

The Ru Mediation Series Vol.1:

Gao Panlong (1562-1626 C.E.)

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Ru Meditation:
Gao Panlong (1562-1626 C.E.)

Translated and Annotated by Bin Song

Edited by Paul Blair

Bin Song, PhD (Philosophy, Nankai University) is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at Boston University, dedicated to the revival of Ruism (Confucianism) in its contemporary, global form.

Paul Blair, MDiv, MA (Theology) is a Canadian Ru, and clinical chaplain at Riverview Health Centre in Winnipeg, Canada. His interests concern the application of ancient thought to contemporary issues, especially in the areas of spirituality, ritual, and language.

"Dedicated to my daughter. When two years old, she practiced quiet-sitting with me in the style of 'just sitting.' " -Dr. Bin Song

Table of Contents

Pinyin Pronunciation Guide	1
Introduction	2
Chapter One: Chants for Quiet-Sitting (Four Five-Character Poems)	5
Chapter Two: Chants for Quiet-Sitting (Three Seven-Character Poems)	16
Chapter Three: A Syllabus for Living in the Mountains	23
Chapter Four: Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal.	27
Chapter Five: A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting	33
Chapter Six: Postscript to “A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting”	40
Chapter Seven: The Death of Gao Panlong	44
Glossary	58
Bibliography	60

Pronunciation Guide

This work uses the Mandarin Pinyin Romanization System for Chinese characters. In Mandarin, there are four distinct tones. The Mandarin language possesses 21 consonants and 16 vowels. Combined, they have the ability to create over 400 mono-syllabic sounds. Below is a simple Pronunciation Guide for the reader to practice with while reading the text.

Pinyin	Pronunciation Description
q	sounds like “ch” in “cheer”
x	sounds like “sh” in “shoot”
zh	sounds like “j” in “jar”
r	sounds like “z” in “azure”
z	sounds like “ds” in “hoods”
c	sounds like “ts” in “hits”
s	sounds like “s” in “saw”
(y)i	sounds like “ee” in “tree”
(w)u	sounds like “oo” in “broom”
yu	sounds like “oo” in “moo”
a	sounds like “ah” in “shah”
(w)o	sounds like “or” in “core”
e	sounds like “uh” in “huh”
(y)e	sounds like “ay” in “hay”
ai	sounds like “y” in “my”
ei	sounds like “ei” in “sleigh”
ao	sounds like “ow” in “bow”
ou	sounds like “oe” in “toe”
an	sounds like “an” in “man”
en	sounds like “un” in “undo”
er	sounds like “ur” in “fur”
ang	sounds like a soft “a” followed by “ng” in “bring”
eng	sounds like a soft “e” followed by “ng” in “bring”

Introduction

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.”

This annotated translation intends to provide access to the major works of Gao Panlong (1562–1626 C.E.) on quiet-sitting for academic researchers, public readers, and practitioners of meditation. It not only aims to facilitate an understanding of Gao Panlong’s thought on quiet-sitting and his related Ruist philosophy, but—more importantly—it hopes to serve as a practical guide for meditation in the Ruist manner.

So far, the most substantial research on Gao Panlong in English has been done by R. Taylor (1978; 1990, Chapter VII). Except for my translations of the texts found in Chapters One, Two and Seven of this book (which are new to English readers), alternative translations of Chapters Three to Six can be found in Taylor (1978). In my version of the translations, I offer a substantially different understanding of key verses in these texts. Also, my annotations to these texts shall hopefully fulfill my aforementioned goals, which are not entirely addressed by Taylor’s research. As a rule, however, English readers studying Chinese thought should read as many translations as possible, and so, despite our differences, I nevertheless recommend Taylor’s books.

Gao Panlong lived as a typical Ruist scholar-official in late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 C.E.). He served in government, opposed corrupt officials, taught in private academies, and also left a significant literary legacy to subsequent generations of Ru. Both his philosophy and practice of quiet-sitting were greatly influenced by Zhu Xi (1130–1200 C.E.), the great synthesizer of Song and Ming Ruism. The practice of quiet-sitting, however, held such a central role in Gao's spiritual life that Gao's writings on the subject tended to be more sophisticated and elegant than Zhu Xi's similar works.

Among the translated texts, Chapters One and Two are poems, presenting Gao's phenomenological description of his experience of quiet-sitting. Chapters Three and Four are practical guidelines, describing how Gao practiced quiet-sitting in a ritualized way. Chapters Five and Six are philosophical treatises, elucidating Gao's reflections on quiet-sitting through the unique term *pingchang* (normalcy-and-ordinariness). Chapter Seven is a biographical account of Gao Panlong's death. By selecting these chapters for translation, I hope to present a panorama of Gao Panlong's Ruist style of meditation: how he described his experience of it, how he practiced it, how he reflected upon it philosophically, and how he lived it in everyday life. As such, the various chapters of this book need to be read together, especially Chapters Two, Five, and Six since they all express Gao's philosophy of quiet-sitting.

Several caveats should be kept in mind: first, the original texts of Chapters One to Six are from *The Posthumous Works of Master Gao*. The poem mentioned in note (i) of Chapter Six, and the text of Chapter Seven are from *The Chronological Life of the Honored Gao Zhongxian*. These original texts are all listed in the bibliography.

Second, the translations of verses from major Ruist classics mentioned in the annotations of this book are my own.

Third, the names of historical figures will follow Chinese syntax, i.e., the surname first, followed by the personal name (e.g., Gao Panlong).

Lastly, I express my sincere gratitude to Paul Blair, the English editor of this book. Paul's sound understanding of Gao Panlong's spirituality and his elegant command of the English language have made even myself fond of reading this translation repeatedly. I must also offer my thanks to all those who reviewed the manuscript of this book. Their insights have been of great benefit to both this book and my own Ruist spiritual life.

Bin Song 宋斌, 2017

Along Charles River, Boston

Chapter One: Chants for Quiet-Sitting (Four Five-Character Poems)

Introduction:

The following is a set of four poems describing Gao Panlong's meditative experiences in the mountains, near rivers, among flowers, and beneath the trees.

靜坐吟 其一

我愛山中坐，恍若羲皇時。青鬆影寂寂，白雲出遲遲。獸窟有浚谷，鳥棲無卑枝。
萬物得所止，人豈不如之。岩居飲谷水，常得中心怡。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, One.

I love to sit in the mountains.

It is like living in the time of King Fu Xi. (i)

Pine trees quietly shed their shadows;

white clouds slowly pass by. (ii)

Animals have their caves in the deep valleys;

no bird roosts upon a low branch. (iii)

Everything has its proper dwelling place; (iv)

how then could humans not?

Living among the rocks, and drinking from the valley waters,

I am ever joyful in the depths of my heart.

Notes:

(i) Fu Xi (伏羲) was a legendary sage-king whose reign during the earliest periods of Chinese civilization was considered the ideal of human society by the Ruist tradition. Under Fu Xi's leadership people were virtuous and happy, and human society enjoyed great harmony.

(ii) This may refer to the movement of clouds out from behind the mountains.

Alternatively, during quiet-sitting, the meditator's eyes might be focused on a narrow field of vision, and in this way, the clouds would seem to "pass" through one's field of vision.

(iii) All things have their proper place in the universe. This is what is meant by the next verse, "Everything has its proper dwelling place." The Ruist idea of "dynamic harmony"

(和, *he*) suggests a symbiosis among all things, each of which retains its proper, self-fulfilling nature, while simultaneously growing and changing together with others.

(iv) The opening verse of the *Great Learning* 大學, one of the Ruist “Four Books,” states, “The way of the Great Learning is to illuminate one’s bright virtue, to love and renew the people, and then, to dwell in the utmost goodness.” Meditating upon where one’s efforts at learning should “reside,” (i.e., the goal of one’s learning), is therefore a priority for Ruist spiritual practice. During Gao Panlong’s meditation, he notes that the myriad things under heaven (天下萬物, a distinctively Ruist term for everything in the world) each have their due place, which is, for him, the manifestation of cosmic harmony. Accordingly, Gao thought of quiet-sitting as a process of discovering one’s genuine self, and thus, discovering one’s proper place in the universe.

靜坐吟 其二

我愛水邊坐，一洗塵俗情。見斯逝者意，得我幽人貞。漠漠蒼苔合，寂寂野花榮。
潛魚時一出，浴鷗亦不驚。我如水中石，悠然兩含清。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, Two.

I love to sit on the river bank.

**It washes away the dust of the vulgar world,
and purifies my emotions.**

I see the significance of the flowing river. (i)

In solitude, my integrity is restored.

**In silence, the green moss gathers;
in obscurity, the wildflowers bloom. (ii)**

**A swimming fish jumps out on occasion,
but the bathing gulls remain undisturbed.**

**I am like a stone in the river:
free and joyful, both awash in clarity. (iii)**

Notes:

(i) In the *Analects* 9.17, while standing on the bank of a river, Kongzi says: “Look at how it flows on like this, never stopping day or night!” In the *Analects* 17.19, while contemplating the cosmos (*Tian*), Kongzi says: “What does *Tian* ever say? Yet the four seasons are put in motion by it, and the myriad creatures are generated from it. What does *Tian* ever say?” In these two quotes, Kongzi describes *Tian* as an all-encompassing, constantly creative, cosmic power that brings all into existence. This has become the standard cosmological view of Ruism. The “significance of the flowing river” drove Kongzi to ponder the deepest questions of human existence: in light of the eternal reality that the world is renewing itself on a daily basis, what should human beings do? *Chants for Quiet-Sitting* can be seen as Gao Panlong’s meditative effort to figure out the answer to this very question.

(ii) There are two layers of meaning to these extraordinarily descriptive words: first, meditation allows us hear what is usually unheard and see what is normally unseen, delving into the depths of cosmic life where human life is located; second, though unheard and unnoticed, things exist in a self-fulfilling manner. Thus, human beings should also find their integrated, genuine self, and so live a life that is able to satisfy oneself even while alone. The practice of discovering and enjoying one's genuine self while alone was once described as "vigilant solitude" (慎獨) by the *Zhong Yong* (中庸, *Being Centered in the Everyday World*), another of the Ruist "Four Books."

(iii) "I" feel the same "feeling" as a stone in the river. Through meditation near the river, Gao feels he is being purified by the clear current like a stone in the river. This is a vivid image of the union between the human meditator and nature.

靜坐吟 其三

我愛花間坐，於茲見天心。旭日照生采，皎月移來陰。栩栩有舞蝶，啾啾來鳴禽。
百感此時息，至樂不待尋。有酒且須飲，把盞情何深。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, Three.

I love to sit among the flowers.

Here, I feel the mind-heart of *Tian*. (i)

**When the sun rises, their colors shine brightly;
as the silver moon passes, their shadows follow along.**

**Butterflies take up a lively dance;
birds come to sing their melodious songs.**

**In this moment, all my senses are calmed.
Ultimate joy need be sought no more. (ii)**

**If there is wine, let's get to drinking it!
With cups raised, how deep our friendship is! (iii)**

Notes:

(i) According to Ruism, our emotions and intelligence are not separated from one another, hence the standard English translation of *xin* (心)—the Ruist conception of human awareness and actuality—is “mind-heart,” rather than just mind or heart. The mind-heart of *Tian* is a symbolic description of the essence of *Tian*: *Tian* is an all-encompassing, constantly creative, cosmic power that is full of life-energy and brings all into being and becoming. Flowers are beautiful plants, and so meditating among them is especially good for understanding the mind-heart of *Tian*, which is frequently described by Ruist classics as “loving life” (好生).

(ii) When the senses are calmed and the emotions purified through meditation, humans will see their “original mind-heart” (本心), and discover their “bright virtue” (明德). This “original mind-heart” unites individuals to the constantly creative cosmos without undermining the self-fulfilling nature of each individual. When we find our “original mind-heart,” ultimate joy arises. This is a process of “re-discovery,” not “searching,” as our original mind-heart is endowed by *Tian* and belongs to us.

(iii) A unique characteristic of Ruism is that it is a spiritual humanism, which takes the all-encompassing creativity of *Tian* as a transcendent ideal, and tries to realize this ideal within human society in a uniquely human—that is humane (仁, *ren*)—way.

Accordingly, Ruist meditation, which perceives the union of the all-pervading, life-energy of *Tian* with human individuals, does not reject worldly happiness or downplay ordinary human relationships. Instead, it purifies and enhances them. In this verse, we find that since the meditator rediscovers his genuine self through meditation, he re-embraces everyday human life and worldly happiness in an authentic and full-hearted way. In other words, the “ultimate joy” that arises during meditation is contiguous with our everyday human life as long as our behaviors abide by what is appropriate and proper. In terms of Zhu Xi’s and Gao Panlong’s “learning of pattern-principle” (理學), we can rephrase this last clause as: “as long as human behaviors abide by pattern-principles.” This is what the Ruist way of life is all about. (Notes: A pattern-principle is the dynamic and harmonious way by which a set of cosmic realities

fits together, as I have explained in some of my other writings. Also, I have a more detailed discussion of this concept in Chapter Five.)

靜坐吟 其四

我愛樹下坐，終日自翺躩。據梧有深意，撫松豈徒然。亮哉君子心，不為一物牽。
綠葉青天下，翠幄蒼崖前。撫己足自悅，此味無言傳。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, Four

**I love to sit beneath the trees,
sauntering about the whole day long. (i)**

**Sitting beside a parasol-tree has deep significance;
how is it pointless to touch the pines?**

**O, how bright is the noble-person's (君子, *junzi*) (ii) mind-heart;
nothing can lead it astray! (iii)**

**Green leaves under a blue sky;
an emerald tent beneath verdant cliffs. (iv)**

My own touch leaves me perfectly content; (v)

this feeling is beyond words.

Notes:

(i) Although these four poems are written for “quiet-sitting,” we can see from some verses that the meditator did not only sit still during meditation. His meditative practice maintains a lively interaction with nature and his fellow human beings. In this way, Ruist meditation is deeply integrative, rather than escapist.

(ii) It is the ideal of Ru self-cultivation to become a noble-person (君子).

(iii) If the mind-heart can be dragged away and disturbed by external things, and thus feel unsettled, then it is not our true mind-heart, nor is it our genuine self. Hence, as long as our interactions with external things abide by pattern-principles, we will always feel self-controlled and well-poised in depth of our heart.

(iv) This describes the environment where Gao’s quiet-sitting took place.

(v) During quiet-sitting our hands can be placed over each other, on top of our crossed thighs; or they can be put on our knees; or wherever else we feel comfortable.

Regardless, the feeling of our “own touch” can be transformed during deep meditation: a feeling of the transparency and lightness of our body, and a correspondingly deep joy.

Here, Gao exclaims that the Ruist spiritual practice of quiet-sitting could even make meditators joyful and satisfied through one's own mere touch! How simple yet powerful this practice is! Gao's words "perfectly content" are reminiscent of Kongzi's teaching in the *Analects* that a Ru's learning should be "for oneself" (為己), as well as the *Zhong Yong*'s teaching that a Ru is able to "enter no place where (a Ru) is not content by himself" (無入而不自得).

Commentary:

Gao Panlong was a great Ru of the late Ming Dynasty. In addition to being an active politician who made significant contributions to reforming and reviving that declining dynasty, he was also a deeply spiritual man. His writings on Ruist quiet-sitting are among the best of the entire tradition.

Each of the four *Chants for Quiet-Sitting* consists of five couplets of five-character lines. From these poems, we note some peculiarities of the Ruist meditative experience in the following points:

First, a Ru does not care much about the temporal origin of the cosmos. Instead, he tries to understand the cosmos through the phenomena of reality. From a human perspective, the cosmos is an all-encompassing, constantly creative process that is full of life-energy, and therefore brings all under heaven into being and becoming. This energy's activity is so subtle and pervasive that only a well-disciplined Ru meditator can hear what is normally unheard, and see what is normally unseen.

Secondly, a Ru tries to find his genuine self—his original human mind-heart—within this holistic cosmological view. Once the genuine self has been rediscovered, he is depicted as joyful, self-fulfilling, self-satisfying, and at peace.

Finally, the Ruist universe is a value-laden continuum between the worlds of man and nature. This means that mystical practices—such as quiet-sitting—enhance, rather than undermine, the values of humanism and worldly happiness, which are based upon the realization of these values.

Chapter Two: Chants for Quiet-Sitting (Three Seven-Character Poems)

靜坐吟 一

高攀龍

靜坐非玄非是禪，須知吾道本於天。直心來自降衷後，浩氣觀於未發前。
但有平常為究竟，更無玄妙可窮研。一朝忽顯真頭面，方信誠明本自然。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, One (i)

Quiet-sitting is neither mysterious (ii) nor Zen-like;

my Way, rather, is rooted in *Tian*.

My mind-heart is set aright once *Tian* has endowed it with goodness.

Before emotions stir, the ocean of cosmic energy can be felt. (iii)

True reality is normal and ordinary; (iv)

beyond this, there is no mystery to be sought.

One day, suddenly, our true face will reveal itself;

then we shall see that sincerity and enlightenment arise innately. (v)

Notes:

(i) Gao wrote two series of poems entitled *Chants for Quiet-Sitting*. The first, which is found in Chapter One of this book, consists of poems written in lines of five characters. The second is this one, with each verse written in lines of seven characters. The five-character *Chants* are more descriptive, while these seven-character poems are more philosophical. In other words, this second series of *Chants for Quiet-Sitting* express Gao Panlong's philosophical understanding of Ruist meditation.

(ii) The character 玄 means “mysterious.” Traditionally, the “Mysterious Learning” (玄學) referred to a Daoist tradition which flourished in the period of Wei and Jin (220-589 C.E.). Therefore, by denying that quiet-sitting belongs to either Daoism or Buddhism, Gao emphasizes the particularly Ruist style of his meditation.

(iii) During quiet-sitting, one's emotions are not aroused since one is not occupied with regular human affairs. For Gao, this is the perfect moment for meditators to sense the all-pervasive cosmic vital-energy (氣, *qi*), within which the innately good human nature is immersed. This verse employs tropes from Ruist classics such as the *Zhong Yong* (中庸, *Being Centered in the Everyday World*) and the *Mencius*. The first paragraph of the *Zhong Yong* says: “Before the emotions of delight, anger, sorrow and joy are aroused, [the state of human nature] is called ‘centered;’ after the emotions of delight, anger, sorrow and joy are aroused, [the state of human nature] is called ‘harmonious’ if all the emotions abide by what is appropriate.” A discussion of *qi* can be found in the *Gong Sunchou* chapter of the *Mencius*.

(iv) Gao has a detailed explanation of the term *pingchang*, “normal-and-ordinary”, in his *Treatise on Quiet-Sitting*, which is found in Chapter Five of this book.

(v) The relationship between the “sincerity” (誠) and “enlightenment” (明) is a central topic in the *Zhong Yong*. For Gao, quiet-sitting helps us to realize and preserve the living-substance of what is normal and ordinary, viz., a particular form of dynamic harmony that unites us with the universe. In such a moment, we are both sincere to our genuine human nature, and enlightened as to why this is so. Because this capacity to realize and maintain dynamic harmony is endowed by *Tian*, and innate to human beings, Gao describes it as “arising innately.”

靜坐吟 二

一片靈明一敬融，別無餘法可施功。乾坤浩蕩今還古，日月光華西復東。
莫羨仙家烹大藥，何須釋氏說真空。些兒欲問儒宗事，妙訣無過未發中。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, Two

**Full spiritual enlightenment is achieved only through reverence; (i)
besides this, no other method provides success.**

Heaven and Earth: how vast and mighty as present becomes past! (ii)

Sun and Moon: how bright and brilliant as dusk becomes dawn!

Envy not the Immortalists brewing their grand elixirs; (iii)

what need is there for Buddhist doctrines of empty reality?

Some will want to ask about the goal of Ruism—

its only secret is this: staying centered, ahead of one's emotions. (iv)

Notes:

(i) This is a condensed, poetic expression of the philosophical view found in Gao Panlong's *Postscript to "A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting,"* which is found in Chapter Six of this book.

(ii) The original characters for "Heaven" and "Earth" are "Qian" and "Kun", names of two hexagrams in the *Classic of Change* which symbolize heaven and earth. The Ru worldview encompasses reality as seen from a human perspective: everything is and becomes together between heaven and earth, amidst the eternal cycles of the four seasons. In contrast to the sometimes quietest and nihilistic tendencies of Daoism and Buddhism, Ruism emphasizes that the world is real, and thus, human life has objective value.

(iii) “Immortalists” refers to Daoists, since one major goal of Daoist practice is usually described as achieving physical immortality.

(iv) Gao Panlong’s philosophical understanding of Ruist quiet-sitting stems from the text of “Being Centered in the Everyday World” (中庸). For Gao, quiet-sitting is an effective means for humans to re-discover the spiritual state of “being centered,” a particular form of dynamic harmony, before their emotions are aroused to actively engage with human affairs. For Gao, rediscovering this capacity to realize dynamic harmony is of the utmost importance for humans to achieve dynamic harmony in other moments of life, apart from quiet-sitting. In other words, quiet-sitting should “moisten” (涵) and “nourish” (養) the human capacity for realizing and preserving dynamic harmony, viz., the ideal state of human life. Please refer to my notes in Gao Panlong’s *A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting* for more details about Gao Panlong’s philosophical understanding of quiet-sitting.

靜坐吟 三

一自男兒墮地來，戴高履厚號三才。未曾一膜顏先隔，何事千山首不同。
一靜自能開百障，老翁依舊返嬰孩。從今去卻蒲團子，鯤海鵬天亦快哉。

Chants for Quiet-Sitting, Three

From the time man is dropped upon the earth,

**with the heights overhead and the depths underfoot,
he is counted among the Three Powers. (i)**

Even without a veil, one's true face remains hidden. (ii)

Why have you quit for the endless mountains without looking back? (iii)

Once you are quiet, all obstacles shall be overcome.

Even an old man can return to his earliest youth!

Let us give up our meditation cushions henceforth;

like Kun in the ocean, or Peng in the sky: how happy we too shall be! (iv)

Notes:

(i) The Three Powers (三才, *sancai*) of the universe refer to Heaven, Earth and Human Beings. In Ruist cosmology, they are regarded as three co-creators whose correlative interaction brings a myriad of things under heaven into being and becoming.

(ii) Gao believed that the spiritual state of “being centered” or “being normal-and-ordinary” is endowed by *Tian* at birth. Without Ruist self-cultivation, however, human beings will fail to re-discover—or even understand—this original capacity. Thus, if this self-cultivation is carried out incorrectly, despite the fact that no “veil” conceals the normal-and-ordinary, living substance of human nature, one might

still be unable to find it. This living-substance of human nature is our “true face,” i.e., our genuine self.

(iii) Ruism claims that one need not retreat from human civilization and become a recluse in order to achieve spiritual aptitude.

(iv) The legendary Kun and Peng are a giant fish and bird from Chinese folklore.

Ultimately, Ruist quiet-sitting is about re-discovering the one particular form of pattern-principle that makes all things fit together dynamically and harmoniously. There are, however, countless other forms of pattern-principles beyond the context of quiet-sitting. Once one has become familiar with the realization and enjoyment of a particular form of pattern-principle through quiet-sitting, one then becomes more adept at realizing and enjoying other pattern-principles beyond quiet-sitting. No opposition between physical movement and stillness exists in Ruist meditation, and thus, a constant, living spirit of insight, happiness, and freedom is able to underpin every moment of human life. Please also refer to Chapter Five to see the related discussion.

Chapter Three: A Syllabus for Living in the Mountains

山居课程

五鼓擁衾，起坐叩齒，凝神澹然自攝。天甫明，小憩即起，盥漱畢，活火焚香，默坐，玩易。晨食後徐行百步，課兒童灌花木，即入室靜意讀書。午食後，散步舒嘯。覺有昏氣，瞑目少憩。啜茗，焚香，令意思爽暢。然後，讀書至日昃而止，趺坐盡線香一炷，落日銜山，出望雲物，課園丁秬植。晚食淡素酒，取陶然篝燈，隨意涉獵，興盡而止，就榻，趺坐，俟睡思欲酣乃寢。

A Syllabus for Living in the Mountains.

At the hour of the fifth drum (about 3–5 AM), rise and straighten your quilt. Sit and click your teeth. (i) Focus your spirit, and in this way it will become strengthened of its own accord. (ii)

At the first light of dawn, take a short nap and get up right after. Once you've washed and brushed, light a fire and burn some incense; then sit silently and play around with the *Classic of Change*. (iii)

After breakfast, walk slowly—for about a hundred paces. Practice the lesson of watering trees and flowers—like a child (iv)—and then, go straight to your inner-room and study your books with a calm mind.

After lunch, go for a walk, stretch, and take in some fresh air. If you feel drowsy, (v) close your eyes and have a short nap. After this, drink some tea and burn a stick of incense, so that your mind is made clear and at ease. Then, read your books until the sun tilts towards the west. Once you are finished, burn a single, slender stick of incense, (vi) and then, cross your legs and practice quiet-sitting. (vii) When the sun starts to set and touch the mountains, head outside to watch the clouds and the landscape, and then, like a gardener, practice the art of horticulture.

At dinner, drink some light rice wine. Bring along a clay lamp with a bamboo cover, and do whatever suits you until you are satisfied.

Go to your bed and practice quiet-sitting with your legs crossed. As soon as you think you feel tired, lie down and go to sleep.

Notes:

(i) This may be an instruction to begin quiet-sitting, though no particular posture is mentioned. Also, it helps to wake up and be more mindful to use one's nails to gently click one's teeth before practicing the early-morning quiet-sitting.

(ii) Gao's method for quiet-sitting is seemingly non-methodical. Gao thinks that, using any method we like to concentrate our mind, our mind-heart will become quieted of its own accord. More details about Gao's meditative technique can be found in note (iii) of the *Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal*, Chapter Four of this book.

(iii) "Play around with the *Classic of Change*" refers to the contemplative and joyful process in which a Ruist noble-person beholds the images of the hexagrams and ponders their corresponding words in the *Classic of Change*. The *Appended Texts* 繫辭 of the *Classic of Change* says: "A Ruist noble-person, when living at home, will behold the images and play with the words."

(iv) The practice of watering flowers and trees belongs to "lesser learning" (小學), an elementary stage of Ruist education for children and adolescents. That Gao includes contents of "lesser learning" within his syllabus of one-day meditation speaks to his free and cheerful style of meditation.

(v) Literally, "if you feel your vital-energies (氣) are muddled." The idea of muddled vital-energies making meditators drowsy is also mentioned in Chapter Five.

(vi) “A slender stick of incense” may be used to mark the time for quiet-sitting. Overall, the *Syllabus* mentions “sitting” four times in a single day. Thus, Gao Panlong seems to be suggesting that one sit multiple times, but not take too long for each.

(vii) This is the first time that a particular posture for quiet-sitting (i.e., with crossed legs), is mentioned.

Commentary:

This *Syllabus for Living in the Mountains* was written by Gao Panlong in the same year as the *Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal*. In these essays, Gao Panlong endeavors to present quiet-sitting in a ritualized way. According to his biography, Gao was quite fond of practicing the ritualized form of quiet-sitting in the mountains with his Ruist friends. The difference between these two texts, however, is also obvious: the *Rule* is for a seven-day meditation, while the *Syllabus* defines a one-day meditation.

From the *Syllabus*, we know that Gao’s Ruist practice of quiet-sitting, even in this one-day ritualized format, is of a free and cheerful nature. One can water flowers and trees, read books, drink tea, enjoy the sunset, take a nap, etc. One can even drink and banquet with one’s friends during dinner. Nothing extreme is demanded.

Finally, Gao’s equal emphasis on the importance of reading and quiet-sitting within this *syllabus* reminds us of Zhu Xi’s method of practicing “quiet-sitting for half the day, and reading for the other half of the day.” (半日靜坐， 半日讀書)

Chapter Four: Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal

復七規

復七規，取大易七日来復之義也。凡應物稍疲，即當靜定，七日以濟之，所以休養氣體，精明志意，使原本不匱者也。先一日，放意緩形，欲睡即睡，務令暢悅，昏倦刷濯，然後入室，炷香趺坐。凡靜坐之法，喚醒此心，卓然常明，志無所適而已。志無所適，精神自然凝復，不待安排，勿著方所，勿思效驗。初入靜者，不知攝持之法，惟體貼聖賢切要之言，自有入處。靜至三日必臻妙境，四五日後尤宜警策，勿令懶散，飯後必徐行百步，不可多食酒肉，致滋昏濁。臥不得解衣，欲睡則臥，乍醒即起。至七日則精神充溢，諸疾不作矣。食芹而美，敢告同志。

Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal

The title of the *Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal* is taken from the *Classic of Change*:

“after seven days there is renewal.” (i)

Whenever you are a bit wearied from dealing with your affairs, you should promptly make yourself quiet and settled. Within seven days you can achieve this so that your vital-energy (氣) and body are restored, your will and mind are purified and enlightened, and the original root of your human nature is not exhausted.

On the first day, relax your mind and ease your body. If you desire a nap, then take a nap. Make yourself comfortable and at ease. At the end of the day, when you feel sleepy, wash and brush, and then enter your inner-room. Burn a stick of incense, and sit cross-legged. (ii)

Any method of quiet-sitting should arouse and awaken your very mind-heart, raising it up and keeping it constantly illumined, so that it no longer intends anything improper. If your mind-heart no longer intends anything improper, your spirit will be renewed and strengthened as a result. Do not waste time with a particular arrangement, nor insist upon some rigid technique, nor fret over the end results. (iii)

Beginners seeking to enter into quietude may not know how to achieve and sustain it, but by carefully considering key passages from the sayings of the sages and worthies, they will find the entryway. (iv)

By maintaining quietude until the third day, you will achieve a wonderful state. Once the fourth and fifth days have passed, however, you must be particularly vigilant. Do not become slothful or negligent. After a meal, go for a slow walk of about a hundred paces. You should not consume too much meat or alcohol, (v) lest you become increasingly agitated, confused, and disorderly. When lying in bed, do

not remove your clothes. When you wish to sleep, lie down. When you wake up, get up immediately.

By the seventh day, your spirit will be fully replenished, without any infirmity at all; and just like a meal of sweet celery, readily share it with your friends. (vi)

Notes:

(i) The hexagram *Fu* 復 (*Renewal*) in the *Classic of Change* consists of one yang line at the bottom and five yin lines. Compared with the hexagram *Kun* 坤 (*Obedience*) consisting entirely of yin lines, the hexagram *Fu* is an image of how the yang power begins to re-emerge, i.e., “renew” within the hexagram *Kun* whose six positions are all occupied by yin lines. In the *Classic of Change*, a yang line represents what is positive and energetic, and therefore, the hexagram *Fu* can symbolize how humans renew their energy through the practice of quiet-sitting. According to the text of the *Classic of Change*, seven days are required for the yang line to return to the Hexagram *Kun* and turn it into the Hexagram *Fu*. Without delving too deeply into the philosophy of the *Classic of Change*, we can nevertheless see that Gao Panlong has deliberately embedded the rationale for his continuous seven-day practice of quiet-sitting within the teaching of the *Classic of Change*. This speaks to the Ruist intent of Gao Panlong’s practice. Buddhism also has a practice of seven-day meditation, and even though Gao may have been influenced by this, it is clear that both his practice and philosophy for quiet-sitting is distinctively Ruist.

(ii) The first day's practice is for regathering one's energy in a very relaxed way. The "rule" include burning incense and sitting in a specific posture (crossed-legged) at a particular time (before sleep).

(iii) When Gao Panlong wrote this *Rule* in 1598, he was 37 years old, having regularly practiced quiet-sitting since the age of 31 (Yang Ching 2011: 321). He therefore devoted himself to several years of diligent practice before writing the *Rule* and summarizing his methods for quiet-sitting.

Compared to other methods of quiet-sitting, Gao's is almost a "non-method." He insists that, as long as the human mind-heart does not intend anything improper, meditators who continuously sit quietly will have their mind-hearts quieted, and consequently, will recover an energetic mindfulness. As such, quiet-sitting need not be performed according to any fixed technique, nor should meditators be concerned with the efficacy of their practice.

Nevertheless, from the next verse we know that this non-methodical method does not mean that *beginners* should not gather and concentrate their attention upon a particular target. Experienced meditators, however, well beyond the need for methodical structures, should advance to Gao's non-methodical meditation. For Gao, quiet-sitting is ultimately non-methodical because the original state of human mind-heart (which Gao calls "the original root of human nature," a Ruist phrase), is energetic and mindful. Thus, any method should recover, nurture and strengthen this state of the human mind-heart

with which human beings are originally endowed. Furthermore, the purpose of quiet-sitting is not simply to sit quietly. Rather, it strives for active and efficient engagement with all facets of human life. In this way, no matter what method we employ, we must understand the ordinariness of meditation and not overestimate the extraordinary experiences we may have during the practice. Obviously, both reasons represent the Gao's peculiarly Ruist approach to meditation.

(iv) For beginners, the priority in quiet-sitting is to calm down and focus the mind. According to Gao's suggestion, pondering the wise teachings of the Ruist classics is a good method with which to start. Other more familiar methods such as counting one's breath, contemplating important icons, etc., can also achieve similar results.

(v) Traditional Ru are neither vegans nor teetotalers. Nevertheless, Ru intend to be moderate and appropriate with regard to pleasure.

(vi) Celery is not a precious food, so it is humble to describe what one intends to tell one's friends as something like "sweet celery." This trope is from a Chinese idiom: 食芹雲美. According to accounts from Gao Panlong's friends, his seven-day quiet-sitting was indeed practiced together with a couple of his friends.

Commentary:

The *Rule for a Seven-Day Renewal* represents Gao Panlong's endeavor to practice quiet-sitting in a ritualized way. The Ruist peculiarities for this ritualized practice include:

1. The rationale of the seven-day, continuous, spiritual practice centering upon quiet-sitting is grounded in the *Classic of Change*.
2. For beginners, Gao suggests the recitation and contemplation of Ruist classics as the way to concentrate one's attention.
3. The seemingly non-methodic way of meditation is based upon the Ruist understanding of the original state of the human mind-heart, i.e., the original root of human nature.
4. Gao instructs meditators to take meditative experience in a "normal and ordinary" (平常) way, and thus, understand the practice of quiet-sitting as being a continuous extension of, rather than an interruption of the ordinary moments of human life. I will explain why this "normal and ordinary" attitude is particularly Ruist in the following chapters.

Chapter Five: A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting.

Introduction:

The following is, in my view, Gao Panlong's most refined reflection on his Ruist practice of quiet-sitting. It is a very dense text, and accordingly, my annotation is also dense. I suggest that readers read the text without consulting my annotations at first, and then read them together.

靜坐說

靜坐之法，不用一毫安排，只平平常常默然靜去。此平常二字，不可容易看過，即性體也，以其清淨不容一物故，謂之平常。晝前之易如此，人生而靜以上如此，喜怒哀樂未發如此，乃天理之自然，須在人各各自體貼出，方是自得。靜中妄念，強除不得，真體既顯，妄念自息。昏氣亦強除不得，妄念既淨，昏氣自清。只體認本性，原來本色還他湛然而已，大抵著一毫意不得，著一毫見不得，纔添一念便失本色。由靜而動，亦只平平常常，湛然動去，靜時與動時一色，動時與靜時一色，所以一色者只是一箇平常也，故曰無動無靜。學者不過借靜坐中，認此無動無靜之體

云爾。靜中得力方是動中真得力，動中得力方是靜中真得力，所謂敬者此也，所謂仁者此也，所謂誠者此也，是復性之道也。

A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting

The practice of quiet-sitting does not require any particular arrangement whatsoever. We have only to retire silently in order to quiet ourselves in the most normal-and-ordinary (平平常常, *pingpingchangchang*) (i) way.

“Normalcy” and “ordinariness”—we must never downplay these two words! They express our essential living-substance; and because it is clear and pure, unperturbed by anything, we call it normal-and-ordinary. (ii)

Before a single stroke is written down, the *Change* is as such; (iii) before a person is born with a quiet disposition, (iv) [the world] is as such; and when delight, anger, sorrow and joy have yet to be aroused, [human beings] are also as such. (v) This is, in fact, the innate pattern-principle (vi) of *Tian*. Each individual must immerse themselves in it and nurture it, for it is the way to self-fulfillment.

As for random thoughts which arise during quiet-sitting, we cannot expel them by force. Once we rediscover our essential living-substance, however, such random thoughts subside on their own. Nor can muddled vital-energies be dispelled by force. Once random thoughts have been purged, our muddled vital-energies will clear themselves accordingly.

All that is needed is to recognize our original nature, and recover the clarity which alone belongs to its original character. In general, we cannot force a single idea upon it, nor force a single intention. Once such a thought has been forced upon it, its original character is lost.

To proceed from stillness to movement, we need only to move with this clarity in a normal-and-ordinary way, for periods of stillness and periods of movement should be the same, and periods of movement and periods of stillness should be the same. They should be the same because that which is universal (i.e., our essential living-substance) is also called normal-and-ordinary, and therefore, is not limited to either stillness or movement.

Scholars merely use quiet-sitting to recognize their living-substance, which neither remains still nor moves. (vii) Being strengthened within stillness is how we are genuinely strengthened in our movement; and being strengthened within movement is how we are genuinely strengthened in our stillness. This is the same thing as

“reverence” (敬); this is the same thing as “humaneness” (仁); this is the same thing as “sincerity” (誠). In a word, this is the Way to recover our human nature.

Notes:

(i) “A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting” was composed by Gao Panlong when he was 52 years old. It summarizes the methodology of his two-decade long practice of quiet-sitting in these two characters: normalcy-and-ordinariness (平常, *pingchang*). In order to correctly understand the meaning of this phrase, we must first know that its philosophy is rooted in the title of one of the canonical Four Books of the Ruist tradition: *Being Centered in the Everyday World* (中庸, *zhongyong*), and also, that Gao is paraphrasing this title as *pingchang* in order to describe his method of quiet-sitting. Both “normalcy-ordinariness,” and *Being Centered in the Everyday World* suggest that Ruist spirituality intends its practitioners to achieve a normal—and therefore the most healthy and sustainable—state in the everyday and ordinary moments of human life, regardless of whether these moments are during quiet-sitting or not. What is “normal” or “central” for Ruism is the state of dynamic harmony which leads to the symbiotic co-thriving of all involved beings. Therefore, the reason why Gao emphasizes that quiet-sitting should seek normalcy-and-ordinariness is because he thinks that it is a useful method for understanding, feeling and enacting this dynamic harmony. Having done so in the context of quiet-sitting, practitioners should then be able to pursue additional dynamic harmonies beyond the context of quiet-sitting, i.e., when they are actively engaged with the world.

(ii) There are three kinds of “dynamic harmony” which are continuous with one another in Ruist cosmology. First, the entire cosmos, *Tian*, is an all-encompassing field of dynamic harmony, since everything is and becomes together within *Tian*. Second, all life is generated by dynamic harmony. As we know from modern biology, life would not be possible without a certain equilibrium of energy through which living organisms function optimally using minimal energy, while maintaining a symbiotic relationship with their environment. Finally, the human species is also born with a certain degree of dynamic harmony. What is peculiar to human beings, however, is that, through rituals, symbols, technologies and all other elements of human civilization, human beings can expand their state of dynamic harmony to the entire cosmos and therefore, manifest the dynamic harmony of *Tian* itself in a uniquely human (i.e., humane) way.

With these cosmological and anthropological insights in mind, we can understand why Gao calls the “essential living-substance” (性體) of human nature “clear and pure,” and how it should be re-discovered and nurtured through the practice of quiet-sitting in a normal-and-ordinary way. This is because the “essential living-substance” of human nature refers to the uniquely human way of achieving dynamic harmony, the most sustainable way of human life both individually and collectively.

(iii) The *Change* here refers to the realities of cosmic change that the *Classic of Change* (易經) seeks to investigate.

(iv) The Chapter “On Music” (樂記) in the *Classic of Rites* (禮記) teaches that “human beings are born with a quiet disposition” (人生而靜).

(v) *Being Centered in the Everyday World* teaches that “before the emotions of delight, anger, sorrow and joy are aroused, (the state of human nature) is called ‘centered;’ after the emotions of delight, anger, sorrow and joy are aroused, (the state of human nature) is called ‘harmonious’ if all the emotions abide by what is appropriate.” For Gao Panlong, quiet-sitting is a means of searching for the “centered” state, a particular form of dynamic harmony.

(vi) A pattern-principle is the dynamic and harmonious way in which a set of cosmic realities (including human realities) fit together. For example, the emergence of any living organism requires a certain equilibrium of energy in order to survive, which is the pattern-principle of life in general. In the general relationship between parents and children, children must offer respect, and parents must be kind in order to correspond with one another in a dynamic and harmonious way. In this way, the virtues of filiality (孝) and parental kindness (慈) are the pattern-principles for parent-child relationships. For Gao Panlong, quiet-sitting is one way for humans to realize the connection between the essential living-substance of human nature and the most generic features of the all-encompassing and constantly cosmic creative power of *Tian*. In this sense, quiet-sitting enables us to feel and understand the pattern-principle of *Tian*.

(vii) Since quiet-sitting is intended to help rediscover one's essential living-substance (i.e., the intrinsic human capacity to realize dynamic harmony in evolving life situations), then the goal of quiet-sitting lies beyond the physical limitations of stillness or movement. For Gao Panlong, humans should be attentive to any pattern-principle in any situation, so that a constant state of "reverence" towards potential pattern-principles, and a consistent state of "sincerity" towards one's genuine human nature is created. If we can achieve this dynamic harmony, then we have also followed Kongzi's essential teaching on "humaneness" (仁).

Chapter Six: Postscript to “A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting”

書靜坐說後

萬歷癸丑秋靜坐武林弢光山中，作靜坐說，越二年觀之說，殆未備也。夫靜坐之法，入門者藉以涵養，初學者藉以入門，彼夫初入之心妄念膠結，何從而見平常之體乎？平常則散漫去矣。故必收斂身心以主於一，一即平常之體也，主則有意存焉。此意亦非著意，蓋心中無事之謂，一著意則非一也。不著意而謂之意者，但從衣冠瞻視間，整齊嚴肅，則心自一漸久漸熟，漸平常矣，故主一者學之成始成終者也。乙卯孟冬志。

Postscript to “*A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting*.”

In the autumn of the forty-first year of the Wanli Emperor (1613), while I practiced quiet-sitting at Taoguang [Temple] in the Wulin Mountains, I composed “*A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting*.” Now that two years have passed, as I look over this treatise, I find that it is not yet quite complete.

Mature practitioners, who have [already] learned the fundamentals, practice quiet-sitting in order to nourish and cultivate themselves. Novices do so in order to learn the fundamentals. The mind-hearts of these novices, however, are entangled by random thoughts. How can they perceive and sustain their living-substance in a

normal-and-ordinary way? If “normalcy-and-ordinariness” is their [only] guide, they risk becoming careless and sloppy as a result. (i)

Therefore, we must always keep our body and mind-heart in check in order to focus upon the One. “The One” is normalcy-and-ordinariness, which is the living-substance (of human nature). “Focusing upon” this principle means that we maintain it in an intentional way. This “intention” is not the forced sort of intention [mentioned in my *Treatise*]: it means that there is nothing overwhelming within our mind-hearts. Once we force any intention upon our practice, this Oneness is also lost.

The reason we can speak of doing this “in an intentional way,” but without it being a forced intention, is this: in everyday life, whenever we don clothes, put on our hats, or see and meet with one another, we do so with order and decorum. (ii)

Through this practice, our mind-heart gradually trains itself over a long period, and then, just as gradually, it becomes normal-and-ordinary. In this way, those who focus upon the One are also able to complete their learning from the very beginning to the very end.

Written on the 2nd of December (1615).

Notes:

(i) I mentioned in note (i) of Chapter Five that “*A Treatise on Quiet-Sitting*” was composed when Gao was 52 and thus, an adept Ruist meditator. From his autobiographical writings, we know that his understanding of Ruist quiet-sitting developed in stages. Thus, his summary of his method with the singular phrase “*pingchang*,” is the product of a very advanced level of understanding. Novices, however, require additional guidance on attaining this *pingchang*. This motivation to compose supplementary material for quiet-sitting is further expressed in the following poem by Gao:

一番攻破一番平，到得平時無處尋。不說從前經歷路，只拈平處誤人深。

One moment of impasse, one moment of breakthrough:

this is how ordinary life comes to us; we will find nothing else.

But if we do not speak of our past experiences on the road,

then only knowing normal things will lead people badly astray.

(ii) Gao Panlong’s method of quiet-sitting ultimately centers upon the preservation of Oneness, i.e., the integrity of the living-substance of human mind-heart that functions throughout all the still and moving moments of everyday human life. This is achieved through our intentional observance of the pattern-principles in our everyday life. Thus, it is Zhu Xi’s teaching of “preserving one’s reverence” (持敬, *chi-jing*), rather than “preserving one’s stillness” (持靜, *chi-jing*), that underpins Gao Panlong’s Ruist method

of quiet-sitting. As such, the usual techniques for beginners should also be oriented towards “focusing upon the One” and “preserving one’s reverence.” For example, contemplating one’s breath, or reflecting upon passages from the Ruist classics during quiet-sitting, should be used to realize the pattern-principle through which one’s meditative experience is optimized. Such meditative experiences, however, should be no different than those achieved during the moving moments of everyday life.

Chapter Seven: The Death of Gao Panlong

Introduction:

A biography of Gao Panlong was written by one of his students, another Ruist scholar-official, Hua Yuncheng (1588–1648). I have selected from it this account of Gao's death for translation and commentary. All the dates mentioned in this chapter have been translated from the ancient Chinese lunar calendar.

高忠憲公年譜

六年丙寅，六十五歲

二月仲丁，奉六君子從祀道南祠。六子者，涇陽涇凡兩顧子，啟新錢子，元台薛子，我素安子，本儒劉子。進則正言直諫於朝，退則明善淑人於野，丹心矢竭於少壯，素節不改於暮年，今日講壇既毀，恐年久事湮，故有是舉。

三月十六日謁道南祠。十七日丑時被逮，不辱赴水終。

初六日，逮繆西溪周季侯，十四日，又有緹騎往蘇，先生自度不免。十六日之早，以東林拆後，會講久輟，神主俱藏道南祠，特肅衣冠往謁，有《別聖文》，隨焚其草，歸則看花後園，與一二門生談笑自若。午後門生華仲通自吳門至，傳言頗異，先生無幾微見顏色。季弟從山中入城，相與暢飲園亭，顏酡意悅，旁一友言，此

信未的，先生微笑曰，“此信想的，吾視死如歸耳，心同太虛，原無生死，何得視生死為二？若臨死轉一念便墮坑落塹，不是立命之學。平生講學此處看極分明，得多少力！”是夕祖孫父子從容晚酌，無一言及家事，止云：“吾有贍田二百畝，售之可完緹騎費，蕭然就道矣。”晚飯後忻然就榻，呼諸子：“明日恐有事，汝輩各歸寢。”夜半壻秦君鄰復傳日中信，諸子不令先生知。先生正睡覺，問曰：“信的乎？”整衣起坐從容入書齋，諸子後隨，曰：“吾欲稍料理出門計，可暫退。但亟命家人，覓舟明早入郡，無被逮事即歸，有即赴京。不使官旗到家，嚇汝曹耳。”作字二三紙鎖篋中，復之內寢與夫人款語半晌出，兩孫趨侍，取封同黃紙，置幾上指示曰：“明日以此付官旗，勿先開。”復諭曰：“吾明日從郡中往京，無歸家相見期。丁寧汝者只四字曰，無貽祖羞。”因命仍暫退，諸子候齋外，方商略赴京事，三四刻不聞動靜。推戶入第，見鐙火熒然，几案寂然，先祠爐香拂拂然，覓先生不見，急發前紙觀之，乃遺表也。云：“臣雖削奪，舊系大臣，大臣受辱則辱國，故北向叩頭，從屈平之遺則，君恩未報，結願來生，臣高攀龍垂絕書，乞使者執此報皇上。”復有別友人書云：“僕得從李元禮，范孟博游矣，一生學力到此，亦得少力，心如太虛，本無生死，何幻質之足戀乎？”諸子惶駭，急從旁扉奔池畔，則先生已赴水矣。此三月十七丑時也。

先是門人華閻修夢遊桃園，見一洞光景奇絕，欲入不得，睡於洞口，有二人深衣幅巾以塵尾揮曰：“急醒急醒。”閻修問姓氏，曰：“吾周衡台，魏廓園也，寄語汝師，確乎不可拔潛龍也，急來急來，會機無失，當相會於桃源深處。”閻修覺而異之以告先生，先生點頭曰：“或別有應。”

尤異者，先生平立水中，左手護心，右手傍岸，衣履整齊，污泥不沾身，滴水不入腹，數日成殮，面色如生，人咸以為異雲。

嘗有友問避亂之策，先生曰：“先要打定一個大主意隨地行去。康節詩云，上天生我，上天死我，一聽於天，有何不可？人若無此主意，臨時便手忙腳亂，不能安於天理。”又有問：“朝聞夕死，何以為可？”先生曰：“我有四字，人忽以為常談，不必說。”其友極叩之，先生曰：“當死便死。”其生平日言如此，是可以觀先生矣。劉念台曰：“先生平日學力堅定，故臨化時做得主張，如此攝氣歸心，攝心歸虛，形化而神不化，亦吾儒常事。若以佛氏臨終顯幻之法求之則惑矣。”知言哉！嗚呼！先生固以微言相示矣！

In 1626, Gao Panlong was 65 years old. On the 14th of February, Gao accompanied six other gentlemen to perform a sacrificial ritual in the Daonan Temple. (i) These six people were: Gu Jingyang, Gu Jingfan, Qian Qixin, Xue Yuantai, An Wosu, and Liu Benru.

When summoned, Master Gao openly admonished the government with his righteous words. When dismissed, Master Gao taught goodness to the public with his bright virtue. He strove to uphold a sincere and loyal mind-heart when he was young and strong. He would not compromise his straightforward integrity in old age. Since the platform for their teaching (ii) had already been dismantled, Master

Gao feared that their entire project would be suppressed forever, and therefore, he did what he did on this day.

On the 16th of March, Master Gao visited the Daonan Temple. Around two o'clock in the morning, so as to avoid the disgrace of arrest, he leaped into the water to his death.

On the 6th of March, Zhou Jihou had been arrested at Miuxixi. On the 14th of March, another red-clad rider (iii) had come to the nearby place of Su, and Master Gao realized that he too would not be overlooked [by the authorities]. On the morning of the 16th, Master Gao donned his robes and cap, and then, went to visit the Daonan Temple alone. This was because, following the destruction of the Dong Lin Academy, gatherings and discussions had to be suspended for quite some time, but the ancestral tablets of the masters were still enshrined in the Temple. While performing the sacrificial rites, he burned the manuscript of his essay, *"Farewell to the Sages."* Upon his return, Master Gao tended the flowers in his backyard, and talked and laughed with one or two of his students as if everything were normal.

Later that afternoon, Master Gao's student, Hua Zhongtong, arrived from Wu Men, bearing an unusual message with him. Master Gao, however, did not appear affected at all. Then, his second youngest brother arrived in town from the mountains, and they freely shared drinks together in the garden's pavilion. With

flush faces and cheerful moods, one friend sitting beside Master Gao said, “That message cannot be true.” Master Gao smiled slightly and answered, “This message is supposedly true. I consider death as a mere return. My mind-heart is united with the Great Void, (iv) and ultimately, there is no death or life. Why must we regard life and death as two separate things? If the prospect of death changes a single one of our beliefs and hurls us into a pit [of despair], then our learning has not prepared us for our fate (命, *ming*). (v) I have spent my whole life teaching and learning this. I see it very clearly, and draw much strength from it! ”

At dusk, Master Gao had a leisurely nightcap with his children and grandchildren. He said nothing about family affairs except, “I have a field of about two hundred *mu*. (vi) Once it is sold, I should be able to pay the red horsemen, (vii) and then I can be on my sorry way!”

After dinner, Master Gao went to bed in good spirits, and summoned all his children: “I fear that something may happen tomorrow, but all of you should go get some sleep.” At midnight, Master Gao’s son-in-law, Qin Junlin, brought the same message as had arrived during the day, and all of Master Gao’s children [agreed] not to share it with him. Master Gao awoke, however, and asked: “Is the message true?” He then got up, dressed, calmly went to his study, followed by his sons, and said: “I wish to take care of some minor matters before I depart. You can leave me for now, but it is imperative that you task the family with finding a boat to get to the

local prefecture first thing tomorrow morning. If there is no arrest, you will be able to return home straightaway. If there is, you can leave at once for the capital. This way, even if the police's bannermen appear here, you will not be afraid." He then wrote two or three pages, and locked them in a chest. He returned to his inner room to speak candidly with his wife for a long while, and then both of his grandsons hastened to help him seal the chest with yellow paper. He put the chest on the table, and pointed to it saying, "Tomorrow, surrender these papers to the police's bannermen, but do not open it beforehand."

He then repeated his wishes: "Tomorrow, I will be going to the local prefecture, and then on to the capital. There is no chance I will return to see you again, so I leave you with four simple words: 'Don't shame your ancestors.'"

As his fateful hour had not yet come, Master Gao retired for a while, and all his children waited in the outer chambers to discuss their plan to leave for the capital. Thirty or forty minutes passed, however, without any hint of sound or movement. They opened the door and entered [the room]. They found the oil lamp still glowing, various tables off to the side, and a bowl of incense wafting before the ancestral altar, but Master Gao was nowhere to be seen; so they rushed to open and examine the papers from earlier, as well as the official will.

One said: “Although I have been dismissed from office and deprived of my title, I was once a senior minister, and when a senior minister is insulted, the nation is insulted as well. I therefore kowtow to the north, according to the example left by Qu Ping. (viii) Although I have not had the chance to repay your royal favor, yet I hope to do so in my next life. Your servant, Gao Panlong, writes this letter before his impending death, and begs that an envoy deliver it to Your Majesty.”

Another, written to his friends, said: “It was an honor to have studied and travelled with Li Yuanli and Fan Mengbo. After a lifetime of learning, I have gathered some strength—a little strength, at least. My mind-heart is like the Great Void: in its origins, without life or death. Why, then, would I cling to this transitory existence?”

(ix)

All of Master Gao’s children were frightened and shocked, and anxiously rushed through a side-door to the edge of the pond. Master Gao, however, had already leapt into the water. This took place around two o’clock in the morning.

Before all this, something else had happened to one of Gao’s students, Hua Anxiu. He had dreamed that he was walking in a peach garden and beheld a wondrous, glittering cave. He had wanted to enter the cave, but could not, and so he fell asleep at the cave’s entrance. Suddenly, two men had appeared wearing dark robes and long scarves, and they roused Anxiu with their horsetail whisk, saying, “Hurry,

hurry! Get up, get up!” When Anxiu had asked for their names, they said, “We are Zhou Hengtai and Wei Guoyuan. (x) We charge you to tell your master: ‘Truly, you are a hidden dragon who cannot be deterred. (xi) Come quickly, come quickly! If you do not miss this chance, we shall meet one another in the recesses of this peach garden.’” Anxiu was surprised by [his dream], (xii) and had sought out Master Gao to tell him about it. Master Gao nodded his head, saying, “Perhaps there is something to it.”

The most astonishing thing was that Master Gao had been found upright in the water. His left hand was covering his heart, and his right hand touched the pond’s bank. All his clothes and shoes were neatly arranged. No mud had stained or dampened his body. Not a drop of water had entered his belly. Several days after he had been put into his coffin, his face was still ruddy, and everyone reckoned it an amazing thing.

Once, there had been a friend who had asked Master Gao about the means to avoid distress. The Master said, “Before doing anything at all, you must submit to one particular notion, following it wheresoever it should lead you. Kangjie (xiii) wrote this poem: ‘Lofty *Tian* gave me life, and lofty *Tian* shall bring me death. Concerning anything, shouldn’t each of us heed *Tian*?’ Someone without this notion, as soon as they are faced [with distress], will fall into a mad rush, for they do not yet rest securely in the principle of *Tian*.” (xiv)

There had been another who had asked, “‘After hearing the Dao in the morning, one can die in the evening;’ why did [Kongzi] believe this?” Master Gao replied: “I have four words for you, but people ignore them because they are spoken so often, so there’s no point in saying them.” His friend urged him, and the Master answered: “Die when you should.”

Thus were the words Master Gao spoke every day of his life, and now they could be witnessed in his [death].

Liu Niantai (xv) later said: “Master Gao’s strength was firm and steady because of his learning, and therefore, in the face of impending death, he was able to uphold his ideals. In this way, he gathered his vital-energy and returned it to his mind-heart. Then, he gathered his mind-heart and returned it to the Void. His body had failed, but his spirit did not. (xvi) Such a thing is typical for us Ru. Were we to appeal to Buddhist doctrines of fantastical deathbed illusions, (xvi) we would have missed the truth of the matter.” How Liu grasps Master Gao’s words! Alas, in his death, the strength and simplicity of Master Gao’s words were revealed!

Notes:

(i) The Daonan, or Southern Way Temple (道南祠), was built by Ru at Wuxi to commemorate their teacher Yang Shi (1053–1135), an accomplished Ru and student of

two of the most important pioneering Ruist philosophers of the Dao Xue (“Learning of Dao,” 道學) movement: Cheng Hao (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi (1033–1107). The temple was named “Southern Way” because when Yang Shi returned to his home province in southern China, Cheng Hao exclaimed: “My Way will go to the South!” During Gao Panlong’s time, Wuxi remained a center for Ruist learning. He presided over a Ruist academy called “Dong Lin” (Eastern Forests), which was not far from the Daonan Temple.

(ii) This refers to the Ruist Academy of Dong Lin, where Gao Panlong had taught for most of his life. Gao’s later political career was dedicated to fighting Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627), a corrupt eunuch who controlled the emperor, and therefore, held sway over the court of the Ming Dynasty. In 1626, Wei ordered the destruction of the Dong Lin Academy, and the arrest of the Ruist scholar-officials who opposed him. Gao Panlong was a leader among these protesting Ru.

(iii) This refers to an imperial policeman.

(iv) The “Great Void” (太虛), is a Ruist cosmological term in use among some Ruist philosophers (e.g., Zhang Zai, 1020–1077) of the Dao Xue movement, referring to a conception of the entire universe as a vast space pervaded by vital-energies (氣). Within this space, all cosmic realities—including human beings—are generated by a process of ceaseless condensation and rarefaction of the all-pervading vital-energies of the Great

Void. From this perspective, life and death are transitory manifestations of the eternally changing and creating cosmic vital-energies. In Gao's Ruist view, if we strive to be fully human, and thus, constantly live a meaningful and fulfilled human life against the cosmic backdrop of the Great Void, we will find our due place in the universe, and thus, feel peace and tranquility in the face of death.

(v) Ru characterize their teaching as able to “soothe one's self, and fulfill one's *ming*” (安身立命). According to Gao Panlong's writings and deeds, this is because it helps reveal the genuine self, and thus, guides one toward a fully human life. *Ming* (命), however, is a nuanced word with multiple meanings: mandate, talent, fate, mission, etc. To fulfill one's *ming*, is to discover and nurture our unique talents in order to best fulfill our mission as a human being, while simultaneously being reconciled to the fact that human life is short and limited. If one were confident enough to be fully dedicated to accomplishing these related tasks (nurturing one's talents, enacting one's mission, and reconciling with one's finitude), one could legitimately employ that ancient Chinese trope, and describe one's life as having fulfilled the “Mandate of Heaven.” (天命) In such a case, we should feel no regret before death.

(vi) Two hundred *mu* is approximately thirty acres.

(vii) In ancient China, imperial policemen needed to be paid or else they would mistreat prisoners. The implication is that Gao had been an honest official (清官) who had not

unscrupulously enriched himself in office, as he needed to sell his own estate to get enough money for the police.

(viii) Qu Ping (c. 340–278 C.E.), also known as Qu Yuan, was once a senior minister in the state of Chu. He famously composed a poem entitled “*Li Sao*” (“Encountering Sorrow”) to lament his dismissal from government and the king’s patronage of Qu’s corrupt peers. Therefore, Gao Panlong’s reference to Qu Ping is a sharp criticism of the corrupt eunuch driving the persecution of upright Ru, as well as the Wanli Emperor who had yielded such power to the eunuch.

(ix) Here, the same Ruist view of death is repeated: through Ruist learning, one’s mind-heart can understand one’s proper position in the universe, and thus, having been immersed in the eternally changing and creating cosmos, death can be treated as a passage from a transitory existence. In other words, as long as we strive to manifest the all-encompassing and constant creativity of the cosmos in a uniquely human (i.e., humane) way, we fulfill our mission to be fully human. In this sense, our temporary life will achieve eternal value.

(x) These were both students of the Dong Lin Academy. They were persecuted by the eunuch-controlled government and died in prison before Gao Pan-long had committed suicide.

(xi) This is a quote from the *Classic of Change*, describing a firm will.

(xii) Hua was surprised because in his dream, two dead people had asked Master Gao to meet them. This suggested that Master Gao might also die soon.

(xiii) Shao Kangjie (1011–1077) was a Ruist philosopher during the Song Dynasty, and well-known for his study of the *Classic of Change*.

(xiv) Since we live within a cosmic consciousness permeated by the principle of *Tian* (the constantly creative cosmic power), then we can find our due position in the universe, and thereby find peace in each moment of life until death.

(xv) Liu Niantai (1578–1645) was another great Ruist philosopher of the late Ming Dynasty.

(xvi) In the Ruist cosmology endorsed by Gao Panlong, the body and mind-heart are both forms of the all-pervading cosmic vital-energies of the Great Void, but with different degrees of purity: the vital-energy of the body is less refined than that of mind-heart. Therefore, Liu Niantai understood the marvelous circumstances of Gao's death as Gao's decision to concentrate his bodily vital-energies into his mind-heart, and then immerse his mind-heart within the surrounding cosmic vital-energies of the Great Void. Even though Gao's body had lost its vitality, his spiritual strength still lingered, manifested in

the living complexion of Gao's corpse. In Liu's view, this is quite achievable for a life-long Ruist learner and meditator, such as Gao Panlong, and utterly distinct from similar Buddhist teachings and practices.

(xvii) This may refer especially to the funerary customs of Pure Land Buddhism, which are often accompanied by reports of mysterious appearances.

Glossary

心 xin: mind-heart

和 he: dynamic harmony

天下萬物 tian-xia-wan-wu: the myriad things under heaven

天 tian: Heaven, Cosmos, or Nature

慎獨 shen-du: vigilant solitude

中庸 zhong-yong: being centered in the everyday world

本心 ben-xin: original mind-heart

明德 ming-de: bright virtue

仁 ren: humaneness

理 li: pattern-principle or principle

理學 li-xue: learning of pattern-principle or learning of principle

君子 jun-zi: noble-person

平常 ping-chang: normal and ordinary

玄學 xuan-xue: mysterious learning

氣 qi: vital-energy

誠 chen: sincerity

體 ti: living-substance

敬 jing: reverence

三才 san-cai: three powers

大學 da-xue: Great Learning

小學 xiao-xue: lesser learning

原本 yuan-ben: original root (of human nature)

性體 xing-ti: essential living-substance

天理 tian-li: pattern-principle of *Tian* or principle of *Tian*

本性 ben-xing: original nature

持敬 chi-jing: preserving one's reverence

太虛 tai-xu: The Great Void

命 ming: mandate, talent, fate or mission

道學 dao-xue: learning of Dao

天命 tian-ming: Mandate of Heaven

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