innovating and spreading Ruist scholarship. 3) Most importantly, Shuyuan was where the Ru way of life, which pivots upon practitioners' moral self-cultivation, was intensively enacted. In this way, Shuyuan became an institutional pivot to produce and develop Ruist noble-persons (junzi), and then, to sustain local communities' ethical, social and economic self-governance.

In order for English readers to understand Ru activities within Shuyuan, I selected three classical essays written by Wang Yang-ming on this topic: "Instructions For Liu Bosong and Other Teachers on the Basics of Teaching Young Students," "Teaching Agreement," and "Writing on the Pavilion of Zhong Tian to Exhort Students." Among them, the first two target the Ruist "elementary learning" (小學, xiaoxue) for youngsters aged from about seven to fifteen years old. The last one addresses Ruist learning for adults.

Alternative translations for the first two essays can be found in Wing-tsit Chan's, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*,

New York: Columbia University Press, 1963, p.182-186. Some of my own translations of these two essays have been adapted from Wing-tsit Chan's.

## I

### 訓蒙大意示教讀劉伯頌等

古之教者，教以人倫。後世記誦詞章之習起，而先王之教亡。今教童子，惟當以孝弟忠信禮義廉恥為專務。其栽培涵養之方，則宜誘之歌詩以發其志意，導之習禮以肅其威儀，諷之讀書以開其知覺。今人往往以歌詩習禮為不切時務，此皆末俗庸鄙之見，烏足以知古人立教之意哉！

大抵童子之情，樂嬉游而憚拘檢，如草木之始萌芽，舒暢之則條達，摧撓之則衰痿。今教童子，必使其趨向鼓舞，中心喜悅，則其進自不能已。譬之時雨春風，霑被卉木，莫不萌動發越，自然日長月化；若冰霜剝落，則生意蕭索，日就枯槁矣。

故凡誘之歌詩者，非但發其志意而已，亦以洩其跳號呼嘯於泳歌，宣其幽抑結滯於音節也；導之習禮者，非但肅其威儀而已，亦所以周旋揖讓而動盪其血脈，拜起屈伸而固束其筋骸也；諷之讀書者，非但開其知覺而已，亦所以沈潛反覆而存其心，

抑揚諷誦以宣其志也。凡此皆所以順導其志意，調理其性情，潛消其鄙吝，默化其粗頑，日使之漸於禮義而不苦其難，入於中和而不知其故。是蓋先王立教之微意也。

若近世之訓蒙稚者，日惟督以句讀課仿，責其檢束，而不知導之以禮，求其聰明，而不知養之以善；鞭撻繩縛，若持拘囚。彼視學舍如圜獄而不肯入，視師長如寇仇而不欲見，窺避掩覆以遂其嬉游，設詐飾詭以肆其頑鄙，偷薄庸劣，日趨下流。是蓋驅之於惡而求其為善也，何可得乎？

凡吾所以教，其意實在於此。恐時俗不察，視以為迂，且吾亦將去，故特叮嚀以告。爾諸教讀，其務體吾意，永以為訓；毋輒因時俗之言，改廢其繩墨，庶成蒙以養正之功矣。念之念之！

**Instructions For Liu Bosong and Other Teachers on the Basics of Teaching Young Students (i).**

**In education the ancients taught the norms of human relationships. As later generations' obsession with memorization, recitation, and flowery writing arose, the teachings of ancient sagely kings died out. In educating young kids today, the sole task should be dedicated to nurturing their virtues of filiality, brotherly respect, loyalty, trustworthiness, ritual-propriety, righteousness, integrity, and their sense of**

shame. The ways to cultivate and nourish these virtues for youngsters is to attract them into singing verses (ii) so that their intentions to learn can be aroused, to guide them to practice rituals (iii) so that their demeanor and bearing can become solemn and dignified, and to gently exhort them to read books so that their knowledge and perception can be widened. Today, singing verses and practicing rituals are often regarded as unrelated to present needs. This is just a vulgar and despicable view among the least elegant people. How can they know the purpose of the ancients in initiating education?

Generally speaking, it is true of young kids that they love to play around and dislike restrictions. Like plants beginning to sprout, if they are allowed to stretch their stems freely, they will develop smoothly into their due shape. If twisted and interfered with, they will wither and decline. In teaching young kids today, we must make them lean toward being excited for themselves, so that they will be happy and cheerful at heart. Then, they will advance their learning as a natural result. As in the case of flowers and trees, if nourished by timely rain and spring wind, they will all sprout, shoot up, and flourish, and will grow and transform by themselves day and night; if ice and frost strip them of necessities, their energy of life will be dissipated and they will gradually dry up.

Therefore, to teach young kids to sing verses is not merely to arouse their intentions to learn. It is also to release through singing their (excess energy, usually expressed in disorderly ways by) jumping around, yelling and screaming; and to free through music and rhythm their emotions which would otherwise be obscured, repressed and obstructed. To guide them to practice rituals is not only to make their demeanor and bearing solemn and dignified. It is also to exhilarate their blood circulation through moving, turning, and yielding properly, and to strengthen their tendons and bones through bowing, rising, and thus, contracting and extending their bodies. To gently exhort them to read books is not only to widen their knowledge and perception. It is also to preserve their mind-heart through being submerged in repeated words and passages, and to express their will through rhythmic recitation, now loudly and now softly. All of these are to follow and guide their wills and intentions, to balance and adjust their characters and emotions, to eliminate unnoticed their meanness and narrow-mindedness, and to transform silently their crudeness and mischievousness. In this way, they can gradually approach civility and righteousness without feeling that it is too difficult to do so, and they will immerse themselves in centrality and harmony (iv) without knowing why. This is the ancient sagely kings' subtle purpose in initiating education.

However, in recent generations, teachers of young kids merely supervise them every day to imitate and memorize phrases and sentences in pre-arranged textbooks (v). They order students to be restrained and disciplined, without any further awareness of guiding them to practice rituals. They seek intelligence from their students, but do not intend to nourish their goodness. They even beat their pupils with whips and tie them with ropes, treating them like prisoners. Then, the young pupils will look upon their school as a prison and refuse to enter. They regard their teachers as enemies and do not want to see them. They peek (at their school), avoid (their teachers), and hide themselves so as to follow their desire for roaming and playing. They pretend and deceive in order to indulge in mischief and meanness. They become dishonest and negligent, and thus, turn mediocre, vulgar and daily degenerate. Such education drives them to become bad. How can they be expected to do good?

The solid reason why I pursue my teaching is explained as above. I am concerned that ordinary folk do not understand it and think of it as pedantic. I am also about to leave, and therefore, I need to earnestly inform all you teachers of it. You teachers, please do comprehend what I am telling you, and take it as a permanent instruction; please never alter or give up this instruction just because ordinary folk



**may say distasteful words at odds with it. It is only when you persist (in following the instruction), that your efforts to cultivate the right personhood for youngsters can succeed. Keep this in mind! Keep this in mind!**

Notes:

(i) The *Instruction For Liu Bosong* was written by Wang Yang-ming after he, as a military general, helped to subdue rebellions in southern Jiang Xi province and was then given orders to re-establish education so as to stabilize and flourish local communities.

This happened in 1518 when Wang was 47 years old. In this *Instruction*, he laid out major principles for Ruist elementary learning, and through reading it, readers can get to know not only what Wang Yang-ming's vision of early Ruist learning consisted of, but also general characteristics of Wang Yang-ming's Ru philosophy.

(ii) "Verses" mentioned here refer to verses in the Ruist classic "The Odes," and other classical poems and lyrics.

(iii) The Ruist concept of "ritual" (li, 禮) mentioned here refers to a variety of physical activities such as religious ceremonies (the ritual of respecting one's ancestors), civil ceremonies (the ritual of adulthood), social etiquettes (greeting and bowing), arts (calligraphy and tea ceremony), sports (archery and martial arts), etc.

(iv) Achieving centrality and harmony (致中和) is the goal of self-cultivation articulated in the opening chapter of *Zhong Yong* (中庸, Being Centered in the Everyday World), one of the four Ruist canonical books.

(v) The term “ke fang (课仿)” refers to the practice of writing characters and composing essays according to the requirement of civil examination.

Commentary:

During the mid Ming Dynasty when Wang Yang-ming lived, his Ruist heart was mainly concerned with the following contemporary situations: one, the imperial government, under the influences of unenlightened emperors, malicious politicians and established Ru literati, became more and more authoritarian and corrupt; and two, after Zhu Xi's thought was officially recognized as the orthodoxy for civil examinations, schools become more and more test-focused and rigid in educating young students. For Wang Yang-ming, these two concerns were intimately interconnected with each other: in order to restore a more just politics and a more humane society, Ruists must be dedicated to renewing people's mind-heart through education. Therefore, in this *Instruction*, Wang Yang-ming clearly expressed his alternative vision of Ru elementary learning: its ultimate goal ought to be nurturing students' moral excellences and facilitating the natural, reasonable growth of

students' whole personhood. Following this goal, Ruist learning should encompass not only basic education through reading and writing, but also aesthetic education through music, physical education through rituals, and potentially other dimensions of education contributing to the same goal.

## II

### 教約

每日清晨，諸生參揖畢，教讀以次遍詢諸生：在家所以愛親敬長之心，得無懈怠，未能真切否？溫清定省之儀，得無虧缺，未能實踐否？往來街衢，步趨禮節，得無放蕩，未能謹飾否？一應言行心術，得無欺妄非僻，未能忠信篤敬否？諸童子務要名以實封，有則改之，無則加勉。教讀復隨時就事，曲加誨諭開發。然後各退就席肄業。

凡歌詩，須要整容定氣，清朗其聲音，均審其節調；毋躁而急，毋蕩而囂。毋餒而懾。久則精神宣暢，心氣和平矣。每學量童生多寡，分為四班，每日輪一班歌詩；其餘皆就席，斂容肅聽。每五日則總四班遞歌於本學。每朔望，集各學會歌於書院。

凡習禮，須要澄心肅慮，審其儀節，度其容止；毋忽而惰，毋沮而忤，毋徑而野；從容而不失之迂緩，修謹而不失之拘局。久則體貌習熟，德性堅定矣。童生班次，皆

如歌詩。每間一日，則輪一班習禮；其餘皆就席，斂容肅觀。習禮之日，免其課仿。

每十日則總四班遞習於本學。每朔望，則集各學會習於書院。

凡授書不在徒多，但貴精熟。量其資稟，能二百字者，止可授以一百字。常使精神

力量有餘，則無厭苦之患，而有自得之美。諷誦之際，務令專心一志，口誦心惟，

字字句句綢繆反覆，抑揚其音節，寬虛其心意。久則義禮浹洽，聰明日開矣。

每日工夫，先考德，次背書誦書，次習禮，或作課仿，次復誦書講書，次歌《詩》。

凡習禮歌《詩》之數，皆所以常存童子之心，使其樂習不倦，而無暇及於邪僻。教

者知此，則知所施矣。雖然，此其大略也；神而明之，則存乎其人。

### **Teaching Agreement**

**Every day, early in the morning, after the pupils assemble and bow to each other,**

**the teachers should ask all of them one by one:**

**“When you love your family and respect your elders at home, has your mind-heart  
been inattentive or lacked sincerity?”**

**“When you practice rites to soften your bearing, purify your mind, and keep  
vigilant to yourself, have you carried out all the details without any overlook?”**

**“When you walk back and forth on the street according to proprieties, have you ever been careless and not comported yourself appropriately?”**

**“Whenever you speak, act, or entertain any thought, have you succeeded in not deceiving yourself and avoiding anything false or erratic? Have you persisted in being loyal, trustworthy, sincere and respectful?”**

**All youngsters’ answer must be honest. If they have committed any mistake, they should correct it. If not, they should devote more to refining themselves. In addition, the teachers should furnish timely and pertinent instructions according to situations indicated by various responses, and hence, inspire each of their pupils. After that, pupils should withdraw to their seats and begin to attend to lessons.**

**When singing verses, pupils need to tidy their appearance and take a deep breath. Let their voice be clear and distinct. Let their tone and rhythm be even and accurate. They cannot sound rash or impatient; neither reckless nor noisy; neither weak nor timid. In time, they will feel their spirit becomes liberated and joyful, and their heart is calmed and peaceful. Depending on the number of pupils, each school should be divided into four classes. In rotation each class sings on one day, while the others sit down to listen respectfully in a composed manner. Every five days all the**

four classes will sing one after another in their own school assembly. On the first and fifteenth day of every month various surrounding schools will assemble to sing together in the Ru academy (shuyuan) (i).

In practicing rituals, let the pupils' mind-heart be purified and their thoughts be serious. Teachers need to watch the details of rites, and to inspect the measures of pupils' demeanor. They cannot look negligent or lazy; neither frustrated nor ashamed; neither abrupt nor crude. Let them be at ease with themselves, but not to the point of being sluggish. Let them carefully refine their behaviors, but not to the point of being rigid. In time, their body and bearing will be habituated to the rituals; virtues and the good human nature will take root in their personhood firmly. The order for pupils to follow should be the same as that in singing. Every other day it will be the turn of one class to practice rituals, while others are seated to observe respectfully in a composed manner. On the day of practicing rituals, the pupils will be excused from writing and composition (ii) . Every ten days all four classes will assemble in their own schools and practice in rotation. On the first and fifteenth day of every month, all schools will assemble and practice together in the Ru academy.

In teaching and reading books, the value does not lie in the amount but in mastering selected materials well. Taking pupils' talents and capacities into consideration, if a

pupil can handle two hundred words, teachers should teach only one hundred so that the pupil always has a surplus of strength and spiritual energy. Then, the pupil would not suffer from being too tired of it. Instead, the pupil will feel the joy of self-satisfaction. When reciting, the pupils must be concentrated. While reciting from the mouth, they need to ponder in their mind-heart. Every word and each sentence needs to be clarified and gone over again and again. Their voice and rhythm should go up and down (following words), and their mind-heart should be relaxed and receptive. In time they will be in tune with the virtues of civility and righteousness, and their intelligence will be gradually developed.

In the daily curriculum, first, examine the pupil's moral deeds and thoughts. Second, memorize and recite books. Third, practice rituals, or write characters and compose essays. Fourth, teachers need to give lectures on books, and let pupils recite them. Last, sing verses (iii). The rationale for practicing rituals and singing verses consist in that youngsters can constantly keep them in their mind-heart. Then, they are joyful in learning and practicing without getting tired of them, and so that they have no chance to be exposed to what is bad and perverse. If teachers know this agreement, they will know what to furnish in teaching. However, what these agreed principles instruct are just the gist of teaching. Whether one can implement them

**flexibly enough to make one's teaching illustrious and magnificent depends upon people.**

Notes:

(i) The school system envisioned here by Wang Yang-ming is that every area has a major Shuyuan, and a network of minor schools or classrooms for early learning are connected to it.

(ii) Writing, or calligraphy, is a physical practice related to coursework required by civil examination. Regarding the physical dimension of Ru education, Wang Yang-ming thought ritual practice can alternate with the training of calligraphy.

(iii) According to Wang Yang-ming, for one typical day of elementary learning in Shuyuan, moral education begins in the early morning. A less intensive intelligence education and physical education follow in the morning. After a noon-break, a more intensive intelligence education is underway, and then, the daily school work will end with music and songs, a type of aesthetic education. Such a joyful school day!

### III

書中天閣勉諸生



雖有天下易生之物，一日暴之，十日寒之，未有能生者也。承諸君子不鄙，每予來歸，咸集於此，以問學為事，甚盛意也。然不能旬日之留，而旬日之間又不過三四會。一別之後，輒復離群索居，不相見者動經年歲。然則豈惟十日之寒而已乎？若是而求萌櫟之暢茂條達，不可得矣。

故予切望諸君勿以予之去留為聚散，或五六日，八九日，雖有俗事相妨，亦須破冗一會於此。務在誘掖獎勸，砥礪切磋，使道德仁義之習日親日近，則勢利紛華之染亦日遠日疏，所謂“相觀而善，百工居肆以成其事者也”。

相會之時，尤須虛心遜志，相親相敬。大抵朋友之交，以相下為益，或議論未合，要在從容涵育，相感以誠；不得動氣求勝，長傲遂非。務在默而成之，不言而信。其或矜己之長，攻人之短，粗心浮氣，矯以沽名，訐以為直，挾勝心而行憤嫉，以圯族敗群為志，則雖日講時習於此，亦無益矣。諸君念之念之！

#### **Writing on the Pavilion of Zhong Tian to Exhort Students [i]**

Let's suppose there is one thing in the world very easy to grow. However, if it was placed under the sunshine for one day, and then frozen for ten days, it would never be able to grow. I am grateful that you gentlemen do not look down upon me. Every time when I return here, you all gather at this pavilion, and then, are busy with questioning and learning. I really appreciate your kindness and enthusiasm.

However, usually, I could not spare more than ten days to stay here. Even within these ten days, we could only gather three or four times. After we say farewell to each other after this short period, we become secluded from one another and live alone again. Some of us could not even meet afterwards for several years. Isn't this more harmful than the aforementioned ten-day freezing cold? If this situation continues, can we hope that the sprouts of our self-cultivation would be able to flourish and grow into their due shape? I do not think so.

Therefore, I hope you gentlemen do not gather or leave according to my arrival or departure. Every five or six days, or every eight or nine days, even if you may be entangled with affairs in your quotidian life, you should release yourself from them to have a gathering here. The purpose of this is for you and your friends to guide and help each other, and to appraise and encourage each other. In this way, you can "hone and grind," and "cut and polish" one another so that in your moral self-

cultivation, you will feel closer and closer to the excellences of humaneness and righteousness on a daily basis. Meanwhile, you can stay further and further away from the bad influences of (vulgar people's) snobbishness and obsession with material extravagance. Therefore, it is said that "if artisans observe and better each other, they can become accomplished while staying in their workshops." (ii)

During gatherings, while keeping intimate to and respecting one another, you particularly need to make your mind receptive, and your heart humbled. In general, interactions among friends benefit from seeing ourselves inferior to each other. If we disagree, the key is to remain composed and continue to nourish and care for each other. We need to influence our friends using our sincerity. We cannot aspire after winning over others with a perturbed mood; in this way, we would encourage our arrogance and indulge in bad habits. Instead, we should make great efforts to accomplish our purpose silently, and to earn friends' trust even if we do not need to speak at all.

In an extreme situation, (we can imagine) one may be proud of one's own advantage, and then, attack others' disadvantage. This person has vulgar thoughts and a frivolous bearing. He pretends in order to earn fame. He exposes others' short-comings and thinks this exemplifies his uprightness. He harbors one heart

**always aspiring to win over others, while actually, he is jealous. He even intends to divide people and undermine communities. For this kind of person, even if he talks and performs at this pavilion every day, what is the use of it! You gentlemen, please keep this in mind! Please keep this in mind!**

Notes:

(i) Different from the two previous essays, this one was written by Wang Yang-ming to teach his adult students on how to regularly pursue their Ruist learning in a Shuyuan-styled institution. In 1522, when Wang was 54 years old, he met his students at the Pavilion of Zhong Tian in the Temple of Long Quan in Zhejiang Province. Under Wang's guidance, his students reached an agreement to gather regularly in the Pavilion on the first, eighth, fifteenth and twenty-third day of each month regardless of whether Wang Yang-ming's was present or not. This was also the initiating act leading to the establishment of a new Shuyuan. In order to remind attendants in this new Shuyuan of the genuine spirit of the Ru way of learning, Wang Yang-ming wrote this classical essay and displayed it on the wall.

(ii) Part of the quote is from the *Analects*.

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