

TO ACQUIRE WISDOM :
THE "WAY" OF WANG YANG-MING
(1472 - 1529)

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Chapter III

THE STARTING POINT: HSIN

When a person devotes himself to study (hsüeh), he must have a "starting-point" [t'ou-nao , literally, "head"]. Only then can his effort become fruitful..... He will [have a definite direction] as a boat can have when [provided with] a rudder.¹

An examination of Yang-ming's life prior to 1508, the year of his enlightenment, has yielded a recurrent pattern of two apparently contrary pulls--an attraction toward tranquillity and contemplation, as well as an interest in scholarship and political action. At first sight, the enlightenment of 1508 might appear to be the maturation of his fondness for contemplation, a fondness which he had carefully and systematically cultivated. He admitted to having erred in his practice of the investigation of things external to himself. And since in Chinese, the word "things" (wu 物) contains the meaning of "affairs" (shih 事), it may be argued that he finally realised the folly he committed in having engaged himself in the active life of a scholar-official, a life which brought him to the loneliness of exile, in which place, however, he discovered the value of solitude and the self-sufficiency of his own nature.

However plausible this explanation at first appears, a glance at his subsequent life and activities is sufficient to dispose of it. Yang-ming was to show himself far more active after 1508 than before that year. He would never lose his fondness for silence and contemplation, but he was to give less and less importance to the practice of meditation. Finally, he would seem to have succeeded in uniting the two contrary attractions of tranquillity and activity, by his elaboration of the famous doctrine of the "extension of liang-chih", according to which every interior and exterior act of the human person can contribute to the development of his hsin or character.

To understand the real meaning of Yang-ming's "discovery"--the meaning held by Yang-ming himself--we must, therefore, constantly keep in mind the pragmatic character of the need which it answered. The two contrary "pulls" of involvement in the world and withdrawal from it not only reveal to us the tensions inherent in his exuberant temperament. They also express his restless search for the "right method" that would direct him to the ultimate goal of human life: sagehood. It would have been meaningless for Yang-ming to recognise the theoretical possibility of every man attaining sagehood, unless he could also find the correct method for its attainment. The agreement of Mencius and Hsün-tzu on the "universal possibility of sagehood" did not solve the problem for the later generations who purported to see passages in the Classics susceptible of a differing interpretation of this issue, and who were especially disconcerted by the scarcity of sages, especially since the time of the end of Chou. It was, in fact, almost contradictory that philosophers like Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi should accept so earnestly Mencius' notion of this "universal possibility", while considering him as the "last sage". Probably, they regarded that the loss of the orthodox Confucian teaching since the death of Mencius, which involved the loss of understanding of "universal possibility of sagehood", had led to this very scarcity. Certainly, the long prevalent belief that sages were born, not "made", was little encouragement to the pursuit of sagehood. Even if the triumph of Sung Neo-Confucianism of the philosophy of Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi, spelled the triumph of the "idea" of the "universal possibility of sagehood", sages did not thereby become more abundant. Somehow, the ideal of sagehood still remained the reserved goal of a few selected scholars, who always risked the danger of being considered "mad" (k'uang) for daring to have such an ambition. It was against this situation that Yang-ming revolted, and, in revolting, would present his own discoveries--that every man not only can be a sage, but possesses within himself all the means necessary to become one, and that sagehood is not a remote,

impersonal ideal, but a concrete goal, well within the reach of everyone, a "state of mind", self-transcending, yet to be made immanent, to become internalised.

The "enlightenment" of 1508, with its assertion of the entire adequacy of human nature itself as the agent and cause of sagehood, appeared, at first sight, as the parting of the ways for Wang Yang-ming and Chu Hsi. In reality, it represented the fruit of Yang-ming's labour in attempting to give consistency to Chu's teaching of the universal capacity for sagehood. Yang-ming had tried Chu's method for acquiring wisdom--that of investigating things and extending knowledge--and had found it inadequate. He finally discovered a new basis or principle which would lay the foundation for a different method. His goal remained the same as Chu's. The shift, however, is evident. Where knowledge of the Classics, and of all the moral principles enshrined in them, as well as in external events and things, was the basis of Chu Hsi's thought and the criteria for his action, they are, for Yang-ming, of much less importance. His emphasis would be primarily on personal insight, the result of evidences drawn from life and books and experiences, but completely internalised. Words, for example, are no longer important because they come from Classical texts, but only because they are meaningful to hsin.

Nevertheless, Yang-ming refrained for the time being from criticising Chu Hsi. His first pre-occupation after the "enlightenment" was to seek for confirmation in the canonical texts which he knew by heart, as proofs of his convictions. He committed to writing the findings, entitling the collection, "My Personal Explanations of the Five Classics". It was, at the same time, an appeal to authority, an attempt to remain within the "orthodox" tradition, as well as a subtle declaration of independence. He selected what he remembered of the words of the Classics, interpreting these according to his needs, and presenting them as "internal evidence" for his own thought. Besides, he said that the Classics are only "instruments" to be used

in one's quest of the "Way". Once the "Way" has been found, the instruments should be put aside, just as the fishing rod should be put away once the fish has been caught, and the dregs of rice should be discarded once the good wine has been extracted from them.² The mistake of the worldly scholar, however, was to look for fish in the rod itself and consider the dregs to be wine. Yang-ming then went on to describe the writing of his "Personal Explanations":

As I have not been able to bring books with me [to Lung-ch'ang] I have been sitting daily in the mountain cave, noting down what I remember by heart of the books which I studied in the past. I have given explanations on those points which have impressed me. After seven months I have virtually covered the ideas of the Five Classics. I call [this work] "Personal Explanations" because [the ideas I offer] are not necessarily in accordance with those of the worthy [scholars] of the past.³

And so, quite early in his philosophical career, Yang-ming adopted the attitude characteristic of that great rival of Chu Hsi's, Lu Chiu-yüan: "The Six Classics are all my footnotes".⁴ He made a strong assertion of the validity of his personal insights, assigning to the texts of the Classics a secondary, supporting role. He also set aside quite completely those authoritative commentaries on the Classics, written by Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi. The "enlightenment" was to mark a "beginning". Yang-ming had decided to make the "journey" to sagehood all alone, relying completely on his own internal, spiritual resources.⁵

The Starting-point: "hsin"

Yang-ming asserted the importance of having a correct "starting-point" before one's effort to attain sagehood can become fruitful.⁶ According to him, this "starting-point" is, without doubt, hsin (mind-and-heart). He

described it as a life-giving power, and as the source and principle of goodness in man.

In his "Personal Explanations of the Five Classics", Yang-ming gave a rather arbitrary interpretation of the beginning line of the Spring-Autumn Annals: "[It was his] first year.... the kings first month"⁷, by extolling the powers of Heaven, Earth and Man. He said that just as Heaven possesses the power of jen, by which it brings forth living beings, so too, man is endowed with hsin, the power and capacity which comes to him with life, and gives meaning to life. What is [called] origin, is, for Heaven, the power of jen which brings forth living beings, and, for man, hsin. Hsin is that which comes [to us] with life.⁸

Thus, he brings out that which, after long reflections upon the experience of his recent enlightenment, he considers to be the central idea of his philosophy: the living, human hsin as that "beginning" from which philosophical thinking should start and to which it should frequently return. It is no wonder that his school of thought, as a development of those ideas already present in the philosophy of Lu Chiu-yüan, should be known to posterity as Hsin-hsüeh.

Already in these earliest extant writings which have come down to us from the time of his exile, Yang-ming has spoken of "making illustrious virtue manifest" (ming ming-te 明明德)⁹ in terms of making hsin, the mind or heart, manifest. For him, hsin, which is one with nature, is the source of all goodness as well as the principle of all conscious and moral activity, possessing within itself the power of conducting the human person to the highest goals of sagehood. This does not necessarily mean that it is completely free of any or all imperfections, but rather, that it possesses within itself the power of controlling these imperfections, and so, of perfecting itself. Comparing therefore hsin, the mind or heart, to the sun, which is naturally bright, and becomes obscure only when hidden from view by some obstacle, Yang-ming described the earth as that which, at the sun's setting, blocks from view what is

of itself total brightness: This can happen for the individual too, when his mind is obscured by "selfishness".

There is nothing of the virtue of hsin that is not originally bright. That is why we speak of "illustrious virtue". If, at times, [hsin] is not bright, it is merely obscured by selfishness. When selfishness is removed, there will be nothing that is not bright. Just as the sun rises of its own accord [up the horizon] from under the earth, without relying on the help of heaven [or the sky] (t'ien), so too the gentleman of his own accord makes illustrious virtue manifest, without requiring the help of another.¹⁰

And so, according to Yang-ming, hsin, the mind-and-heart is that which refers to three things: the perfect hsin of pristine purity, the actual hsin obscured by selfishness, and the restored, acquired hsin of the gentleman who attains wisdom and sagehood. Yet the whole process is self-determining: hsin is capable of improving and restoring itself, without requiring any outside help.

Hsin chi li

Yang-ming's determination that hsin should be the great "starting-point" of his philosophy proceeded naturally from the discovery he made in 1508--that his hsin was itself adequate as an instrument in the pursuit of sagehood, and that he had made a mistake in the past by seeking for this instrument outside the self. It also led him to formulate the proposition: hsin chi li 心即理 .

The Chinese word hsin refers to that centre in man's being which is the source of all his conscious and moral activity.¹¹ As such, it extends beyond the meaning of the English word "mind". It can perhaps be translated better into the Latin word "mens", taken to mean the innermost point or the apex of the soul, or the French word "coeur", in the sense assigned to it by Blaise Pascal. It is, therefore, the meeting-point of the intellect and the will.

For that reason, its activity, yi 意, translated sometimes as "thought", refers also to all conscious activity, including pre-reflective as well as volitional acts, that is, "intention". The word li,¹² on the other hand, referred, in the system of thought constructed by Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi, to the "essence" or "nature" of things as well as of man, that which constitutes their organising principle, but that which also, in the Chinese interpretation, has a moral dimension, since human nature, and the world with which it is existentially one, is fundamentally moral. And, since the Chinese language lacks a definite verb to be, the proposition, hsin chi li-literally, hsin and li are one and the same--can be translated to mean that "the source of all virtue, perfection and moral principles lies in hsin, in man's mind-and-heart". Initially therefore, this proposition represents Yang-ming's attempt to internalise the moral quest, by claiming for the mind-and-heart, the possession of all moral principles, and even by identifying hsin with virtue or the sum total of moral principles.

In the year 1512, during a discussion with his favourite disciple and brother-in-law, Hsü Ai 徐愛 (1487-1518), Yang-ming had to answer the objection of Hsü, who thought, with Chu Hsi, that the "highest good" should be sought in external things and affairs, because all these possess in themselves a definite li. Yang-ming's reply was to identify the "highest good" with the "original substance" (pen-t'i) of hsin--that is, hsin-in-itself--commending Chu Hsi for having explained the words "making illustrious virtue manifest" in terms of "realising perfect virtue (T'ien-li) to the fullest extent without the least bit of selfish human desire."¹³ He also added:

Hsin chi li [The source of all virtue, perfection and moral principles lies in the mind-and-heart]. Is there any affair (shih) in the world which is outside [the realm of] hsin? Is there any virtue (li 理) which is outside [the realm of] hsin?¹⁴

Hsü gave as examples or moral principles which reside in affairs outside of the mind, those relating to the virtues of filial piety in serving one's friends, and benevolence in governing the people. In other words, he was thinking of the whole world of moral relationships, which form the recognised core of Confucian ethics.

Wang Yang-ming replied that the principles of filial piety or loyalty and the rest can hardly be looked for in the parents or the ruler, and so on. These principles are all in hsin. Repeating here that hsin chi li, he continued:

When hsin is free from the hindrance of selfish desires, it is the embodiment of the perfect virtue (T'ien-li)... . When this hsin, which is the pure and perfect virtue, is applied to serving parents, there is filial piety, to serving the sovereign, there is loyalty, [and so on].....¹⁵

He sought thus to answer Hsü's question by limiting the meaning of the word li purely to its ethical dimension, as that which constitutes moral and virtuous activity.

"Perfect virtue" or "principle of Heaven", [T'ien-li] is, of course, that totality of goodness, present in the universe as well as in man, present, however, in its fullness and purity only in the sage, the perfect man, whose hsin is free from all traces of selfishness.

Yang-ming also agreed with Hsü that practical matters relating to caring for the parents' comfort in winter and summer and the like deserve investigation. But he did not think that the pursuit of virtue would begin with such details. He suggested that the filial son develop within himself a deep love for his parents, a love which as the "root" of virtue will make possible the growth of filial piety, blossoming into all the minute points of observance which constitute the "branches".¹⁶ And so, instead of seeking to acquire moral knowledge of virtuous conduct through the study of details and techniques discovered by chance occasions, he envisages the pursuit of virtue as

being best carried out by the development of the goodness inherent in hsin, the seat of man's personality and the source of all moral activity.

... The Book of Rites says: "A filial son who loves his parents deeply is sure to have a peaceful disposition. Having a peaceful disposition, he will surely have a happy expression. And having a happy expression, he will surely have a pleasant countenance".¹⁷ There must be deep love as the root and then the rest will naturally follow.¹⁸

About the same time that the discussion with Hsu Ai took place, or perhaps a year after, Yang-ming wrote a letter to another friend of his, in which he also spoke of the teachings of the Great Learning, in particular those regarding sincerity and the understanding of the good. He said:

What one calls li (moral principle) in an object [or event], "righteousness" in adapting ourselves towards it, and "good" in nature, is differently designated on account of the things to which they refer, but in reality are all manifestations of my hsin. There is no object, no event, no moral principle, no righteousness and no good that lies outside hsin.... . To insist on seeking the supreme good in every event and object is to separate what is one into two things.¹⁹

And so, Yang-ming directs the seeker of the "highest good" to an inner quest of the fullest moral development of himself. This would not isolate the self from reality, nor remove it from the world of active involvement. Rather, it represents the fusion, through practice, of "inner" and "outer" concerns. The development of an ever-deepening mind-and-heart in the aspirant for sagehood brings about a union between the agent and the objects of his intentions and actions, thus transcending the dualism between the self

and the non-self, between the hsin and li.

Yang-ming sought to justify his identification of hsin with li by pointing out that it is the intention of the mind rather than the act itself, or the object to which the act is directed, which makes the act virtuous. He used as an example the Five Despots of the Spring-Autumn times, who gave the appearance of practising virtue by resisting barbarian invasions and by honouring the dynastic house of Chou, but really acted out of selfish motivations.²⁰ These people who make a distinction between hsin and li, may express admiration for such historical figures, on account of their external achievements, and neglecting to consider their unworthy motives. They may even imitate such conduct, doing deeds that appear virtuous without ascertaining that these are in conformity with their intentions. "[These people] make two things of hsin and li, and drift unwittingly into the kind of hypocrisy that is characteristic of the way of despots. I speak of hsin and li as being identical, so that people may know [this is so] and devote their efforts to [cultivating] hsin instead of accumulating isolated and external acts of righteousness."²¹

It is the inherent goodness of hsin, rather than external relationships, which prompts us to the practice of virtue. In other words, it is the "moral" or "virtuous" nature of hsin, which manifests the presence of a natural knowledge of the moral nature of human relationships, and of a natural ability to act in accordance with such knowledge. Thus, "On seeing the father, one naturally knows how to be filial; on seeing the elder brother, one naturally knows how to be fraternally respectful; on seeing a child fall into the well, one naturally knows how to be compassionate".²² The moving power of filial piety, fraternal respect and compassion are not present in the father or the brother or the child but in one's own hsin.

If the principle (li) of filial piety was present in the parent, would this li... no longer [affect] my heart (hsin) after the parent's death?.... The

substance of hsin is hsing (nature). Hsing (nature) and li (virtue) are one. And so, where there is a mind (hsin) of filial piety toward the parent, there is the principle (li) of filial piety. Where there is no mind of filial piety, there will be no principle of filial piety.²³

Yang-ming appealed to the authority of Mencius as support for his proposition, hsin chi li. The sage seldom mentioned the word li, largely unknown to the early Chinese philosophers.²⁴ But the sage frequently discussed both hsing (nature) and hsin (heart-and-mind), often using the two words interchangeably. He had particularly stressed the innate human capacity for goodness and of the presence in it of the "four beginnings" of virtue.²⁵ Yang-ming declared that the dichotomy of hsin and li and the quest for moral principles (li) outside of hsin would imply the acceptance of Kao-tzu's proposition that righteousness was an exterior virtue,²⁶ and so indicate a lack of the proper knowledge of righteousness itself. "[Neither] humanity... [nor] righteousness can be sought outside hsin. How then could li alone be sought outside? To seek li outside hsin would divide knowledge and action into two things. To seek li in hsin is the teaching of the 'unity of knowledge and action' given by the school of the sages".²⁷

Obviously, the practical, moral implications of Yang-ming's proposition that li is present in hsin and somehow identical to it represents a radical departure from the practical, moral teachings of Chu Hsi, who had always insisted on the "investigation of things" outside of the self as a help to the practice of virtue. Yang-ming never denied that human affairs and the events of life as well as persons and things with which we come into contact are a good "test" of the reality of our knowledge of moral principles.²⁸ He only preferred to regard all affairs, events, persons and things in terms of their relationship with hsin. In other words, the moral dimension of the whole lived world of human relationships and affairs connotes somehow the "inseparability" of these relationships and affairs with hsin, the source of morality.²⁹

Universal Capacity for Sagehood

Yang-ming made the goal of sagehood accessible to all, bringing a higher sense of consciousness and understanding of man's innate dignity and potential greatness, which is also the foundation of man's basic equality with man. He also did something else. He also discovered the real meaning of sagehood, and of the word "sage": he is not a being with super-human powers as described by the Han apocryphal classics; or a person born great, with extraordinary intellectual and moral capacities, somehow identified with Tao or original non-being, as presented by the Neo-Taoists; or a bodhisattva prepared by innumerable previous lives of high virtue and merit for the bliss of Nirvāna, but who prefers to remain within the cycle of life and death, of change and transmigration, in order to help and save others, to bring them also over to the other shore of eternal rest. Yang-ming described the sage very simply as a man whose hsin is filled with pure T'ien-li (perfect virtue) without admixture of "selfish desires". The sage is born like everyone else. He has no special knowledge other than the capacity for knowing the good which every man and woman has. He does not necessarily know, by "innate endowment" and without the need of study, all the information pertaining to the rites, music, systems and institutions.³⁰ Indeed, it is not even necessary that the sage should study all things, and be prepared in advance for every kind of situation. Even Confucius, Yang-ming pointed out, had to ask questions on rites and ceremonials when he went inside the grand temple.³¹ Thus, in a sense, the sage is an "improvisor": he responds to the needs of the times, learning to do so as the needs arise. Neither is it necessary that the sage should be impeccable. Citing the famous formula of the doctrine of the sages which was supposedly transmitted by Yao to Shun, Yang-ming said:

If Yao and Shun really considered themselves as faultless, they would not be sages. The advice they gave to each other was, "Man's hsin is prone

to error; but the Tao-hsin is subtle. Keep always to the Mean; practise discernment and single-mindedness". Since they themselves regarded that the man's mind is prone to error, it shows that their own minds were also prone to faults. Only because they were always wary, were they able to hold fast to the Mean and avoid transgressions.³²

To learn to be a sage, is therefore simply to preserve and cultivate T'ien-li--that inborn power of goodness within us, or liang-chih (literally, knowledge of the good) as it will be called--and, by so doing, eliminate selfish desires. Sagehood is a quality which is somehow inborn, since every man's nature or mind-and-heart is originally full of goodness. To become a sage is simply to recover our original innocence, to take over complete possession of ourselves by re-capturing our pristine state of mind-and-heart.

Yang-ming was fond of comparing the mind-and-heart (hsin) of the sage to a bright mirror,³³ which is endowed with the power of reflecting all things as they come. By itself, it does not engage in either "activity" or "tranquillity". It merely responds to all events, without allowing anything to tarnish it, without retaining any of the images. Thus, "the emotions of the sage are in accord with all things and yet of himself he has no emotions."³⁴

The work of striving after sagehood resembles therefore that of polishing the mirror, or rather, of the mirror polishing itself. For while "the mind-and-heart of the sage cannot tolerate the least particle of dust and has naturally no need of polishing, the mind-and-heart of the average man... resembles a spotted and dirty mirror, which needs thorough polishing, to have all its dust and dirt removed. Then will the tiniest speck of dust become visible, and only a light stroke will wipe it away, without [anyone] having to spend much energy."³⁵

Yang-ming placed much emphasis on the need of "polishing the mirror". This image expressed for him the effort of removing selfish desires and of developing .. T'ien-li (perfect virtue) in the mind-and-heart (hsin). He described

not attain the goal sought after in his actions, let him examine himself".⁴¹ And then, with characteristic directness, and employing also the technique of "shock" so well developed by Ch'an Buddhist Masters, he explained the task of "establishing sincerity" in the following words:

Recently, whenever I discussed learning with friends, I spoke only of two words, "establishing sincerity" (li-ch'eng 立誠). As in killing a man, the knife ought to be placed on the throat, so in studying, efforts should be made to enter the fine points of hsin. Then would study naturally become earnest and solid, and radiate brightness, and even if selfish desires sprout up, they will disappear in the same way as a few flakes of snow melt upon a fiercely burning stove.⁴²

Yang-ming developed his doctrine of sagehood especially in his conversations with Ts'ai Tsung-tui 蔡宗兌 [Ts'ai Hsi-yüan 蔡希淵] and others. Ts'ai had agreed that one can learn to be a sage. But he could not understand why such different people, as Confucius, Po-yi and Yi-yin should all be considered sages.⁴³ In other words, he had such a high ideal of sagehood, and of Confucius the sage par excellence, that he could not understand how other men, in his view inferior in character to Confucius, should also be venerated as sages. Yang-ming replied by comparing the work of attaining sagehood to that of refining gold. When a man has completely identified his mind with perfect virtue or "principle of Heaven", the state of perfection he has achieved can be likened to that of pure gold, which is no longer mixed with copper or lead. Men, however, differ in capacity (ts'ai), just as gold pieces may differ in weight. But the purity of gold is decided on the ground of its perfection in quality, not quantity.⁴⁴

Therefore, even an ordinary person who is willing to learn to have his mind become completely identified with perfect virtue can also become a sage, just as a piece of gold weighing one tael is

inferior in quantity, but not [necessarily] in quality, to another piece weighing 10,000 yi 斤. ⁴⁵ This is why [we] say, "Every man can become Yao and Shun". ⁴⁶

Yang-ming went on to explain that some men are born with a greater capacity for sagehood, and can practise virtue naturally and with great ease, whereas others are obliged to make greater effort to learn how to do so. Those who are less "talented" must make one hundred efforts where others need make only one, and one thousand efforts where others need only make ten. But they can all achieve the same kind of success. He then criticised the scholars who regarded sagehood as something determined by "knowledge and ability". Thinking that a sage must know all and be able to do all, they aim at encompassing all the knowledge and ability which they attribute to sages, and so devote themselves to acquiring "extensive knowledge" instead of to the only thing necessary--developing in themselves T'ien-li (perfect virtue). In the end, as they become more and more learned, they also become more and more selfish, more and more estranged from this T'ien-li itself. It is like a person who puts lead, brass and iron into gold, so as to increase its weight in quantity, thus lowering its purity of quality, until it is no longer fit to be called gold. ⁴⁷

Yang-ming made the ideal of sagehood possible of achievement, accessible to all men. This made a strong impression on his disciples. On two separate occasions, two of his disciples told him that they discovered that all the people walking in the streets were sages. Yang-ming took it calmly, remarking that this was just a natural fact. ⁴⁸ However, while he believed in the universal capacity for sagehood, he was careful to see to it, that none of his disciples assume the artificial "bearings" of a sage. To those who complained to him, that many did not listen to their teachings, he said: "You assumed the bearing of a sage, and so scared people away. How could you succeed in lecturing to people? You must become like one of the people of ordinary intelligence. Then you can discuss learning (hsüeh) with them." ⁴⁹

Unity of Knowledge and Action

The proposition, that "the source of all virtue, perfection, and moral principles lies in hsin", laid the foundation for Yang-ming's affirmation of the universal capacity for acquiring wisdom. It provides also the basis for his practical doctrine, his method, since hsin is capable of determining itself through a process of knowledge which involves experience and action. This will be clarified later on by Yang-ming's adoption of the term liang-chih--literally, good knowledge, or rather, knowledge of the good--as the basis of both his thought and method. To act, therefore, was to become for Yang-ming, to "extend and develop our knowledge of the good".

From the beginning, or at least, ever since the enlightenment of 1508, Yang-ming understood knowledge, chih 知 as being primarily moral knowledge--the personal, moral judgement. To know, therefore, is especially to know the principle of this or that moral act. On the other hand, the word "action", hsing 行 does not simply designate any movement whatsoever, but only that by which one acts in conformity to his "knowledge of the good". In other words, just as true knowledge is always knowledge of virtue, true action should always be virtuous action. "The Unity of Knowledge and Action" is therefore primarily a moral ideal rather than a principle of epistemology.

Yang-ming began teaching "the unity of knowledge and action" in 1509, the year following his enlightenment. He was still living then in Kweichow, the place of his exile, and had been befriended by Hsi Shu, Assistant Superintendent of Education, who asked him about the similarities and differences between the teachings of Chu Hsi and Lu Chiu-yüan. Refraining from giving direct answers, Yang-ming explained to Hsi instead his own recent discoveries. He spoke of the relationship between knowledge and action, proving his points by quoting the Five Classics and the ancient philosophers. Hsi finally understood and said, "The teaching of the sages has become clear again [for me] today. The similarities between Chu [Hsi] and Lu [Chiu-yüan] show that each had his insights as well as his

weaknesses. Instead of resorting to argumentation, it is better to seek for answers in my own [human] nature. Then I shall naturally understand." He ordered the repair of the Kwei-yang 貴陽 Academy, and, together with Mao Hsien 毛憲 the Vice-Commissioner, led the students of Kwei-yang in paying respects to Yang-ming as their teacher.⁵⁰

In another conversation with his disciple Hsü Ai, Yang-ming was to outline his ideas on the unity of knowledge and action. Hsü had pointed out that there are people who know they ought to serve their parents with filial piety but do not put this knowledge to practice, which shows a clear distinction between knowledge and action.⁵¹ Yang-ming answered that, in such a case, knowledge and action are being separated from each other by selfish desires, and thus are no longer knowledge and action "as they ought to be",⁵² In his own opinion, however, there have never been people who "know" but do not "act". Those who seem to know but do not act simply do not know.

Seeing beauty pertains to knowledge, while loving it pertains to action.⁵³ However, beauty is no sooner seen than loved. One does not first see it and then make up his mind to love it....

This is like saying that such a man knows filial piety.... [or] fraternal respect. This must be due to his already having practised filial piety and fraternal respect.... This is also like the knowledge of pain. One can only know pain after having experienced it.⁵⁴

Interestingly, Yang-ming illustrates the unity of moral knowledge and moral action by giving examples taken from the experience of sense perception which provokes an immediate and instinctive desire--or sometimes, aversion--for the objects perceived. He made no distinction between knowledge and the broader human consciousness. For him, the cycle of reflection begins with a more passive activity, that is, with sensation, and proceeds to a reflective, moral

knowledge, involving choice or action. Thus, where pre-reflective or sense knowledge is by nature "knowledge in action", so too moral knowledge--reflective or pre-reflective--should be one with action.⁵⁵ Yang-ming knew, of course, that the perfect unity of moral knowledge and moral action is only a reality in the ideal man, the sage, who acts spontaneously according to his deep moral convictions, which have become to him, like second nature. Such a man acts always according to his originally good nature, practising all virtues instinctively. Thus, Yang-ming expounded his teaching of the unity of knowledge and action, by referring almost accidentally to the unity which must exist in pre-reflective knowledge, for the sake of holding up a moral ideal to be achieved. For this reason, he also said that "knowledge is the direction for action, and action is the effort of knowledge".⁵⁶ "Knowledge is the beginning of action and action is the completion of knowledge".⁵⁷

To justify his methodology, Yang-ming also says:

People today distinguish between knowledge and action and pursue them separately, believing that one must know before he can act.... They say that [they will wait] till they truly know before putting their knowledge into practice. Consequently, to the end of their lives, they will never act and also will never know. This doctrine of knowledge first and action later is not a small sickness.... My present advocacy of the unity of knowledge and action is [made] precisely as medicine for that sickness...⁵⁸

This is certainly the language of a prophet, seeking to arouse the moral conscience of his fellow countrymen to the recognition of certain ethical ideals. For Yang-ming, indeed, the "return to hsin" can only mean going back to the original source of both knowledge and action, to that power which is productive of all moral goodness. As he put it: "If one understands my meaning [and purpose]

there is no harm in saying that [knowledge and action] are two things, since they will still be only one in reality. If one does not understand my meaning, even if he says [knowledge and action] only make up one thing, it will still be useless, like idle gossip".⁵⁹

The teaching of the unity of knowledge and action also seeks to reform and rectify men's characters by going right to the heart of their troubles: to their thoughts and intentions. To his disciple Huang Chih 黃直, Yang-ming explained that those people who separate knowledge and action into two things do not make any effort to remove their evil thoughts and intentions so long as these remain as such, and have not been translated into "action". On his part, however, he advocates the unity of knowledge and action precisely so that people may understand that "when a thought is aroused, there is already action. If there is anything evil there..., one must overcome it at once. One must go to the root and the bottom of [things] and not allow the evil thought [or intention] to lie latent in one's chest. This is the basic purpose of my doctrine."⁶⁰

All his life, Yang-ming would never get tired of speaking of this "unity of knowledge and action." He discussed it in his letter to Ku Lin, saying that "where knowledge is genuine and earnest, it is also action, and where action is intelligent and discerning, it is knowledge."⁶¹ He kept repeating that a true understanding of this unity between knowledge and action would lead a disciple of the Confucian Way to seek for the source and principle of all perfection and goodness in hsin--the mind-and-heart.⁶² In a long letter written in 1526, he took up the subject again, in response to questions posed by a friend, saying:

Knowledge and action are really two words describing the same, one effort. This one effort requires these two words in order to be explained completely. If one sees clearly the essential point of departure, he would know this is only one, and that though [knowledge] and [action] may be described as two activities, they really remain one effort.⁶³

Sitting in Meditation

The teaching on the "Unity of Knowledge and Action" sets forth an ideal for both knowledge and action, foreshadowing a method to be developed for its attainment. Ever since his enlightenment of 1508, Yang-ming spoke frequently of preserving and developing "the principle of Heaven" or perfect virtue, and of eliminating selfish desires. These are practical goals, of the ascetic and moral order. Before 1520 or 1521, however, he had as yet no "universal method" to offer. He could only encourage his disciples to practise "quiet sitting" (ching-tso). This is a technique for cultivating one's character and personality. It is not the all-efficacious method. Nevertheless, Yang-ming frequently practised sitting in meditation, and advised others to do the same. Many of the poems he wrote before 1520 and even after manifest his deep love of silent contemplation. In one of them, probably written in 1514, he had this to say:

If our Master Confucius desired to remain
silent and wordless, ⁶⁴

We ought to believe that wordlessness expresses
great joy.

When one wakes to the hidden meaning of the
hawk flying and the fish leaping ⁶⁵

One knows that moral striving does not lie in
expounding texts.

Self-cultivation and mind-culture are not Ch'an
practices. ⁶⁶

In attempting to correct errors, one may go to
the opposite.

.....

Under the influence of hearsay and rumour,

True learning has long been interrupted.

I need to sit in silence in the woods,

Green mountains understand well my unspoken
words. ⁶⁷

In the Buddhist and Taoist schools, meditation was made for the sake of gaining inner calm, of reaching pure consciousness, of reducing the body to "dry wood" and the mind to "dead ashes". ⁶⁸ Yang-ming, however, promoted this exercise for a different goal. It is only a "remedy" for the lack of study, to help toward the recollection of the mind. "If, during the day, our work and effort begin to

annoy us, we can practise sitting in meditation. [And] if, we feel lazy and uninclined to read, we should [go against this inclination] and read. This is like applying a remedy according to the disease."⁶⁹ It is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.

Yang-ming regarded sitting in meditation especially as a good method by which the beginner may acquire enough peace and strength to discern and eliminate his selfish desires. This, he said, resembled the work of getting rid of bandits. One must be determined to wipe them out completely.⁷⁰ Before doing so, the unruly desires, whether for sex, money or fame, must first be discovered. The root of the trouble must be pulled up and thrown away so that it will never grow again. "Act at all times like a cat trying to catch a mouse, with its eyes intent on watching and its ears intent on listening. As soon as a [bad] thought takes rise, overcome it at once, as decisively as [a blacksmith] removes a nail or saws iron."⁷¹ It is not, he said, the concern of the beginner to abandon all thought and reflection. He must first examine himself and overcome his unruly desires. He must think of sincerity. He must think of the "principle of Heaven". When he has acquired, in his hsin, the pure "principle of Heaven", he will then also have attained a state of emptiness or void regarding thoughts and reflections.⁷²

In 1519, when a disciple expressed disappointment in the effort of "putting a stop" to thoughts and deliberations through meditation, Yang-ming explained that thought is never, and can never be, absent. There is, after all, no tranquillity without activity as there is no activity without tranquillity. What is aimed at, rather, should be the elimination of selfish desires. And then, nature can be calm whether in a state of activity or tranquillity. When being reminded of Ch'eng Yi's praise of a man who was able to sit absorbed in meditation, and become completely unaware of the doings of his son who was near him, Yang-ming merely remarked that Ch'eng was probably speaking in jest and mocking the man. Distractions, after all, will always be felt. What is important is not to be misled by them.⁷³

When one of his disciples, Liu Chün-liang 劉君亮, expressed a desire to retire into the mountains for the sake of giving himself up to quiet sitting, Yang-ming replied that such a course of action can be recommended if his motive had been to cultivate himself in a quiet place. But the same practice would not be helpful if Liu was seeking tranquillity for its own sake, and through disgust with the affairs of the world and of society.⁷⁴ And so, if sincerity of intention can be cultivated in meditation, it is also used as a criterion to judge the practice of meditation itself and the appropriateness of such a move.

All his life, Yang-ming himself yearned for silence and quiet. As far as he could, he also gave himself and his disciples every opportunity of retiring to a quiet place, or at least of spending some days or weeks, from time to time, in such places. But just as he had repented of his retirement in Yang-ming Cave in 1504 when he had achieved a certain measure of success in acquiring "parapsychic" powers, recognising this to be merely the result of "playing with [his] mental powers"⁷⁵, so he would always be wary of practising quiet sitting or meditation for its own sake. He wanted, both through quiet sitting and through the activities of daily life, to attain a fusion of the "inner" and "outer" realms of his mind and spirit, or rather, he could not see these realms divided into two. For him, life is thoroughly one, and the "inner" permeates the "outer." His goal was not self-perfection for its own sake. It was to be a Confucian sage, a man who unites "kingliness without" with "sageliness within", a man who "manifests" his "illustrious virtue" not only by cultivating himself, but also by allowing self-cultivation to overflow into the fulfilment of responsibilities towards the family, the state and the world.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, sitting in meditation, while geared to action, remains, in itself, a technique. It cannot take the place of an all-embracing, universal method. It contains, besides, the risk of making its practitioners prefer silence and contemplation to action. From the beginning, Yang-ming was well aware of these risks and dangers. Writing in 1511 to Wang Chün 汪俊 [Wang Shih-t'an 汪石潭] on the subject of Chu Hsi's commentary on the Doctrine of

the Mean, Yang-ming had objected to the work of self-cultivation being divided into two sections, with a special time set aside for quiet and passivity. He said:

I would recommend that you pay more attention to activity, without allowing such effort to suffer any interruption. When activity is not without harmony, passivity[or tranquillity] will not lack equilibrium.⁷⁷

Already, in 1515, soon after his departure from Ch'u-yang, Yang-ming issued a warning regarding the danger of being turned away from a life of action by the practice of contemplation.⁷⁸ In later life, he described clearly his own shift from an emphasis on quiet sitting and contemplation to a different technique, that of "extending liang-chih", which can be achieved either through quiet reflection, in or out of meditation, or through action itself.

When I was in Ch'u-yang, I saw that my students were mostly concerned with intellectual knowledge, and spent time debating on similarities and differences of meanings of words, which did them no good. For a while, they realised the situation better, and achieved some immediate results. But in time they gradually developed a fondness for silence and a disgust for action, thus falling into the pitfall of becoming lifeless like dry wood. There are people who advocate abstruse and subtle theories to startle others. But I expound now only the doctrine of extending liang-chih. If liang-chih is clear, one can either try to attain truth through quiet reflection, or through efforts made in the midst of activity.⁷⁹

The universal method of "extending liang-chih" was not, however, easily discovered. Yang-ming had to suffer further tribulations, before the initial experience of enlightenment which he received in 1508 could yield its full result. This fuller discovery will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Notes to Chapter III

- 1 WWKC 1: 79b, [Chan, Instructions, 66]. The English translation is my own.
- 2 Allusion to Chuang-tzu, 26 "Wai-wu p'ien", 外物篇, SPPY ed., 9.6a; Eng. tr. by Burton Watson, op.cit., 302. See also Hsieh Lin-yün's 謝靈運 (385-433) "Yu chu tao-jen pien-tsung lun" [Discussion of Essentials with Some Venerable Gentlemen] in Tao-hsüan's 道宣 (596-66) ed., Kuang hung-ming chi, SPPY ed., 20: 9b-10a. In discussing the question of gradual and sudden enlightenment, he alluded to the fishing rod and the rabbit's traces as representing the Confucian Classics and the Buddhist Tripitaka both of which may help one to attain enlightenment. [The doctrine of sudden enlightenment discussed therein is attributed to Hsieh's friend, the monk Tao-sheng 道生 (c. 360-434)].
- 3 "Wu-ching yi-shuo hsü" 五經臆說序 [Preface to "My Personal Explanations of the Five Classics"], WWKC 22: 668b. The expression "former worthies" (hsien-hsien 先賢) obviously refers to scholars like Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi.
- 4 HSCC 22.5a.
- 5 See Yamada Jun, Yōmeigaku seigi, (Tokyo: 1942), 64. Regarded in this light, Yang-ming's enlightenment may be compared to René Descartes' (1596-1650) experience of 1619, when he decided to make a clean sweep of the confusing ideas of other philosophers, and to bring new clarity and system into the sciences by relying upon the pristine powers of his native intelligence. This is given in his "Private Thoughts", and from Discourse on the Method, parts 1 and 2.
- 6 WWKC 1: 79, Chan, Instructions, 66. Hiroyuki Iki indicates the importance Yang-ming placed on a correct "starting-point" in his article, "Wang Yang-ming's Doctrine of Innate Knowledge of the Good," PEW XI (1961-2), 27.
- 7 See Legge, Classics, v.6, 1. Tung Chung-shu had also said much on this first line of the Spring-Autumn Annals, particularly regarding the word yuan 元 (first, origin, source). See Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu, SPPY ed., 4: 1a. Both Tung and Yang-ming manifest the characteristically Chinese "correlative" thinking by their manners of reading different levels of meanings into words.
- 8 "Wu-ching yi-shuo shih-san t'iao" 五經臆說 十三條 [Thirteen Items from the "Personal Explanations of the Five Classics"], WWKC 26: 742b. These were salvaged by Ch'ien Te-hung from Yang-ming, who had committed the rest of the manuscript to fire, saying that the doctrine of liang-chih hardly needed the support of Classical proofs. See Ch'ien's note, attached to the beginning of the "Thirteen Items": WWKC 26: 742a. In comparing hsin to jen, Yang-ming calls to mind the teaching of Ch'eng Hao concerning the life-giving power of jen. See Ch. I, n. 54.

9 Great Learning, Ch. 1. Legge, Classics, v.1, 356. Thus, Yang-ming developed further a concern for the "inner" world of human character and personality which Confucius had begun. See Hsü Fu-kuan, Chung-kuo jen-hsing lun shih [History of the Chinese Philosophy of Human Nature], Hsien-Ch'in-p'ien, [pre-Ch'in period], (Taichung: 1963), 65-74. [I disagree, however, with Hsü's view that Confucius was an agnostic in his attitude regarding the existence of the Supreme Being or God, and that Chu Hsi and others had sought to continue this tradition].

Yang-ming's objective has also been described as "the development of a [philosophical] system centred on the transcendent True Self [i.e., the "human ultimate" (jen-chi 人極)] which stands in correlation to the "cosmic ultimate" (T'ai-chi 太極) [also called Heaven-and-Earth]. See Yasuoka Masaatsu, Ō Yōmei Kenkyū, [A Study of Wang Yang-ming] (Tokyo: 1967), 240.

10 "Wu-ching yi-shuo shih-san t'iao," WWKC 26: 745a Yang-ming was fond of comparing hsin to the clear sky or to the bright sun which may be hidden by dark clouds. See also WWKC 3: 146a-b; 20: 627b. This reminds one of Plato's parable of the dark cave of ignorance with an opening to daylight, through which men ascend till they reach the Form of the Good, represented by the source of light. In Yang-ming's case, the implication would be that light is only hidden by the darkness, and the action required is less to "ascend" to light, than to "dispel" the darkness. See Republic, Book VII.

11 See also Ch. 1, pp. 18-19.

12 See also Ch. 1, pp. 14-15; 18-19.

13 WWKC 1: 56a; Chan, Instructions, 6-7. The reference is to Chu's Ta-hsueh chang-chü, 1a-b.

14 WWKC 1: 56b-57a; Chan, Instructions, 7. Wang and Hsü were discussing the passage from the Great Learning, ch. 1, regarding the "highest good", which Chu Hsi considered as belonging to the text containing Confucius' words as noted down by his disciple Tseng Shen. See Legge, Classics, v.1, 356.

15 WWKC 1: 56b; Chan, Instructions, 7. Although it has been pointed out by P.C. Hsü, Okada Takehiko and others that Chu Hsi also gave much importance to the development of hsin, there is no doubt that he would not agree with Yang-ming's "reflexive" method of doing so by regarding hsin itself as the direct agent of its own perfection. In his "Kuan-hsin shuo" 觀心說 [On the Contemplation of hsin] CWWC 67: 20a-21b [Eng. tr. Chan, Source Book, 602-604], Chu clearly declared that one may contemplate things (wu) with hsin, in order to acquire li and so perfect hsin too, but cannot contemplate hsin itself with hsin. Thus he sought to retain a strict difference between the "subjective" (chu 主) and the "objective" (k'o 客), saying that the investigation of li is Confucian while the development of hsin by hsin is Buddhist.

- 16 WWKC 1: 57a; Chan, Instructions, 8.
- 17 Li-chi cheng-yi, "Chi-yi" 祭義, SPPY ed., 47: 5b; Legge, Li Chi (Oxford: Clarendon, 1885; reprinted in New York: 1967), 215-6.
- 18 WWKC 1: 57b; Chan, Instructions, 8.
- 19 Letter to Wang Tao 王道 [Wang Ch'un-fu 王純甫 1487-1547] WWKC 4: 178b-179a. In Yang-ming ch'uan-hsin lu [Record of Yang-ming's Transmission of the Truth] Liu Tsung-chou praised Yang-ming's recovery of hsin as an event which achieved as much as Mencius' teaching on the original goodness of human nature. See Liu-tzu ch'uan-shu yi-p'ien [Supplement to the Complete Works of Liu Tsung-chou] 11: 4a. Yang-ming rejects an entitative interpretation of reality in favour of an ontological interpretation.
- 20 The Five Despots were Dukes Huan of Ch'i 齊桓公 (r. 685-643 BC) Wen of Chin 晉文公 (r. 636-628 BC) Mu of Ch'in 秦穆公 (r. 659-621 BC) Hsiang of Sung 宋襄公 (d. 637 BC) and King Chuang of Ch'u 楚莊王 (r. 613-589 BC). See Shih-chi, ESWS series, K'ai-ming ed., 40: 15-16; 5: 18-19; 40: 142.
- 21 WWKC 3: 155a; English translation adapted from Chan, Instructions, 252. See T'ang Chun-i "Yang-ming hsüeh yü Chu-Lu yi-t'ung ch'ung-pien," [A Repeated Discussion Concerning the Similarities and Differences between Wang Yang-ming's Philosophy and that of Chu Hsi and of Lu Chiu-yüan], in Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao, VIII (August, 1968), 67.
- 22 WWKC 1: 60a; Chan, Instructions, 15. Yang-ming is referring here to Mencius. 2A 6. See Legge, Classics, v. 2, 201-2.
- 23 Letter to Ku Lin 顧璘 [Ku Tung-ch'iao 顧東橋 1476-1545] WWKC 2: 90a; Chan, Instructions, 94.
- 24 Mencius used the word li 理 several times without attaching to it much philosophical meaning. See Mencius 5B: 1, 6A: 7, 7B: 19. See also Tai Chen, Meng-tzu tzu-yi su-cheng in Tai Tung-yüan te che-hsüeh, op. cit., 40-72. Tai's book was an attempt to find the intended meanings of Mencius, which he considered to have been obscured by Sung-Ming philosophers. See also Chan, "The Evolution of the Neo-Confucian Concept li", op. cit., 50.
- 25 The feelings of commiseration, shame and modesty, together with the moral intuition, are the beginnings of the virtues of jen (humanity), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), and chih 智 (wisdom). See Mencius 2A, 6; Legge, Classics, v.2, 203.

26 See Mencius 6A: 1-6 [Legge, Classics, v.2, 394-403] for Mencius' debate with Kao-tzu, regarding whether righteousness is a virtue external to the self. Mencius spoke of the "feelings" (hsin 心) of commiseration, shame, respect, and the ability to distinguish right and wrong as the "four beginnings of virtue". Virtue, of course refers to humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom.

27 Letter to Ku Lin, op.cit., WWKC 2: 90a-b; Chan, Instructions 95. Note the explicit declaration that the teaching of hsin chi li implies an acceptance of the "unity of knowledge and action". It is interesting that Yang-ming should criticise Chu Hsi's teaching of hsin and li as that which makes of righteousness an external thing. He must have known that Chu had criticised Lu Chiu-yüan's identification of hsing and hsin as a return to Kao-tzu's view that "what is inborn is called nature" (Mencius 6A: 3) See CTYL 124: 10b; 126: 11b. Chu Hsi implied in this criticism that Lu's position was close to that of Ch'an Buddhism.

28 Wing-tsit Chan, "Chinese Theory and Practice with Specific Reference to Humanism" in The Chinese Mind, Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture, ed. by Charles A. Moore, (Honolulu: 1967), 82. On this point, Wang was in agreement with Chu Hsi.

29 In "Wang Yang-ming and Existential Phenomenology," International Philosophical Quarterly V, (1965), 621, Jung Hwa Yol says of this "unity of knowledge and action": "Not withdrawal, but involvement, is the essence of Wang's philosophy... The mind is of centrifugal character: it extends or directs itself towards the world." This excellent article, however, concentrates upon those aspects of Yang-ming's philosophy which deal with knowledge and intentionality, and says little of the underlying, practical aim.

30 WWKC 3: 134b; Chan, Instruction, 201. See also Shimada Kenji, "Yōmei gaku ni okeru ningen-gainen jiga ishiki no tenkai to ki igi" [The Evolution of the Notion of 'the Human' and of the Consciousness of Self in the Yang-ming School and the Meaning of this Evolution] Tōyōshi kenkyū VIII, (July 1943), 155-156.

31 Analects 3: 15; Legge, Classics, v.1, 160.

32 Letter to His Younger Brothers, (1518), WWKC 4: 189b; Shimada Kenji, "Yōmei gaku ni okeru," op.cit., 156-7.

33 WWKC 1: 65a; 2: 112b-113a; Chan, Instructions, 27; 148-9. The parable recalls to mind the gathas of the 7th cent. Ch'an monks Shen-hsiu 神秀 and Hui-neng 慧能 recorded in Liu-tsu ta-shih fa-pao t'an-ching, TSD No. 2007; XLVIII, 337-8. Eng. tr., in Yampolsky op.cit., 130-132; Wing-tsit Chan, Platform Scripture 35-41. Yang-ming prefers the position of Shen-hsiu to that of Hui-neng.

- 34 WWKC 2: 112b; Chan, Instructions, 148. The reference is to Ch'eng Hao, Wen-chi, 3: 1a, but Yang-ming was quoting from Lu's letter.
- 35 Letter to Huang Wan and Ying Liang 應良 . [Ying Yuan-chung 應原忠] (1511) WWKC 4: 171b. By using the image, Yang-ming was continuing a long tradition.
- 36 Poem written as Farewell to his Students Wang Chia-hsiu 王嘉秀 and Hsiao Ch'i 蕭琦 , WWKC 20: 600a.
- 37 WWKC 1: 71b; Chan, Instructions, 45. Wing-tsit Chan remarks that this is the only independent saying by a disciple of Wang's which is recorded in the Ch'uan-hsi lu.
- 38 WWKC 1: 60a; Chan, Instructions, 14-15.
- 39 WWKC 1: 71b; Chan, Instructions, 44. In an essay addressed to Wang Chia-hsiu ["Shu Wang Chia-hsiu ch'ing-yi ch'uan" 書王嘉秀請益卷], Yang-ming develops at some length the work of self-mastery, saying that its aim is complete selflessness. See WWKC 8: 262.
- 40 Mencius 4A, 4; Legge, Classics, v.2, 294.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Letter to Huang Wan (1513), WWKC 4: 176a "Study" refers to moral cultivation. Liu Tsung-chou remarked that Yang-ming gave a certain priority to "Establishing sincerity", even over the doctrine of liang-chih. See Yang-ming ch'uan-hsin lu 1: 3b.
- 43 According to Shih-chi, Po-yi 伯夷 was the scion of a feudal house who chose to live in retirement as a hermit, in order to yield his position to a younger brother. He opposed the expedition of King Wu of Chou 周武王 against the Shang dynasty and starved to death after the King's victory through his refusal to live on the grains of Chou. Yi-yin 伊尹 belonged to an earlier period. He was a minister of King T'ang 湯, founder of the dynasty Shang, whom he helped in the task of bringing peace and prosperity to the country. The fact that both Po-yi, the hermit, and Yi-yin, the minister, were venerated as sages had always given room in Confucian doctrine to the teaching that both the eremitical and active lives could lead to sagehood, with the choice of one or the other being dependent on varying needs and circumstances. Confucius, however, was the sage who sought for an opportunity of active service but was obliged to live in retirement. For this reason, he was considered as greater than Po-yi and Yi-yin. See Mencius 6B: 1, [Legge, v.2, 369-372;] Shih-chi 61: 179a-b; 3: 11a-b.

- 44 WWKC; 1: 77b; Chan, Instructions, 60. For the importance of this passage and of what follows, to Yang-ming's doctrine of sagehood, see Takahashi Kōji, "Yōmei Kyogaku no mujun-sejinkan chūshin to shite," [The Contradiction in Yang-ming's Teaching: the Notion of Sagehood] Chūgoku Tetsugaku, III, (1965), 2. Takahashi also considers this doctrine as the natural consequence of the doctrine of the identity of hsin and li.
- 45 WWKC 1: 78a-80b; Chan, Instructions, 61-69. To a disciple who was not so happy with the "allotment" of 10,000 yi of gold to Yao and Shun, and only 9,000 yi to Confucius, Yang-ming answered that the comparison with gold should not be taken too seriously. Sagehood, after all, was a transcendent state, and cannot be weighed quantitatively. While natural endowments differ from person to person, all can attain a certain capacity of self-realisation, developing their given talents according as these are big or small.
- 46 WWKC 1: 77b-78a; Chan, Instructions, 61; see also Takahashi, op.cit., 2-4. Yamada Jun, op.cit., 85-87.
- 47 WWKC 1: 78a-80b; Chan, Instructions, 239-240.
- 48 Ibid. Professor de Bary compares the development of Yang-ming's ideal of sagehood to the proclamation of universal Buddhahood through the Mahāyāna in China, Japan and Korea centuries earlier, and especially to those forms which emphasised the attainment of Buddhahood in this life and this body. He points out the difference between Yang-ming's ideal and that of Mahāyāna Buddhism; where the latter identified life with suffering and illusion, the former consistently exalts life, creativity and the potentialities of the human individual. See Self and Society, Introduction, 14-15.
- 49 WWKC 3: 151a; Chan, Instructions, 240.
- 50 "Nien-p'u", WWKC 32: 910a-b.
- 51 WWKC 1: 57b; Chan, Instructions, 10. For the teaching on knowledge and action in earlier Chinese philosophy, see Wing-tsit Chan, "Chinese Theory and Practice," op.cit., 84-85.
- 52 Literally, "in their pen-t'i"
- 53 Referring to a sentence in the Great Learning, ch.6; Legge, v.1, 366, which describes how a gentleman ought to make his intention sincere. This shows that already then, (1512 or 1513), Yang-ming was considering the extension of knowledge as an effort of making one's intention sincere. See Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, Wang Yang-ming chih-hsing ho-yi chih chiao [Wang Yang-ming's Teaching on the Unity of Knowledge and Action], (1926) Yin-ping shih wen-chi, op.cit., 43: 27-28, n.2. In Liang's words. "The entire Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming (WWKC) serves merely as a footnote to the words [concerning the unity of knowledge and action]". [See 43: 27].

- 54 WWKC 1:58a; Chan, Instructions, 10. Araki Kengo points out how Ku Hsien-ch'eng criticises Yang-ming for distinguishing intellectually between knowledge and action, only to conclude by saying that they are one. Ku considers this teaching self-contradictory. In Yang-ming's defence, I wish to say that he was merely using certain conceptual distinctions to indicate a deeper unity which is rooted in experience, for the sake of emphasising a fact of great ethical importance. See Araki's Bukkyō to Jukyō, 370-2.
- 55 Jung Hwa Yol, op.cit., 633. This article points out the closeness of Yang-ming's metaphysical positions to those of existential phenomenology. For the present, however, I am concentrating on the practical aspects of Yang-ming's proposition.
- 56 WWKC 1:58b; Chan, Instructions, 11.
- 57 Ibid. For a general discussion of the ethical aspects of this teaching, see also Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, Wang Yang-ming, 46-49. Ch'ien Mu, Yang-ming hst'eh shu-yao [Essentials of Yang-ming's Philosophy], (Taipei:1963), 57-60; Okada Takehiko, Ō Yōmei to Minmatsu no jugaku, [Wang Yang-ming and Late Ming Confucianism], (Tokyo: 1970), 57-59.
- 58 WWKC 1:58; Chan, Instructions, 11-12. Yamada Jun, op.cit., 98-112. Note that in this quote, Yang-ming referred to "people today" rather than to Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi, although elsewhere [WWKC 3:153-154; Chan, Instructions, 249] he mentioned the danger inherent in the Ch'eng-Chu school's emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge.
- 59 WWKC 1:58-59; Chan, Instructions, 12. While Yang-ming's theory of the unity of knowledge and action allegedly bears the imprint of Ch'an Buddhist influence, by proclaiming a "unity" resembling that found in the unitary experience of pre-reflective knowledge or consciousness, Araki Kengō points out its difference from Ch'an teaching which regards Tao (ultimate reality) as belonging to a realm which transcends both knowledge and action. Araki cites the Buddhist monk Chu-hung 株宏 (1532-1612) who said that the concern over knowledge and action was basically Confucian and that Yang-ming did not understand Ch'an tenets in any depth, since, as a soldier, he accepted killing as a possibly good act. See Bukkyō to Jukyō, 389-391. For the Ch'an teaching on knowledge and action, see Wu-men kuan 19, TSD No.2005, XLVIII, 295; German tr. by Dumoulin, Der Pass ohne Tor, (Tokyo:1953), 31-32.
- 60 WWKC 3:134a-b; Chan, Instructions, 201.
- 61 WWKC 2:89b-90a; Chan, Instructions, 92-94.

- 62 Ibid.
- 63 WWKC 6: 215a.
- 64 Analects 22: 19, Legge, Classics, v.1, 326.
- 65 Book of Odes. "Wen-Wang chih shih" ; Legge Classics, v.4, 445. The Doctrine of the Mean, ch.12 makes reference to it. See Legge Classics, v.1, 392. The expression "hawk flying and fish leaping" represents the way of nature, which reveals the operations of the "principle of Heaven".
- 66 Yang-ming denies here that inner cultivation is a Ch'an Buddhist practice, and warns others from shunning this cultivation for fear of being contaminated by Buddhism.
- 67 This poem was written by Yang-ming on the occasion of the departure of Luan Tzu-jen 樂子仁, a friend of his. See WWKC 20: 605b.
- 68 Chuang-tzu ch. 2, SPPY ed., 1: 18a.
- 69 WWKC 1: 64b; Chan, Instructions, 26. Yang-ming's teaching of "quiet-sitting" was actually less "Buddhist" than that of Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi, whose emphasis on tranquillity as a means of recovering one's original goodness made such practice an essential part of their cultivation. Yang-ming, however, gave equal value to quiet-sitting and any other practice, particularly with his doctrine of "extending liang-chih." See Kusumoto Masatsugu, "Conflicts between the Thoughts of the Sung Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty", Philosophical Studies of Japan, op.cit., 54-57, who emphasised the "quietist" trend of Chu Hsi's philosophy in contrast to the more "dynamic" Yang-ming School. Later on, in seeking to correct the abuses of Yang-ming school's T'ai-chou branch, Nieh Pao and others after him would again emphasise quiet-sitting and tranquillity and thus effect a certain return to Chu's teachings. See also Kusumoto Masatsugu, Sō-Min jidai jugaku shisō no kenkyū; [A Study of the Confucian Thought of the Sung and Ming Periods], (Chiba-ken: 1963), 173-184, 327. Okada Takehiko, Ō Yōmei to Minmatsu no jugaku, 21, 173-4, 256-8.
- 70 WWKC 1: 68a; Chan, Instructions, 35. Note that Yang-ming would also comment on the relative easiness of the work of suppressing bandits when compared to that of removing "the bandits of hsin". See Okada Takehiko, Ō Yōmei to Minmatsu no jugaku, 60-62.
- 71 WWKC 1: 68a; Chan, Instructions, 35. The example given of the cat was taken from Ch'an sources. Chu Hsi had made reference to it also in teaching the need of concentration. See WWKC 71: 7a-b. Yet Ch'en Chien argued that Chu merely used Ch'an parables to teach Confucian truths whereas Yang-ming, like Lu Chiu-yüan, was a "Buddhist". Yang-ming, Hsüeh-pu t'ung-pien 7: 15b-16a. For the Ch'an source, see Wu-ming (fl. 1189) Lien-teng hui-yao, [Essentials of

the Combined Lamps] 15, Zokuzōkyō 1st coll., pt. 2, B, case 9, 339b. Even after he had begun teaching the doctrine of liang-chih Yang-ming continued to insist on the need of discovering and eliminating selfish desires through the practice of sitting in meditation. The fact that he developed the later doctrine did not imply his discarding this practice, although he gave it less emphasis. WWKC 3: 144a-b; Chan, Instructions, 223-4.

72 WWKC 3: 144a-b; Chan, Instructions, 223-224.

73 WWKC 3: 130b; Chan, Instructions, 190-1. The incident concerning Ch'eng Yi is given in ECCS, Yi-shu, 3: 5a.

It must be kept in mind, of course, that Yang-ming was giving advice to specific disciples for their specific problems.

74 WWKC 3: 140a; Chan, Instructions, 214. See also Yang-ming's letter to Liu, in WWKC 5: 202.

75 "Nien-p'u", WWKC 32: 907. See also above, ch. II, p. 50.

76 WWKC 3: 130b, 141a; Chan, Instructions, 191, 216-7.

77 WWKC 4: 172b

78 See his essay addressed to Meng Yüan [Shu Meng Yüan chüan 書孟源卷], WWKC 8: 263b.

79 WWKC 3: 141a; Chan, Instructions, 217.

Chapter IV

THE CONTROVERSIES: KO-WU

Whenever [philosophical] teaching is given, there must be similarities and differences. It is not necessary for all to have the same opinions; that is the way to seek the same [truth].¹

Yang-ming realised that his own teachings--"the source and principle of all virtue and perfection lies in hsin", and "knowledge and action are one" clashed with the accepted teachings of Chu Hsi regarding ko-wu--the "investigation of things"--and chih-chih--the "extension of knowledge". Chu had spoken of such "investigation" and such "extension" as consisting of "developing hsin (mind-and-heart) to the utmost, knowing one's nature, and knowing Heaven". It is the first step to take in the pursuit of sagehood. He had said that "sincerity of the intention, rectification of hsin, and cultivation of the person" are equivalent to "keeping to one's hsin, nurturing one's nature, and serving Heaven" all of which follow the first step. He had also said that perfect wisdom and perfect humanity (jen) lie in "remaining single-minded regardless of whether one's life will be long or short".² Yang-ming, however, disagreed with such teaching, preferring to equate the "investigation of things" with the cultivation of T'ien-li, which means, for him, "abiding in the highest good".

Preliminary Discussions

In the famous conversation with Hsü Ai, Yang-ming explained that Chu Hsi made the mistake of reversing the proper order which should be observed in the work of study, requiring of the beginner what can be done only by the moral genius or expert. He considered rather becoming "single-minded", regardless of whether one's life is long or short, as the first step, equivalent to "making up one's mind" (li-hsin 立心).³ He admitted that it involves

painful and arduous labour, as is proper to all beginnings. He added: "Chu Hsi reversed the proper order [of things], so that the beginner has no place to start".⁴

Yang-ming declared also that he preferred to use the word ko as "rectifying" rather than "investigating" or "reaching", and the word wu as "affairs" (shih) rather than "things". For whereas "investigating or reaching things" implies a linear movement of the person who reaches out of himself to attain to the so-called "principles" (li) of things, "rectifying [oneself in the handling of] affairs" connotes a circular movement involving the dynamic activity of hsin, the mind-and-heart, engaged in perfecting and determining itself. Let us listen to his own words:

The master of the body (sheng) is the mind-and-heart (hsin). That which proceeds from the mind-and-heart is intention (yi). Intention-in-itself [literally, the "original substance" (pen-t'i) of intention] is knowledge. That to which intention is directed is affair (wu). For example, when the intention is directed to the service of one's parents, then such service is an "affair" [or action].... There is no li (virtue, moral principles), no wu (affair, action) outside of hsin (the mind-and-heart).⁵

Following this line of reasoning, Yang-ming concludes that the central moral teaching of both the Doctrine of the Mean and of the Great Learning lies in "seeking the sincerity of the intention", and this, in turn, is the meaning of ko-wu, called "investigation of things".⁶

Yang-ming objected to Chu Hsi's new arrangement of the text of the Great Learning, which put the section on the "investigation of things" before that on "making the intention sincere". For him, "making the intention sincere" is the principal message of this book, and the starting point of the entire task of study or personal cultivation. Chu's re-arrangement confused the order of importance as well as of precedence. He referred to it as the "infinitesimal

mistake in the beginning which led to an infinite mistake in the end".⁷ He remarked that Chu's effort to interpret the whole text in terms of reverence (ching) and of sincerity (ch'eng) was superfluous, like "drawing a snake and giving it feet".⁸ It would be much better if he had left the entire text intact without additions and without changes.

In a letter written in 1514, Yang-ming gave a thorough discourse on this question of the "investigation of things". He says that "sincerity of intention" is the essential principle and basis of learning, while the "investigation of things and the extension of knowledge are the results achieved by sincerity of intention". He also stated that Chu Hsi's teaching of "intention becoming sincere after exhausting the principles (li) of things", while not contradictory in itself, does not completely conform to the original meaning of the text of the Great Learning or of the Doctrine of the Mean. Unfortunately, this teaching became accepted by "later scholars", who "adhere to the added commentaries, and do not investigate deeply into the meaning of the Classics".⁹

Yang-ming attempted, for a long time, to accommodate Chu Hsi's teachings, by a process of re-interpretation, presenting what he considered to have been the "real meaning" of Chu Hsi's words, and appealing from a "misunderstood" Chu Hsi to the "real" one. Later on, he would take a further step, and move from an "immature" Chu Hsi to a "mature" Master, who, allegedly in his old age, reached virtually the same positions as did Yang-ming himself.

In his "Tzu-yang shu-yuan chi hsü" 紫陽書院集序 [Preface to the Collected Works on the Tzu-yang Academy], dated 1515, Yang-ming had tried to reconcile his teaching that "the source and principle of all virtue and perfections lies in the hsin" with Chu Hsi's famous "Rules for Instruction of Po-lu tung Academy".¹⁰ He claimed that his desire was to present a systematic methodology for the acquisition of virtue through learning. For him, this means

going from the roots to the branches, cultivating the mind-and-heart (hsin) and expressing this cultivation through the practice of such virtues as humanity and righteousness. He says that this was also the inner meaning of Chu's "Rules", which first set forth knowledge of the five moral relationships as the "essentials" of learning, and then prescribe for the students a graded programme of "study, inquiry, reflection and discernment", which, in turn, is followed by certain "main points" on practical moral behaviour in the management of affairs. He admits the danger which arises when Chu's words are taken in a detailed and fragmentary manner, adding that his own teaching is designed to clarify what Chu Hsi has not been able to explain completely. Thus, according to Yang-ming, hsin remains always as the object of "study, inquiry, reflection and discernment",¹¹ In other words, all efforts of learning or self-cultivation should be concentrated on the cultivation of man's hsin.

So long as Yang-ming kept his teaching on the "investigation of things" private, in letters and discussions with disciples and friends, he was able to avoid public controversy. The situation, however, changed in 1518, with his publication of the two works: Ta-hsueh ku-pen p'ang-chu 大學古本旁注 [Old Version of the Great Learning, with side commentaries], together with the preface he wrote for it three years before, and the Chu-tzu wan-nien ting-lun 朱子晚年定論 [Definitive Ideas of Chu Hsi, as developed in His later Life], also with his preface.¹² These works indicated his state of mind at the time. The first was an open assertion of views on the Great Learning which differed from Chu's, while the second work represented an effort to defend himself against possible accusations of "heterodoxy", by a strange appeal to Chu Hsi himself. The text of the Great Learning had been divided into small chapters, punctuated and explained by Chu Hsi, who had also altered the expression, ch'in-min 親民 (love the people) to that of hsin-min 新民 (renovate the people). This edited text, together with Chu's commentary, had gained wide acceptance and official approval during Yuan and

Ming to such a point that many forgot the original text was an integral part of the Book of Rites.¹³ Yang-ming, however, preferred the pre-Sung text as found in the T'ang edition of the Nine Classics, and had it published, together with his own "Preface", prepared three years earlier, as well as certain brief, side commentaries. Yang-ming's second publication consisted of a collection of excerpts from thirty-four letters, written by Chu to twenty-four persons, disciples and friends, and a selected passage from the writings of Wu Ch'eng 吳澄, [Wu Yu-ch'ing 吳幼清 1249-1333] who expressed regret at the degeneration of Chu's school of thought into a "school of exegesis", and declared his own "conversion" from a fondness for fragmentary knowledge to the cultivation of real virtue.¹⁴ To these Yang-ming added his own preface, written three years earlier. He claimed here that he had found proofs that Chu had reached, in his later life, the same conclusions as himself, on what the correct Way of the Confucian school was.¹⁵

These publications established Yang-ming's reputation as a thinker, and also stirred up a great deal of controversy, which was to last throughout the Ming and well into the Ch'ing dynasty.¹⁶ This controversy can best be seen through the letters and remarks exchanged between Yang-ming and Chan Jo-shui, Lo Ch'in-shun--a renowned scholar of Chu Hsi's school, Yang-ming's senior in age and official rank--and several other people. It revolves around the philosophical question called "the investigation of things", so much a part of the teaching of the Great Learning, and generally associated with the interpretations given to it by Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi. And it also calls to question the authority of Chu Hsi, till then unchallenged.

I propose to study the controversies aroused by Yang-ming's two publications, by discussing the debates between Yang-ming and his friends, concerning both the "investigation of things" and the authority of Chu Hsi, and then move on to a more thorough treatment of Yang-ming's entire attitude toward the Classics and the role of intellectual inquiry in the quest for wisdom and sagehood.

The Controversies

In the preface to the Ta-hsüeh ku-pen p'ang-chu, Yang-ming presented his reasons for the publication of the old version of the text. He began by saying that the essential teaching of the Great Learning, including that of the "investigation of things", lies in "making the intention sincere". This is also the meaning of "extending knowledge", which is achieved through the "rectification of hsin", as expressed in the "cultivation of self", which is nothing else than "manifesting illustrious virtue"--with reference to self--and "loving the people"--with reference to others. He thus internalises the whole quest for wisdom and sagehood. Self, mind-and-heart, intention, knowledge and even thing [in his case, referring to action] are all one and the same, are all different manifestations of the same reality, or better still, of the same process. Let us listen to his own words:

The work of making intention sincere lies in the investigation of things. To seek such sincerity means, at its utmost, to rest in the highest good. To rest in the highest good requires the extension of knowledge. The rectification of hsin is aimed at the recovery of the pen-t'i [of hsin]. The cultivation or perfection of self expresses the operation [of such rectification]. This is called manifesting virtue with reference to the self, and loving the people with reference to others.¹⁷

After this explanation, Yang-ming went on to say that, when the entire text of the Great Learning is taken as a whole, and meditated upon in an attitude of reverence, everything falls well into perspective and the meaning of the sages is clear. When, however, the text is divided into sections, and given a commentary, the doctrine transmitted by Confucius to Tseng-tzu and contained therein is lost. "Fragmentation [of knowledge], emptiness [of content] and falsehood" are the results. The highest good disappears from sight.¹⁸

ko-wu: "Whole" or "Parts"?

Lo Ch'in-shun was Yang-ming's elder by nine years and a known scholar of the time. He had studied Ch'an Buddhist writings and followed Buddhist practices, but had later discarded them in favour of the "orthodox" teachings of Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi.¹⁹ He was a conscientious official and led a blameless life. After reading Yang-ming's two publications of 1518, which had been sent to him in 1520, he wrote to tell Yang-ming of his reactions.

Like Ch'an Jo-shui, Lo pointed out that Yang-ming advanced his own teaching on the "investigation of things" by taking the two words ko-wu out of context. He added that Yang-ming's interpretations appear to favour discarding the "investigation of things" outside of the mind-and-heart, for the sake of cultivating the mind-and-heart alone, which would result in a direct contradiction of the words of the text, and come dangerously close to the teachings of Ch'an Buddhism.²⁰

Yang-ming shared little common ground with Lo, other than the fact that he and Lo respected each other as eminent scholars and men of integrity, with the same high ideals of sagehood. Lo held to the distinctions Chu Hsi made between hsin (mind-and-heart) and hsing (nature). He did not share Yang-ming's optimistic estimate of the power of hsin. Instead of discussing with Lo the subtler questions, such as of knowledge and action, Yang-ming concentrated on explaining to Lo his own basic position regarding the "unity" and "wholeness" of the quest for sagehood. It is, he said, the whole personality that should be developed, not by "investigating" one thing after another in the manner of an assiduous scholar and exegete, but by cultivating hsin. Besides, he sought to make this explanation, not by a discourse on hsin, as he had done with his own disciples, but by beginning with li, which, together with hsing, (nature), made up Lo's basic starting-point, as it did Chu Hsi's earlier.

Yang-ming admitted to Lo that the words of the text of the Great Learning make mention not merely of making the intention sincere and of rectifying hsin, but also of the "investigation of things" and the "extension of knowledge", as "methods" of personal cultivation. However, he claims that this does not justify the separation of learning into two realms: "inner" and "outer". The four "methods"²¹ or procedural steps are in reality four aspects of the same effort, an effort directed at the integral development of the character of the whole man, by the cultivation of his personality at its deepest recesses--at its hsin. And then, propounding a thoroughly unitary philosophy for the sake of supporting his single, integrated method of self-cultivation, Yang-ming presented his own understanding of li. This time, it is in terms of this word that he seeks to explain the other words, of hsing (nature), hsin (mind-and-heart), yi (intention), chih (knowledge), and wu (thing).

There is only one li (principle of being). When concentrated in an individual, it is known as hsing (nature). As master [or moving principle] of this (nature), it is known as hsin (mind-and-heart). In terms of the operation of this [hsin], it is known as yi (intention or thought). In terms of the clear consciousness [one has] of this intention, it is known as chih (knowledge). And, from the point of view of [the object of] experience of this [knowledge] it is known as wu (act or "thing").²²

According to his view, the investigation of li would therefore become the investigation of human nature itself, and this is to be done by the control that the mind-and-heart exercises over its acts and operations, which means, over its "intentions". By this control, the mind-and-heart assures the sincerity of its intentions, which, in turn, assures the sincerity and rectitude of the mind-and-heart itself and of the whole person. Yang-ming therefore gave a renewed statement of his views on the method of self-cultivation, flowing from the above explanation of li:

With regard to wu (acts or "things"), we speak of ko [for him, rectifying but usually, "investigation"]. With regard to chih [knowledge, in his case not different from action], we speak of chih 致 (extending). With regard to yi (intention), we speak of ch'eng (making sincere). With regard to hsin (mind-and-heart), we speak of cheng 正 (rectifying). To rectify is to rectify this [hsin], to make sincere is to make this [hsin] sincere, to investigate is to investigate this [hsin]. This is what is meant by investigating li to the utmost for the sake of completely developing [human] nature. There is no li outside hsing (nature); there is no wu [either] outside hsing.²³

With this last sentence, therefore, Yang-ming seeks to explain his own position to Lo by taking Lo's position, by speaking, of hsing (nature), li (principle of being) and wu ("thing", for him, really "act"), in his explanations of hsin (mind-and-heart).

In later life, Yang-ming frequently had to answer his disciples' questions concerning his teaching on the "investigation of things" and on hsin and li. On one occasion,²⁴ a disciple asked how Yang-ming would reconcile his own teaching with that of Ch'eng Yi on these questions, quoting from Ch'eng Yi the sentence, "In wu (things), [it] is called li (principle of being)".²⁵ Yang-ming must have known very well the context for this sentence, taken out of a passage in which Ch'eng Yi had discussed the question of the goodness of hsin. For he promptly replied to the disciple, that the word hsin should be inserted: "In wu (things), [hsin] is called li". He went on to explain that for him, this meant that when the mind-and-heart (hsin) applies itself to the practice of serving one's parents, then this virtuous action is li, and when the mind-and-heart applies itself to the practice of serving the ruler, this virtuous action also becomes li.²⁶ Thus, over and over again, Yang-ming asserts that li is not an abstract

principle, whether of being or of virtue. For him, being and virtue cannot be separated from life and action. Hsin (mind-and-heart) and li (virtue) are inseparable, because it is hsin which makes li.

On that same occasion, Yang-ming continued his discourse by explaining his underlying reason for teaching such a doctrine regarding li. He said that to consider li as abstract principles, albeit principles of virtue, but quite separate from and outside of hsin, the centre of moral activity, has led to the abstraction of the concept of virtue itself, and the divorce between virtue and life.

[There are people] who only strive to make their actions look good on the outside, while separating them completely from hsin (mind-and-heart). They make hsin (mind-and-heart) and li (virtue) into two things, drifting unconsciously into hypocrisy as did the [Five] Despots. I speak of li as being present in hsin, so that.... people may make efforts on hsin and not accumulate individual acts of righteousness externally..... This is the basic reason for my teaching in this respect.²⁷

When the disciple posed a further question as to why Yang-ming always tried to synthesise the teachings of the many sages and worthy men of the past, by regarding them in a holistic or unitary view, he replied: "There is only one Way (Tao),.... Heaven-and-Earth and the sages are all one. How can they be divided?"²⁸

ko-wu: Knowledge or Action?

Wang Yang-ming was a "self-taught" philosopher. Chan Jo-shui, on the other hand, was the recognised disciple of Ch'en Hsien-chang, the disciple, in turn, of Wu Yü-pi. At the time of the first meeting of Yang-ming and Chan Jo-shui, the latter was, without doubt, the "senior" philosopher, older and more mature. Chan's friendship certainly

contributed to Yang-ming's resolution to engage himself in the quest for wisdom and sagehood, and to do so by relying very much on personal insight acquired through the practice of virtue.

Unlike Lo Ch'in-shun, with whom Yang-ming seems to have had no real discussion until 1520, Chan had discussed with Yang-ming the problems related to the Great Learning over a long period of time. It revolved around the question of knowledge and action. Where Chan insisted upon the role of classical knowledge in the quest of sagehood, Yang-ming replied that there was no genuine knowledge outside of action. But the basic positions of the two men were not so far apart. Both believed in hsin, the mind-and-heart, as the self-determining principle capable of bringing a man to his highest goals, although Chan would have added, provided he made certain efforts to study the Classics.

Late in 1511, Yang-ming wrote an essay in Chan's honour, in which he expressed openly his debt of gratitude:

For twenty years, I had meddled with perverse doctrines and heresies.... Later, I made friends with Chan Kan-ch'üan [Jo-shui], after which my determination [to seek after the ideals of Confucian sagehood] became firmer and stronger, and quite irrevocable. This shows how much I have received from Kan-ch'üan.²⁹

He continued by praising Chan's insistence on the role of personal insights in the quest for sagehood, defending Chan from the charge of being tainted with the influence of Ch'an Buddhism by appealing to Chan's high ideals:

The teachings of Kan-ch'üan insists upon acquiring for oneself personal insights. The world has not been able to understand it....[Many] suspect it to be Ch'an Buddhism. If that be so, then I still have not known Ch'an Buddhism. For, with such sublime ambitions as his, how can someone like Chan Kan-ch'üan not be a disciple of the sages.³⁰

The seeds of disagreement, however, were already present. Having received, through Chan, the legacy of Ch'en Hsien-chang concerning the importance of acquiring for oneself personal insights, as well as the teaching of the unity of man with all things, Yang-ming had also gone beyond these horizons. The period between 1512 and 1518 had already witnessed his gradual development of an independent philosophy. From then on, he was to influence Chan more than Chan could influence him. The two engaged in philosophical disputes in letters and conversations, which ended with Yang-ming's death in 1529.

Chan's teaching centred around the notion of T'ien-li or "principle of Heaven", a notion which calls to mind again the teaching of Ch'eng Hao and his emphasis on acquiring insight for oneself. But it also gives some importance to Chu Hsi's notion of li. This would later bring him into conflict with Yang-ming, who objected to Chu's doctrine of an "exhaustive search for li" by the "investigation of things". The dispute was to focus on the differences of methodology of self-cultivation. It brought out Yang-ming's entire dependence on personal insight, as opposed to Chan's admission of the role of the Classics as the ultimate corrective criteria to such insights, which he, no doubt, valued also. It also brought out certain subtle nuances in the understanding of the word hsin. For Yang-ming, hsin, the mind-and-heart, which is one with all things, is in itself independent and sufficient, without necessarily requiring the help of the Classics in its quest for wisdom. For Chan, hsin, understood also as one with all things, must on that account accommodate also the Classics as the deposit of truth and wisdom.

Already in 1515, Yang-ming had discussed with Chan the relative merits of the Old and New Versions of the Great Learning, as well as the interpretation of the words ko-wu, "investigation of things". They were then unable to reach an agreement. According to one of Yang-ming's disciples:

Kan-ch'üan held the old theory [of Chu Hsi]. The Master said: "This would be seeking wisdom in external things". Kan-ch'üan replied, "If you regard the investigation of the li of things as external, you are belittling your hsin (mind-and-heart)". Then the Master proceeded to give a discourse on Mencius' chapter on developing hsin to the utmost.³¹

The next day, Chan explained his own ideas further in a letter addressed to Yang-ming, objecting to Yang-ming's interpretation of the word wu (thing) as "that to which the intention of hsin is directed". For him, that implied that things (wu) are outside of the mind-and-heart (hsin). He suggested rather that the mind-and-heart (hsin) comprehends all things (wu), and hence, that the "investigation of things" is no external quest. "For the mind-and-heart [which] investigates [things] and extends [knowledge] is not external [to oneself]".³²

Did Chan, however, understand correctly Yang-ming's definition of the word wu? Could he, perhaps, have misunderstood Yang-ming, by placing wu (things) in a context of the investigation of knowledge, where Yang-ming himself had referred rather to action, the action, namely, of "polishing" the mind by removing from it all selfish desires? In other words, was not Chan's idea of self-cultivation that of the mind-and-heart (hsin) expanding itself through a deepened understanding of all things, while Yang-ming preferred that hsin (mind-and-heart) empty itself of all unruly desires through a process of purification and asceticism? To a disciple, Ch'en Wei-chün [Ch'en Chiu-ch'uan 陳九川], who had shared Chan's misgivings regarding Yang-ming's position, Yang-ming had explained that he too, did not consider wu to be outside of hsin. He regarded rather that wu (thing) is somehow one and the same with sheng (body or self), hsin (mind-and-heart), yi (intention) and chih (knowledge). He said: "The [sense organs of] eyes, ears, mouth and nose, together with the four

limbs, make up sheng (body or self). Yet without hsin (mind-and-heart), how can they see, hear, speak or move? And also, if hsin wishes to see, hear, speak or move, it too would be powerless without the eyes, ears, mouth, nose and the four limbs. Hence hsin (mind-and-heart) is nothing without sheng (body) and sheng is nothing without hsin".³³

Thus, hsin (mind-and-heart) is that which is in command of the body or the "self" (sheng), and the two cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Besides, the mind-and-heart (hsin) is dynamic: its activity is called intention (yi), whereas the intelligence which permeates this activity is called knowledge (chih). As to "thing" (wu), it is that to which intention is directed. In other words, knowledge involves the moral activity of the intention, and even "thing" (wu)--which, for Chan, is the object of knowledge--must involve action.

And so, Yang-ming's method of self-cultivation lies in the rectification of intention, a process in which knowledge and action are one, in which truth or wisdom is discovered by action. For Yang-ming, action contains knowledge.

Between 1517 and 1520, when Wang was busy suppressing bandits and the rebellious forces of Prince Ch'en-hao, Chan was back in his home-town, mourning the death of his mother. He gradually lost his former misgivings concerning the old version of the Great Learning, coming around to Wang's point of view especially in expressing preference for the words "ch'in-min"--loving the people--which Chu Hsi had altered.³⁴ He also regarded the "investigation of things" as "realising personally the 'principle of Heaven' (T'ien-li) everywhere". This seemed to make his position closer to Wang's although they still remained a step apart:

[Chan's] present view on the investigation of things is much nearer [the truth]. However, there is no need for him to substitute the word li (virtue) for the word wu (thing). Let the word wu be restored, and his teaching will be correct.³⁵

For Yang-ming, Chan's use of the word li implies his continued adherence to the importance of the role of knowledge, of knowing the principles of things, of attaining the supreme reality in T'ien-li, the "principle of Heaven", or, more clearly, perfect virtue.

Chan, on the other hand, could not accept the reduction of the teaching of the Great Learning to "making the intention sincere". For him, that is tantamount to saying that the universe is empty and unreal. While he admits to a "mystical unity" between self and the Universe, he also maintains that the two are somehow distinct in existence. The investigation of things would therefore refer to the attainment of "principles" existing in the universe. For him, to "investigate" means to "reach" or "arrive", while "things" refer to perfect virtue or "principle of Heaven". This can be attained through study, inquiry, thought, discernment and action.³⁶ Thus, he visualised a certain "ascent" to perfect virtue or "principle of Heaven", which forms the supreme reality, being also the fullness of all goodness and perfection, and which involves a man in becoming wise so that he may be good. Action, therefore, depends on knowledge, as does also the attainment of sagehood itself.

In a letter written to another friend, Ku Lin, some time before 1524, Yang-ming has left us with his reply to Chan's interpretation of the investigation of things. After saying that, to develop one's nature and know Heaven, all that is needed is to extend one's liang-chih to the utmost, which, in turn, includes the effort of "carefully examining T'ien-li", he declares that he has never discouraged others from "investigating things" to the utmost, nor has he urged them to live in seclusion and do nothing. Rather, he holds that "if an unenlightened student can really carefully examine T'ien-li... in connection with things and events as they come, and extend his knowledge of the good, then though stupid, he will surely become intelligent, and though weak, he will surely become strong".³⁷ However, he continues:

Who knows that the "investigation of things" of the Great Learning should not be interpreted in the sense of "rectifying" rather than in the sense of "reaching"? If it must be interpreted in the sense of "reaching", it would be necessary to say, "investigating things to the utmost until you reach the principles of all things" in order to make sense... To mention only the "investigation of things" and dogmatically to say that it means the investigation of the principles of things to the utmost is to regard the latter as belonging entirely to the sphere of knowledge and the investigation of things as involving no action... That is why later scholars have separated knowledge and action into two sections and have been constantly caught up in fragmentary knowledge and dissociated details, and why the doctrine of the sages has been declining and fading away.³⁸

Hence, with regard to the doctrine of "investigating things", the chief difference between Wang's and Chan's teachings is that of practical asceticism. For Wang, the quest for sagehood is purely moral and mystical. In his view, the unity of knowledge and action implies that moral knowledge and moral action are almost indistinguishable, that the former lies in the latter. His overwhelming emphasis was therefore upon moral and spiritual asceticism, through the individual's continual responses to the movements of his own mind and to the events of life which act upon the mind. Chan, however, insisted upon the necessity of intellectual effort, of study of Classics. He considers that it is difficult to ascertain the "correctness" or "orthodoxy" of one's thoughts and concepts without making intellectual efforts. To break out of the narrow boundaries of a purely internal quest for sagehood, as consisting in the purification and rectification of one's inner thoughts and motives alone, he expresses preference for "the realization of T'ien-li" as the meaning of "investigating things". True, Yang-ming also speaks of developing T'ien-li.

the civil examinations and become interested in the writing of prose and poetry, how he devoted his mind to Confucian learning but was confused by the great variety of theories and interpretations regarding the texts, and how he turned to Taoism and Buddhism for an answer to the meaning of life. Then he described his exile in Lung-ch'ang, the enlightenment he received and the confirmation of it by his meditations on the Classics. He was troubled, however, by the fact that his insights were not in agreement with the teachings of Chu Hsi, whom he respected very much. Finally, after "searching" through Chu's works, Yang-ming found that Chu's ideas had changed remarkably in later life, when he "expressed regret" at the mistakes he made in earlier years. And so, with great joy, Yang-ming decided to make open Chu's intellectual evolution and the insights he attained late in life, which were largely unknown to the scholars of the world, attached only to the "tentative" doctrine of Chu's age.⁴²

In the same letter in which he discussed Yang-ming's publication of the old version of the Great Learning, Lo Ch'in-shun also gave his criticisms of Yang-ming's second publication of excerpts from letters which Chu was supposed to have written in later life. He pointed out that Yang-ming had selected these passages on an arbitrary basis, and had taken them out of context to highlight Chu's teaching on inner cultivation. Besides, Yang-ming had also presented as written late in life four letters written in Chu's middle age or even earlier--certainly before Chu's publication of his "Collected Commentaries" and his "Questions and Answers" on the Four Books, -which Yang-ming asserted, incorporate Chu's "tentative" doctrine.⁴³ He also pointed out, that if Wu Ch'eng finally acquired insights into "the learning of the sages", these probably came suddenly, as the culmination of his long years of devoted study of the Classics and the Commentaries, thus proving that the assiduous study of the Classics should be promoted rather than discouraged. After all, one might forget the fish-trap on catching the fish, and forget the rabbit's traces on catching the rabbit itself, but there is no reason why one should also regret having used the fish-trap and followed upon the rabbit's traces.⁴⁴

In his answer, Yang-ming insisted that most of the letters in his selection were written by Chu Hsi towards the end of that philosopher's life, although he admitted that he had not taken care to establish the correct chronology for all the letters. He acknowledged that he had published the selection for the sake of "reconciling" as much as possible, Chu's teachings on the "investigation of things" and Yang-ming's own insights. But he denied that he had made this work public with the motive of deceiving his readers.⁴⁵


All my life, Chu Hsi's teachings have been like a revelation from the gods or from divination and oracles. I could hardly bear to depart from his teachings so abruptly. In my heart, I cannot bear to contradict Master Chu, and yet I cannot but contradict him, because the Way is what it is and the Way will not be made clear unless I am forthright.⁴⁶

This was in 1520. Yang-ming had made an attempt to reconcile his teaching with Chu Hsi's, or rather, to reconcile Chu Hsi's teaching with his own, and his attempt had been largely unsuccessful. One can hardly blame him for any intellectual dishonesty. He had merely acted in accordance with Lu Chiu-yüan's remarks, of the Six Classics being only footnotes to one's insights, and had applied it to the writings of Chu Hsi. In doing so, he had been grossly careless of chronology, and quite unfair to Chu Hsi's intended meanings. And he had admitted his errors. Yang-ming's differences with Chu Hsi were only made clearer by this publication, aimed originally as an appeal, from a supposedly "mistaken" Chu Hsi, to the "real" Chu Hsi, for support for Yang-ming's own teachings. There would be no reconciliation possible. If the ideas of Chu Hsi were the criterion for Confucian orthodoxy, as this was known in the Ming dynasty, then Yang-ming was without doubt a dissenter and even a heretic.⁴⁷ But there can be other ways of looking at this picture.

To Acquire Wisdom

Classics versus Commentaries

How much value Yang-ming attaches to intellectual inquiry as well as to the authority of the ancients can be seen in his attitude toward the Classics. Yang-ming had spoken at length on this subject, especially in a conversation with Hsü Ai.⁴⁸ He gave then his reasons for favouring a return to the sources, the classical texts themselves, without paying attention to the commentaries. He said that Confucius' merit was in abridging and transmitting the Classics, reducing their contents, purifying them of accumulated dross. This was done in order to help people to find out more easily the real "message" of the Classics. This message lay, not in the words or narratives given by the texts, but in the spirit in which these were recorded. The Classics represent a "portrait" of the "principle of Heaven". They can be compared to the portrait of a human person, given by a painter who offers an outline of the man's appearance in such a way as to communicate something of his genuine, spiritual personality. Those who view the portrait should use it in order to seek out this true personality, this hidden spirit. The commentaries, however, are written by later men, who came after the sages. Their works can be compared to the "copies" of the master-pieces. These copies have changed and added to the originals, until the true likeness has been lost.⁴⁹ One should therefore return to the sources, to the texts themselves, in order to recover the primary purpose for which Confucius and the other sages had transmitted the Classics, and this was: "to rectify men's hsin, keep intact the 'principle of Heaven', and eliminate selfish desires."⁵⁰

In an essay he wrote on the "Tsun-ching Pavilion" [literally, Respect-the-Classic Pavilion] of Chi-shan College, Yang-ming describes the Classics as the "constant Way (Tao)". This is called ming  (ordinance, or destiny) in Heaven, and hsing (nature) in man. It is also called hsin (mind-and-heart) as master of the person.

Thus, this constant Way "penetrates persons and things, reaches the four seas, fills up Heaven and Earth, goes through past and present, comprehends all that exists, and is identical to all that exists, without changing anything."⁵¹ And also:

When it responds to events, it becomes compassion, sense of shame, modesty in yielding to others, and discernment of right and wrong. When it is expressed in affairs, it becomes the affection between father and son, the righteousness between sovereign and subject, the relationship between husband and wife, the order between elders and juniors, the fidelity between friend and friend.... The Six Classics are nothing other than this constant Way in my hsin.⁵²

Yang-ming explained that sages of old had committed to writing these Classics, for the sake of giving support to the ultimate human criteria of morality. Such action can be compared to that of the ancestors of a rich clan, who committed to writing the record of their property, which they bequeathed to their descendants.⁵³ "Thus, the reality of the Six Classics is contained in my hsin, just as the real, accumulated wealth and property of all kinds and items are preserved in the rich family, while the inventory book merely presents an account of their names, kinds, and numbers." And so, worldly scholars who do not seek the reality of the Classics in the mind-and-heart, and search for it in words and sounds, resemble the descendants of the rich family, who squander their heritage, while pointing vainly to the inventory books, saying, "Here is my accumulated wealth and property."⁵⁴

The primary purpose for which the Classics have been handed down determines also the manner in which they should be studied. Yang-ming was against merely understanding the words themselves. He recommended that the texts be read over and over again, until they have yielded their spiritual meaning. This spiritual meaning cannot be separated from virtuous action:

One should make efforts [to develop] hsin in-itself. Whenever something is not understood and cannot be put into practice, one should enter into oneself and seek to realise [what is said] in one's hain. Understanding will surely come. For the Four Books and Five Classics talk about nothing but hsin in-itself. And this is nothing other than the Way (Tao). When hsin in-itself is understood, the Way is also understood.⁵⁵

Thus, the Classics should be the object of an intellectual inquiry which is permeated by virtuous intention and activity. For the philosopher of the unity of knowledge and action, there cannot be any other answer. Elsewhere Yang-ming said of the different books of the Classics, their various genres and the different truths which they seek to communicate:

In [using] the Six Classics, the gentleman seeks the movements of yin and yang of the mind-and-heart (hsin), in order to act in accordance with them, by his reverence for the Book of Changes. He seeks the laws and ordinances and governance of hsin, in order to put them into practice, by reverence for the Book of Documents. He seeks the musical and lyrical expressions of the feelings of hsin, in order to give vent to these, by reverence for the Odes. He seeks the regulations and rules of hsin, in order to pay attention to them, by reverence for the Book of Rites. He seeks the joy and peace of hsin in order to give expression to them, by reverence for the Classic of Music. He seeks the distinctions between sincerity and hypocrisy, perversity and rectitude of hsin, in order to learn discernment, by reverence for the Spring-Autumn Annals.⁵⁶

And so, by reverent contemplation of the Classics, the portrait of perfect virtue (T'ien-li) or of hsin-in-itself, the student is able to benefit from the spiritual richness hidden in each book, for the development of his own hsin, his own personality.

Yang-ming recognised that many of the Classical texts are obscure, and in need of explanations. He did not discount the role of simple commentaries. He wrote a preface to a new edition of Wu Ch'eng's Li-chi ts'uan-yen 禮記纂言 [Annotated edition of the Book of Rites]. He praised warmly this attempt to elucidate the confusing and complicated body of ritual texts, which have accumulated many commentaries. These often consist of detailed explanations of articles and numbers of sacrificial vessels as well as minor items of criminal law. The Li-chi ts'uan-yen, however, seeks to bring the student back to the foundation of the rites, putting various issues in a proper order of moral values.⁵⁷

Speaking of the fundamental unity underlying the many ordinances of the ritual texts, Yang-ming had this to say:

There are three hundred rules of canonical rites and propriety (ching-li 經禮) and three thousand additional rules of demeanour (ch'ü-li 曲禮).⁵⁸
 Not one of them is not based on humanity (jen); not one of them is not based on human nature (hsing).
 Such are the ordinances and arrangements of Heaven. Such is the very mind of the Sage.⁵⁹

According to him, it would be a mistake to pay so much attention to the details of rites and propriety, as to forget this very reason for which the ritual texts exist: to expound the mind (hsin) of the sages. He quoted the Analects, saying: "Propriety! Propriety! Are gems and silk all that is meant by this word?"⁶⁰ and also, "If a man is lacking in the virtue of humanity, what can propriety [or the rites] do for him?"⁶¹

Voicing sympathy for the followers of Lao-tzu⁶² and Chuang-tzu⁶³, who claim that the rise of ritual law or of

the practice of particular virtues followed the decline of real virtue (tao and te), and who prefer to overlook "propriety" and talk only of human nature, Yang-ming went on to give his own views of propriety:

Li [propriety, ritual observance] is to the ceremonies what the compass and the quadrant are to the shapes of squares and circles. Without squares and circles there can be no function for quadrant or compass; without ceremonies there can be no show and propriety. Yet squares and circles are made by quadrant and compass, without being themselves compass or quadrant...[For] the compass and the quadrant are not limited to certain definite circles and squares, while circles and squares are ruled by definite compasses and quadrants.⁶⁴

These words help us to understand what Yang-ming said on an earlier occasion, when he claimed that the two words, li 禮 (rites or propriety) and li 理 (organising principle, being, virtue) have the same meaning. For, he said, to restrain or control oneself with the rules of propriety implies that one's hsin is already full of the "principle of Heaven" (T'ien-li).⁶⁵

Yang-ming has left us with two long letters on the subject of propriety or the rites. From these, we discover his expert knowledge of the Classics, particularly of detailed questions of rites and of historical precedents, and also of Chu Hsi's well known Chia-li 家禮 [Family Rites].⁶⁶ From these, we also discover his constant pre-occupation, which was to direct his friend or disciple, away from an excessive fondness for ritual hair-splitting, and on to a new awareness of and respect for "genuine human feeling". Without such, the rites would be a dead question. For this reason, although he has made no explicit pronouncement on the matter of Emperor Shih-tsung's desire to transgress precedents by giving posthumous, imperial honours to his deceased father,⁶⁷ it might safely

be presumed that Yang-ming was sympathetic to such expressions of genuine filial feeling. Some of his poems, written in 1524, have especially been interpreted by his disciples as being expressive of Yang-ming's attitude toward the controversy aroused by Emperor Shih-tsung's gestures.⁶⁸ In one of them, he attempts to lift men's minds from petty preoccupations with ritual observances to a higher plane:

An autumn rain brings in the newness of a cool night,
 Sitting on the pond's edge, I find my spirit
 stimulated by the solitary moon.
 Swimming in the depths, the fish are passing on
 words of power;
 Perched on the branches, birds are uttering the
 veritable Tao.⁶⁹
 Do not say that instinctive desires are not
 mysteries of Heaven.⁷⁰
 Know that my body with one with the ten thousand
 things.
 People talk endlessly about rites and music,
 But who will sweep away the heaps of dust from the
 blue sky?⁷¹

According to him, therefore, man's first attention should be given to developing T'ien-li, and to eliminating selfish desires. Everything else is secondary. Once T'ien-li is well developed, and hsin (mind-and-heart) has become crystal clear, what one should do on specific occasions and for specific needs would become naturally clarified also.

Personal Insight versus Authority

In 1522, Chan Jo-shui wrote a long letter to Yang-ming, in which he explained clearly the differences between his understanding of "investigation of things" and Yang-ming's. He presents four objections to Yang-ming's interpretation. Of these, the first two are concerned with textual problems.

he will grow old and die as a fool. Of course, your intelligence is far superior to anyone else's. I would not dare say this of you. But as I observe how Confucius exhorted himself to study, and was worried about not studying, and as I realise how you occupy a high position in the world, and are esteemed by the scholars of the world, I wish to [remind you] that one must be cautious in his learning, and balanced in his teaching....⁷⁵

Whether Yang-ming answered this letter from Chan Jo-shui is not known to us. However, from the letter he wrote to Lo Ch'in-shun, we can find his thought on the role of intellectual inquiry in the quest for sagehood, as well as on the role of authority of Confucius himself as the teacher of wisdom. He maintained that he included the "Nine Items" of self-cultivation set out by Chu Hsi in his own interpretation of the "investigation of things".⁷⁶ But he acknowledged also that he differed from Chu Hsi in the relative emphasis made on these items. After this, he attacked the so-called disciples of Chu Hsi of his own times, whom he compared unfavourably with Yang Chu and Mo Ti,⁷⁷ the two "heretics" whose fallacies had been exposed by Mencius himself. He also likened himself to Han Yü, who had been audacious enough to combat the harmful teachings of Buddhism and Taoism, without being equal to Mencius in virtue.⁷⁸

That Yang-ming accepted in all sincerity the role of intellectual inquiry in personal cultivation can also be seen in the explanation he gave for "honouring virtuous nature" and "following the path of study and inquiry". Commenting on Chu Hsi's admission that Lu Chiu-yuan taught more of "honouring virtuous nature" while Chu himself gave greater emphasis to "study and inquiry", Yang-ming once told his disciple, Huang Chih, that the two cannot be separated from each other. He said: "Is there such a thing as 'honouring virtuous nature' in a vacuum without also pursuing 'study and inquiry', or pursuing 'study and inquiry'?

in a vacuum without relating it to '[honouring] virtuous nature?' If there is, I do not know what we are seeking to learn in our present studies and discussions".⁷⁹ It would seem, therefore, that his main pre-occupation was to permeate intellectual inquiry with the desire for virtue, while at the same time subordinating it to the cultivation of this desire itself, and of one's capacity for virtue.

Yang-ming's attitude to intellectual inquiry can be discerned in his teaching concerning the role of the arts (yi 藝) in the quest for wisdom. With his eyes always fixed on the ultimate goal of life, he declared that this word yi (arts) is related to the other word of the same sound, yi 義, meaning righteousness. The arts, therefore, ought to lead man to the practice of virtue (li 理). Such activities as the recital of poetry, the reading of books, the playing of lutes and the practice of archery are all intended to give greater harmony to hsin, the mind-and-heart, and so help it to proceed with its quest of the great Way. "The man who does not first set his will firm on the Way, and only seek amusement in the arts, is like a fool who does not first plan the building of a house, but attend only to the purchase of paintings which he can hang up as show, without knowing where he is going to hang them".⁸⁰

To the difficulty, that reading or intellectual work sometimes brings with it ideas of vanity connected with the desire to succeed in the civil service examinations, Yang-ming replied that even this should not become any hindrance to the man whose liang-chih (desire for goodness) is genuine and earnest. He would know then that he should not force himself to commit things to memory, that he should not yield to impatience, to ambition or to boasting. As long as he immediately overcomes such temptations, he will remain in perfect accord with the "principle of Heaven". "Let him therefore read. He will be merely refreshing and giving harmony to his mind-and-heart (hsin). What difficulty is there?"⁸¹

There is no doubt, however, that, for Yang-ming, reading (tu-shu 讀書 literally, reading or studying books) is a means toward an end, and this end is the quest for wisdom, much more than the passing of examinations. He excuses the persons who read or study with the ambition of passing examinations, so long as these persons have need of official emolument for the support of their parents or family.⁸² But he is anxious to point out that intellectual inquiry should only be carried out as a help to the acquisition of wisdom and sagehood. Care should therefore be taken that such inquiry does not absorb the mind and lead it astray.⁸³ For this reason, he is against the laborious work of classical exegesis. He warned his disciple Chi Pen 季本 [Chi Ming-te 季明德] in these words:

If you wish also to divide up every section of the [Classical] writings, giving commentaries and citing proofs, taking these to be systematic steps of the pathway by which a sage advances in the Way (Tao), ... then you will not be free from the defects of making comparisons and of being fettered by words. To show in this way the fact that sagehood is attainable by learning, may give some insights, but would tend to make of the status of sagehood something very high and far away.....⁸⁴

Reading, after all, is only one exercise of the task of study. As already mentioned, the Chinese word hsüeh (study) means simply, to learn, or to acquire by learning--whether through moral effort or intellectual inquiry. For the philosopher who teaches the unity of knowledge and action, there can be no distinction between the two. Yang-ming generally means by hsüeh, a method by which selfish desires may be removed. It is therefore, no different from the effort of extending liang-chih. As he put it:

A scholar who has already determined to become a sage, needs merely to extend his liang-chih, in its intelligent and conscious aspects, to the uttermost,

proceeding gradually day by day. He does not need to worry about externals and details. Criticisms, the praise and blame of others, can also be used profitably.... but without having these affect his hsin in the least.....⁸⁵

Given this view of study or intellectual inquiry, it is easier to see why Yang-ming regarded as suitable objects of study, not only the recognised books of the Confucian canon, but also the so-called Taoist and Buddhist scriptures, so long as these contribute to the realisation in oneself of T'ien-li or perfect virtue.⁸⁶ These unorthodox texts are not required for the passing of official examinations, but contain insights which are nonetheless valuable. This concession which Yang-ming made is important to the student who wishes to understand the universal character of his "Way" of acquiring wisdom, although it cannot be denied that Yang-ming valued the Confucian classics far above those of the other two schools.

The Appeal to Confucius

Lo Ch'in-shun had criticised Yang-ming for putting forward views which differed from those of Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi, and in direct contradiction of the words of the Classical texts. To this charge of "heresy", Yang-ming replied in self-defence that he had merely attempted to return to the sources of Confucian teaching by restoring an old text which Chu Hsi had tampered with. Appealing directly to the authority of Confucius, he said: "The old version of the Great Learning is the original version transmitted from generation to generation in the Confucian school. Master Chu, suspecting that errors and gaps have crept in, corrected and amended it. But I believe that there has not been any errors and gaps. That is why I followed the old version completely. Perhaps, my mistake has been in believing too much in Confucius. I did not omit Master Chu's chapter divisions or delete his commentary on purpose."⁸⁷

The appeal to Confucius was no sooner made when Yang-ming also went beyond it. He went on to say that true learning is only that which is personally acquired in one's hsin, without regard to the authority of other scholars, even of Confucius.

If [words] are examined in the hsin and found to be wrong, then even if they have come from [the mouth of] Confucius, I dare not accept them as correct. How much more so for what has come from people inferior to Confucius! If [words] are examined in the hsin and found to be right, then even if they have come from [the mouths] of mediocre people, I dare not regard them as incorrect. How much more so for what has come from Confucius!⁸⁸

He then criticised Chu Hsi for having tampered with the old version, which had been handed down for several thousand years. "By what [authority] did Chu Hsi [decide] that this paragraph should be here and that one should be there, that this part had been lost and should be provided for....? Are you not taking too seriously [my] divergences from Chu Hsi and not seriously enough Chu's rebellion against Confucius?"⁸⁹

Wisdom, after all, is no static deposit of unchanging truths which have been discovered by any one man who can therefore claim a certain monopoly over it. Wisdom means the ability to deal with different circumstances. It pre-supposes an open mind, a mind without set judgements and ready answers, a mind which looks for the answers in the circumstances themselves. For this reason, every sage understands wisdom and virtue in his own unique way.⁹⁰ For this reason also, even Confucius himself would never present any simple, rustic questioner with a standard answer. He would merely try to direct the man himself to see the right and wrong of a situation in his own heart and with his own judgement.⁹¹ The words of the ancients are all the results of deep personal experience, acquired frequently through trials and tribulations. In order to

attain the wisdom contained in them, the student himself must not stop at the words, he must also re-discover wisdom at its source, through the complete engagement of his hsin in its quest, permitting the whole of life to strengthen his nature, and so improve his understanding.⁹²

Yang-ming's answer to the question concerning the role and guidance of authority in the quest for sagehood is one which points beyond the authorities, beyond Chu Hsi, beyond Confucius and the Classics, beyond even the first sages, to the source of all wisdom and sagehood: the self-determining, self-perfecting hsin, the deepest and most dynamic principle within man himself. As he says in one of his poems, every man possesses a "Confucius" in his own heart, a seed of greatness quite sufficient in itself and capable of developing into a powerful tree with many branches. In another poem, written in 1524, he speaks again of sages and of Classics, of their function of helping to purify man's mind-and-heart of its accumulated pollution, and of the ultimate authority of the "polished mirror", of hsin alone, as that which reflects both truth and error.⁹³ His words are:

Under the new autumn moon, I sit alone in the
courtyard.

Where else between Heaven (Ch'ien 乾) and Earth
(K'un 坤) has man more freedom and ease?

My loud songs move away with the fresh breeze,
My quiet feelings flow off with Spring's clear water.
The thousand sages have no word of power outside of
the mind;

The Six Classics exist for the purpose of wiping
away the mirror's dust.⁹⁴

Alas, that the dreams of Duke Chou should still
disturb me;⁹⁵

I have not awakened to the beauty of living in a
poor alley.⁹⁶

Yang-ming's attitude towards one specific Classic, the Book of Rites, as well as the application of the moral principles set forth by it to real life, can thus enlighten us with regard to his general attitude toward all of the Classics and how one should use them. The Classics are made for man, not man for the Classics.

Notes to Chapter IV

- 1 From a letter to Yang-ming by Chan Jo-shui, in Kan-ch'üan wen-chi, [Collected Writings of Chan Jo-shui] 1866 ed., 14: 36a.
- 2 Chu Hsi's teachings can be found in his Meng-tzu chi-chu, [Collected Commentary on the Book of Mencius], where he sought to explain the beginning lines of Mencius 7A in terms of the first chapter of the Great Learning, and vice versa. See SSCC 7: 1a-b.
- 3 The Chinese words used here recall Chang Tsai's understanding of the work of the sage. For other references to the importance of a "firm determination" and "single-mindedness" emphasised by the Ch'eng-Chu school as well but made into the essential component of self-realisation in the Lu-Wang school, see WWKC 1: 82; 7: 230, 254. The starting-point of Yang-ming's philosophy contains, in itself, the end to be achieved.
- 4 WWKC 1: 59b; Chan, Instructions, 12-14. The same subject came back in the letter Yang-ming wrote to Ku Lin, before 1524. See WWKC 2: 90a-92b. Chan, Instructions, 95-97. Yang-ming gave the same exposition as he did to Hsü Ai.
- 5 WWKC 1: 59b-60a; Chan, Instructions, 14-15.
- 6 Ibid. See also Yang-ming's letter to Wang Tao, WWKC 4: 178b-179a.
- 7 WWKC 2: 118b; Chan, Instructions, 162. This is a variant of a frequently cited sentence: "To make a mistake of a hair's breadth may lead [a person] one thousand li astray". See Shih-chi, op.cit., 130: 279. This quotation, often given as from the Book of Changes, actually comes from the apocryphal Book of Changes. See Tjan, op.cit., v.1, 102. Tjan cites as his authority a commentary of P'ei Yin 裴駰 (5th cent. AD). See also Takigawa Kametarō, Shiki kaichu kōsho [An Investigation into the Collected Commentaries of Shih-chi], (Tokyo: 1956-1960), 130: 24.
- 8 WWKC 1: 87a-b; Chan, Instructions, 86-7. See Chang Lieh's criticism of Yang-ming's argument, Wang-hsüeh chih-yi, CYTCS ed., 2: 4b-6b. The story concerning drawing the snake's feet comes from Liu Hsiang 劉向 (c. 77-6 BC) ed., Chan-kuo ts'e 戰國策 [Intrigues of the Warring States] "Ch'i-shu" 齊書 [Book of Ch'i]. See Chan-kuo ts'e chiao-chu [Intrigues of the Warring States, Annotated Version] SPTK ed., 1st series, 4: 17b-18a. Eng. tr. by J.I. Crump, Jr., (Oxford: 1970), 167.--The Warring States period lasted from c. 300-221 B.C.
- 9 To Wang Ch'eng-yü 王承裕 [Wang T'ien-yu 王天宇 1465-1538], WWKC 4: 183b-184a.

- 10 The name "Po-lu tung" 白鹿洞 means "White Deer Cave." See CWWC 73: 18a-19a.
- 11 WWKC 7: 238b.
- 12 The preface is in WWKC 3: 160a-b; Eng.tr., Chan, Instructions, 264-267. One version of this work can be found in the Han-hai 函海 collection, comp. by Li Tiao-yuan, (Preface 1782, Taipei reprint, 1967), v. 13, 8165-8174. But Prof. Wing-tsit Chan has expressed doubt regarding its authenticity. See Instructions, 103, n. 27. Yang-ming's side commentaries were based on the commentaries of Cheng Hsuan and of K'ung Yin-ta. The work has been praised by Chu Yi-tsun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) in Ching-yi k'ao [An Investigation into the Classics and their Meanings] SPY ed., 159: 3a. The two works were published in 1518, a particularly busy year for Yang-ming. During the first five months, he was engaged in military campaigns against bandits in southern Kiangsi. On concluding these successfully, he initiated measures of rehabilitation for the population. He also mourned the premature death of Hsü Ai, his brother-in-law and most promising disciple, which had occurred shortly after Hsü's publication of certain recorded conversations between himself and Wang, which now make up the first part of Ch'uan-hsi lu.
- 13 See above, Ch. I, n. 33.
- 14 WWKC 3: 168b-169a. Wu Ch'eng, also known as Wu Ch'ao-lu 吳卓虞 was one of the two best known philosophers of Yuan times, the other being Hsü Heng 許衡 [Hsü Chung-p'ing 許仲平 1209-1281]. But where Hsü remained an adherent of the Ch'eng-Chu school, Wu showed a greater fondness for Lu Chiu-yuan. See SYHA 90: 1b-2a for Hsü and 92: 1a-b for Wu. It is therefore not astonishing that Yang-ming should criticise Hsü [WWKC 1: 73; Chan, Instruction, 44] and single out Wu for praise. See also below, his praise of Wu's commentary on the Book of Rites.
- 15 WWKC 3: 160a-b; Chan, Instructions, 264-267.
- 16 See criticisms of Yang-ming by Kao P'an-lung, in Kao-tzu yi-shu, "Yang-ming shuo-pien" 陽明說辨 [A Critique of Yang-ming's Teachings], 1: 3a-4b; 3: 46b-51a; 4: 51a-b; and by Ku Yen-wu, in Jih-chih lu chi-shih, 18: 23a-28a, by Ch'en Chien, Hsueh-pu t'ung-pien 11: 2a-b; 8a-9a; 11b-14b, Feng K'o, Chiu-shih p'ien 3: 3a-4a, 14a-15b; 4: 1a-2b, and Lu Lung-ch'i, in Lu Chia-shu chi, "Hsüeh-shu pien" 學術辨 [A Critique of Learning], 1: 1a-17b.
But Yang-ming also had his supporters, including Liu Tsung-chou and Huang Tsung-hsi. See MJHA, "Shih-shuo" 4a-b, 10: 1a-b.
Huang Tsung-hsi is especially responsible for modifying certain extreme tendencies manifested by the later Yang-ming school.

17 The preface, given in WWKC 7: 241a-b, is dated 1518. But we know that it was first written in 1515, and then published in 1518. According to Lo Ch'in-shun, however, the preface dated 1518 and sent to him by Yang-ming in 1520 was later amended and expanded before being finally published by Yang-ming's students in 1536. See K'un-chih chi [Record of Assiduous Learning], CYTC ed., 4: 9a-10a. A comparison of the texts as quoted by Lo and as given in WWKC shows that the latter represents the final version of the preface. See also Yang-ming's letter to Hsüeh K'an 薛侃 [Hsüeh Shang-ch'ien 薛尚謙, d.1545], (1523), for mention of changes made in the preface. WWKC 5: 208b.

18 WWKC 7: 241a-b. Yang-ming's confidence in the capacity of hsin to improve and perfect itself, and to attain the "highest good", recalls to mind, even more than the philosophy of Chu Hsi, the concern of Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) the acquisition of wisdom through a method of "improving the understanding" by which one rises to the intellectual love of God, the highest good. Both by his life and teachings--he believed in the identity of intellect and will, of thought and action, and in an immanent God, the highest good--Spinoza resembles Yang-ming to an unusual degree. Even Spinoza's effort to complete and correct Descartes' view of clear and distinct ideas which require the support of a God outside of the self, by accepting the human understanding to be its own guarantee, reminds one of Yang-ming's faith in the self-determining nature of hsin. The Chinese thinker differs from the Dutch Jew, however, because he grew up in a tradition which did not know the "geometrical method" of reasoning, and concentrated much more on intuitive perceptions. See Spinoza: Selections, ed. by John Wild, (New York: 1930), Introduction, ix-xxxii, xlv-lix; "On the Improvement of the Understanding," 1-15; "Ethics," 282-288, 390-400.

19 MJHA 47: 1a-2b. Lo has been hailed as "the first important thinker who opened the way to modern thought" by his support of a rational, objective approach to reality and by his independent emphasis of ch'i (matter-energy). See Abe Yoshio's article in Chügoku no shisöka [The Thinkers of China], (Tokyo: 1963), 571-583.

20 Lo Cheng-an chi ts'un-kao [A Collection of Some Surviving Works of Lo], CYTC ed., 1: 6a-7b. Lo also remarked that Yang-ming's interpretation of the sentence, "the extension of knowledge is in the investigation of things" made of it "the investigation of things is in the extension of knowledge"; see his letter to Ou-yang Te 歐陽德 [Ou-yang Nan-yeh 歐陽南野 1496-1554] a disciple of Yang-ming's, in 1: 9b. In his other work, K'un-chih chi 1: 1a-b; 2: 2a-b; 3: 7a-b, Lo referred to the identification of hsin and hsing as an error which shows Buddhist influences. He himself explained hsin as the locale in which li is found, and hsing as the content of hsin. He also pointed out to Yang-ming that if Wu Ch'eng finally attained insights into the nature of sagehood, it might have occurred as the fruit of his long years of devoted study of the meaning of words in the Classics and Commentaries.

- 21 He is referring to the Great Learning, ch. 1. The four "methods" or procedural steps are: investigation of things, extension of knowledge, making the intention sincere and rectifying the mind-and-heart.
- 22 WWKC 2: 117a-b; Chan, Instructions, 160-1. Yang-ming speaks here of li as the One behind the Many, the ultimate reality which is both hidden and manifest. He is developing a tenet of the Ch'eng-Chu school, but in a much more thorough-going manner, thus denying certain conclusions reached by the Ch'eng-Chu school itself.
- 23 WWKC 2: 118a-b; Chan, Instructions, 161. He speaks here of the method of acquiring li.
- 24 WWKC 3: 154b; Chan, Instructions, 251.
- 25 ECCS, Yi-shu, 18: 17a.
- 26 WWKC 3: 154b-155a; Chan, Instructions, 251. Kao P'an-lung would say that Chu Hsi had neither separated hsin and li, or knowledge and action, but had, rather, reconciled them, and that Yang-ming had merely misinterpreted his thought. See "Yang-ming shuo-pien," Kao-tzu yi-shu, 1: 3a; 3: 49a-51a. While taking into consideration the fact that the abuses Yang-ming attacked were attributable more to the latter-day disciples of Ch'eng Yi and Chu Hsi than to the philosophers themselves, one can also recall Huang Tsung-hsi's judgement, that Kao himself was very close in his thinking to Yang-ming, without having acknowledged it. See MJHA 58: 18b-19a.
- 27 WWKC 3: 155a; Chan, Instructions, 251-2. The example of the Despots has been used before. Here Yang-ming clearly enunciates the practical purpose of his philosophy.
- 28 WWKC 3: 155a; Chan, Instructions, 252. I realize that the "holistic" view of reality [whole versus parts] is more concerned with truth as such than action. I have used this concept to discuss Yang-ming's practical teaching on ko-wu to show that his "integrated" approach flows from his basic understanding of reality and of the nature of wisdom.
- 29 From an essay written in Chan's honour (1511) when he was sent as envoy to Annam. See WWKC 7: 232a-b. Yang-ming's intellectual debt to Chan implies also a certain debt to Chan's teacher, Ch'en Hsien-chang, whom he never met, but whose spontaneous and dynamic approach to sagehood and consciousness of the unity of all things are reflected in his philosophy. While Yang-ming himself never acknowledged this debt, his disciple Wang Chi mentioned it. See Wang Lung-hsi ch'üan-chi [Complete Works of Wang Chi], (1822 ed., Taipei reprint, 1970), [abbrev. as WLCC], 10: 31b-32a. See also MJHA 5: 1a-3b; Jung Chao-tsu, Ming-tai ssu-hsiang shih, 78-79.

- 30 WWKC 7: 232b. As Chan himself was accused of being close to Ch'an teachings, his disagreements with Yang-ming were less on "ideological" Confucian versus Ch'an grounds, and more on their understanding of hsin as the agent of its own perfection. See Okada Takehiko, O Yomei to Minmatsu no jugaku, 72-73; 87-94. See also Lo Ch'in-shun's criticism of Chan's understanding of hsin and T'ien-li, which, according to Lo, required merely "awakening" (wu 悟) to the power of consciousness in hsin. See K'un-chih chi, 4: 11a-b.
- 31 WWKC 3: 129; Chan, Instructions, 186.
- 32 Kan-ch'uan wen-chi, 7: 1a.
In Hsin-hsing t'u-shuo 心性圖說, [Explanations of the Diagram of Mind-and-Heart and Nature], Chan has given his own explanation of the interaction which takes place between mind-and-heart and human nature, and nature at large or all things. It consists of a big circle, enclosing within itself three small circles. The big circle represents the mind and human nature as "embracing" all things. The small ones signify their "penetration" of all things. This is done through the practice of ching (reverence)--through vigilance over self when one is alone, achieving the state of harmony or equilibrium of emotions, which permits the development of the virtues and so attains unity with all things, again in an attitude of reverence. It may therefore be said that the diagram represents the totality of reality, and the participation of mind and human nature in that reality. "To embrace and to penetrate are not really two separate [functions]. Hence hsin is that which embraces Heaven-and-Earth and all things without, and yet penetrates Heaven-and-Earth and all things within. The "within" and "without" are also not two different [spheres]. There is no such division with regard to Heaven-and-Earth, nor, for that matter, with regard to the mind. This is only a question of words". Chan was to accuse Wang of regarding merely the physical heart, located in the breast, as hsin--mind-and-heart. He claims that, for him, it is something much greater: "To say that hsin is inside self, while Heaven-and-Earth and all things are outside, is to belittle hsin". See MJHA 37: 2b-3a.
- 33 WWKC 3: 129b; Chan, Instructions, 188-189. Yang-ming internalised the whole quest for truth and sagehood, emphasising the interaction between the self (sheng) and reality (wu) in both knowledge and virtuous behaviour.
- 34 WWKC 3: 129b-130a; Chan, Instructions, 189-190. Tseng-ch'eng is in the modern province of Kwangtung.
- 35 WWKC 3: 130a; Chan, Instructions, 190
- 36 Kan-ch'uan wen-chi, 7: 18a.
- 37 WWKC 2: 94a; Chan, Instructions, 105.

38 WWKC 2: 94b-95a; Chan, Instructions, 105-6. Chan Jo-shui had followed Chu Hsi in interpreting ko as "reach". See SSCC, Ta-hsüeh chang-chü, 2a; Kan-ch'üan wen-chi, 7: 1a.

39 Chan was to publish, several years after Yang-ming's death, a one hundred chüan work entitled, Sheng-hsüeh ko-wu t'ung [A Penetrating Study of the Doctrine of Investigating Things according to the School of Sages] and addressed to Emperor Shih-tsung. He developed there his own understanding of ko-wu, making it an all-reaching formula, extending from the practice of "making intention sincere" to that of "governing the country" and "giving peace to the world". I have consulted the edition published in Yang-chou 揚州, with a preface dated 1533.

40 WWKC 1: 77b; Chan, Instructions, 59-60.

41 WWKC 1: 78b; Chan, Instructions, 62-63.

42 WWKC 7: 239a-b; Chan, Instructions, 264-6.

43 Lo Cheng-an chi ts'un-kao 1: 7b-9b. Ku Yen-wu pointed out that the repercussions raised by the controversial question of Chu Hsi's 'mature views' were still going on in his own time. For himself, however, he considered Lo Cheng-an's refutations as already adequate. See Jih-chih lu chi-shih, 18: 23a.

44 Lo Cheng-an chi ts'un-kao 1: 9a-b.

45 WWKC 2: 119a-b; Chan, Instructions, 164. The polarisation of "Correct" versus "perverse" learning, supported by state authority, has always obliged Chinese thinkers to present their own views by appealing to the authority of others. For this reason, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao opposed the movement which favoured the establishment of "state" Confucianism in early republican China (1902). Speaking of the classical period of Chinese philosophy during the Warring States, the success of which he attributed to freedom of thought, he related the persecutions of Ch'in, the establishment of Han orthodoxy, and the subsequent evolution of many systems of thought which claimed to transmit the "orthodox" teaching of Confucius. Thus, he said, Confucius became in turn, Cheng Hsüan, Han Yü, Chu Hsi, Lu Chiu-yüan and Wang Yang-ming, and yet others. See Yin-ping shih wen-chi, 9: 55.

In the light of these facts, Yang-ming's action can hardly be condemned. The experience of the medieval European scholastics can also shed light on this point. The philosophical method they followed was to resolve every question in some precise sequence of authority and refutation and resolution. A good scholastic was one who could find authority for either side of the question and who was convinced further that truth could be discovered best by examining all the contradictory statements. See Richard McKeon, ed., Selections from Medieval Philosophers, (New York: 1929), v.1, Introduction, xiv-xv.

46 WWKC 2: 119b; Chan, Instructions, 164.

In his letter to Ku Lin, Yang-ming had avoided giving a direct answer to Ku's charge of his having made arbitrary selection from Chu Hsi's writings for the publication. He had merely argued on the problem of "investigation of things". See WWKC 2: 91b-92a; Chan, Instructions, 98-9.

47 Yang-ming's critic, Ch'en Chien, carefully compared the chronology given in Chu Hsi's "Nien-p'u", his biography, and his "Collected Writings" and "Recorded Conversations" with Yang-ming's work itself, giving the necessary details of Chu's activities year by year, in his refutation of Yang-ming. See Hsüeh-pu t'ung-pien, 11: 2a-14b.

See also Kusumoto Masatsugu, Sō-Min jidai jugaku shiso no Kenkyū, 241-243 on Chu Hsi's doctrine of "reverence", especially as given in those letters he wrote which were included by Yang-ming in his publication. Kusumoto noted that if this development brought Chu nearer to Lu Chiu-yüan and Wang Yang-ming in their method of cultivation in one way, it also brought him further from them in another way, by Chu's increased emphasis on the investigation of things and of li.

In his Ethical Realism in Neo-Confucian Thought, 135-138, Hsü Pao-ch'ien remarked also that Chu Hsi's "spiritual crisis" occurred in middle age rather than in his later life, and resulted in his greater emphasis on the practice of "reverence", as that which united the inner development of the mind and the outer investigation of things.

48 WWKC 1: 61a-63b; Chan, Instructions, 17-24. This was probably in 1513.

49 WWKC 1: 64b; Chan, Instructions, 26-27.

50 WWKC 1: 62a; Chan, Instructions, 20.

51 "Chi-shan shu-yüan Tsun-ching-ko chi" 稽山書院
尊經閣記 [Record on the Respect-the-Classic Pavilion]
 of the Chi-shan College], WWKC 7: 250-1. This College was situated in Yang-ming's home-town, Yüeh-ch'eng.

52 WWKC 7: 250. In criticising Yang-ming, Kao P'an-lung said that since the Classics transmit the sages' hsin, to understand the Classics is also to understand hsin and vice versa. He who only understands the texts and not hsin is a mediocre scholar, while he who only understands hsin and not the texts is a "heretic". See "Yang-ming shuo-pien", Kao-tzu yi-shu, 1: 7b.

53 WWKC 7: 250b-251a.

54 WWKC 7: 251a.

55 WWKC 1: 67a; Chan, Instructions, 32.

56 WWKC 7: 250b-251a. The Classic of Music is no longer extant. Liu Tsung-chou remarked that to regard the Classics as footnotes to one's personal insight is to respect the Classics rather than to disregard them. See Yang-ming ch'uan-hsin lu, op.cit., 2: 17a.

- 57 See WWKC 7: 241b-242a. The preface was dated 1520.
- 58 Allusion to the Doctrine of the Mean, ch. 27; Legge, Classics, v.1, 422.
- 59 WWKC 7: 241b.
- 60 Analects 17: 11; Legge, Classics, v.1, 324.
- 61 Analects 3: 3, Legge Classics, v.1, 155.
- 62 See Lao-tzu, ch. 18. SPPY ed., 10a, where the rise of jen (humanity) and of yi (righteousness) is described as that which follows the abolition of the Great Way. Chan, Source Book, 148.
- 63 See Chuang-tzu 9, "Ma-ti" 馬蹄 [Horses' Hoofs] SPPY ed., 4: 7a-b. Eng. tr. by Burton Watson, op.cit., 105. This idea is also in the "Li-yün" chapter of the Book of Rites. See Li-chi cheng-yi, 21: 1a-13a.
- 64 WWKC 7: 242a. Yang-ming also used the parable of "compass and quadrant" to describe man's liang-chih or capacity to know the good. See Letter to Ku Lin, WWKC 2: 96; Chan, Instructions, 109.
- 65 WWKC 1: 60a-b; Chan, Instructions, 16.
- 66 Addressed to Ho Meng-ch'un 何孟春 [Ho Tzu-yüan 何子元], (1512), and to Tsou Shou-yi (1526). See WWKC 21: 646a-b; 210a-211b.
- 67 MS 17: 31-32. See also Ch. II, n.44.
- 68 For Yang-ming's attitude toward this controversy, see "Nien-p'u", WWKC 34: 962b. See also Ch. II, n.44.
- 69 Allusion to the Book of Odes, "Ta-ya" 大雅 referred to in the Doctrine of the Mean, ch. 12. See Legge, Classics, v.4, 445 and v.1, 392.
- 70 Allusion to Chuang-tzu 6, "Ta Tsung-shih", 3: 2a; Burton Watson tr., The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu, 78. Chuang-tzu had described the "True Man" as one who is "deep in his passions and desires, and shallow in the workings of Heaven".
- 71 "Sitting At Night At the Pi-hsia Pond", [Pi-hsia-tz'u yeh-tso 碧霞池夜坐], WWKC 20: 627a.
- 72 Kan-ch'üan wen-chi, 7: 25b. The citation was from the Varjacobhedikā or Diamond Sutra, TSD No. 235, VIII, 749; Eng. tr. by E. Bonze, Buddhist Wisdom Books, (London: 1958); 47-48. The Ch'an Patriarch Hui-neng allegedly attained enlightenment through meditation on this passage. It should be pointed out that Yang-ming himself cited this sentence with approval in a letter to his disciple Lu Ch'eng [Lu Yuan-ching 陸元靜 fl. 1517] (1524), see WWKC 2: 112-3; Chan, Instructions, 148-9.

- 73 Kan-ch'üan wen-chi, 7: 25b.
- 74 Analects 2: 4; Legge, Classics, v.1, 147.
- 75 Kan-ch'üan wen-chi 7: 25b.
- 76 The "Nine Items" refer generally to various practices associated with intellectual inquiry as a means of self-cultivation. They are enumerated in Chu Hsi's Ta-hsüeh huo-wen. 大學或問 [Questions on the Great Learning] See Chan, Instructions, 162, n. 11.
- 77 WWKC 2: 118b; Chan, Instructions, 162. Yang-ming was not attacking Chu Hsi himself, but Chu's latter-day disciples. It was thus unfair to criticise Yang-ming for having called Chu Hsi a "heretic", comparable to Yang Chu and Mo Ti, as did Lu Lung-ch'i, in a letter to a friend; see Lu Chia-shu chi, 1: 23a.
- 78 WWKC 2: 118b-119a; Chan, Instructions, 163-4.
- 79 WWKC 3: 155b; Chan, Instructions, 253. The reference is to the Doctrine of the Mean, ch. 1. Aside from maintaining his acceptance of intellectual inquiry in the quest for sagehood, Yang-ming did not give a satisfactory answer directly to Lo's charge of his closeness to Ch'an Buddhist teachings. Presumably, he implied that the man who follows the path of intellectual inquiry cannot be a Ch'an Buddhist who merely looks for enlightenment in meditation. The question of Yang-ming's attitude toward Buddhism will be treated more fully in a later chapter.
- 80 WWKC 3: 137a; Chan, Instructions, 207. Yang-ming also gave much value to the role of music in helping self-cultivation. He expressed the desire of purifying theatrical music of its licentious words and tunes, and of keeping only stories with moral lessons, to help the people extend liang-chih. He did not, however, recommend a restoration of ancient musical tunes, saying that the essential thing is to find peace and harmony in hsin, for it was to this purpose that the ancient tunes were first devised by the sages. See WWKC 3: 148a-b; Chan, Instructions, 233-235.
- 81 WWKC 3: 137a-b; Chan, Instructions, 207-8.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Letter to Chi Pen, (1526), WWKC 6: 218b.
- 85 Letter to Lu Ch'eng, WWKC 2: 111a; Chan, Instructions, 146.
- 86 Letter to Chi Pen, WWKC 6: 218b.
- 87 WWKC 2: 117a; Chan, Instructions, 159.

- 88 Ibid. Yang-ming had been criticised many times for "belittling Confucius". Ku Hsien-ch'eng considered it impossible that one's hsin might find incorrect, the words of the sages. Like Chan Jo-shui he also objected to the identification of hsin and li recalling that even Confucius did not attain the state of being able to follow the desires of his heart without transgressing the Mean till old. MJHA 58: 14a; see also Ch'ien Chien, Hsüeh-pu t'ung-pien, 12: 4b and T'ang Chen 唐甄 [T'ang Chu-fang 唐凱方 1630-1704], Ch'ien-shu [Book of Depth], (Peking: 1955), 11. An ardent admirer of Yang-ming's learning and ability, T'ang remarked that Yang-ming did not attain the virtue of sagehood, since he lacked esteem for Confucius, once having compared himself favourably with Confucius when speaking of the knowledge of warfare.
- 89 WWKC 2: 117a; Chan, Instructions, 159.
- 90 WWKC 3: 147b; Chan, Instructions, 230.
- 91 WWKC 3: 147b-148a; Chan, Instructions, 231-2.
- 92 WWKC 20: 629a.
- 93 "Sitting at Night" (Yeh-tso 夜坐), WWKC 20: 628a.
- 94 Reference again to "polishing the mirror".
- 95 Allusion to Analects 7: 5; Legge, Classics, v.1, 196. Yang-ming, however, uses this metaphor to refer to his own worldly ambitions of success.
- 96 Allusion to Analects 6: 9; Legge, Classics, v.1, 188.