

王陽明哲學書信集
秦富懿譯註



JULIA CHING

The philosophical
letters of
Wang Yang-ming

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Calligraphy on the frontispiece may be translated as 'The thousand sages are all passing shadows; *liang-chih* alone is my master' (from a poem by Wang Yang-ming). Calligraphy is by Ku Yü-hsiu of the University of Pennsylvania. The large seal was carved by Ch'i Pai-shih.

秦家懿修女房

千聖皆過影
良知乃吾師

顧毓琇書



The philosophical
letters of
Wang Yang-ming

Translated and annotated by Julia Ching

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For my mother

Translator's note

There are enough books published on the subject of the life and thought of Wang Shou-jen, more commonly known as Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529), to fill a library, but these are written in Japanese or Chinese. Where European languages are concerned, the situation is quite different. There are only two English translations of Yang-ming's selected writings. The first, of Frederick Henke (1916), has a slightly abridged version of the *Ch'uan-hsi lu*, forty-three of Yang-ming's letters, and twelve of his short essays. The second is Wing-tsit Chan's *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings* (1963) which gives a complete translation of the *Ch'uan-hsi lu* together with certain official documents on social and political affairs issued by Yang-ming. This has filled a definite need since Henke's translation is incomplete, very faulty, and lacks the support of critical scholarship. However, on account of the wealth of biographical material and especially philosophical content contained in Yang-ming's private letters, students of Yang-ming must still refer to Henke's translation, which was republished even after the appearance of Wing-tsit Chan's book, under the title, *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming* (1964).

These considerations have led me to the translation of all of Yang-ming's letters with sufficient philosophical content to justify the effort, and to offer critical annotations and references where necessary. Sixty-seven letters have therefore been chosen, of which twenty-six had never been translated before. Simple subject-headings have also been given for each letter. A bibliography of reference books used is included at the end.

Letters chosen for translation have all been taken out of the *Wang Wen-ch'eng kung ch'üan-shu* [Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming] of the Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an [Four Libraries Series] edition, which is a reproduction of the 1572 edition compiled by Hsieh T'ing-chieh. It contains a total of some 160 letters—including the seven that make up *Ch'uan-hsi lu*, part 2.¹ They

were written to about one hundred people: some letters were written to several persons, others to individuals whose names have not been given. A few, written to Yang-ming's superior officials, are concerned with details of practical administration or military campaigns. Many are of a friendly nature, with little philosophical content. Several were written to various members of his family, giving either news or practical instructions. All these extant letters were written between 1503 and 1528,² the year of his death. We have no letters for the years 1504-6, nor for 1510.

All of the letters translated were written between 1503 and 1527, and so cover a span of twenty-four years. No letters for the year 1520 have been translated, although two short ones are extant.

Before making this selection for translation, other existing selections, such as Liu Tsung-chou's *Yang-ming ch'uan-hsin lu* [Record of Yang-ming's Transmission of Truth] from *Liu-tzu ch'üan-shu yi-pien* [Supplement to Master Liu's Complete Works],³ Huang Tsung-hsi's *Ming-ju hsüeh-an* [Philosophical Records of Ming scholars],⁴ and the earlier Sun Ch'i-feng's *Li-hsüeh tsung-chuan* [Orthodox Transmission of the 'School of Principle']⁵ were examined. Other available collections of Yang-ming's writings, such as *Yang-ming wen-lu* [Collected Writings of Yang-ming] of 1536,⁶ Shih Pang-yao's *Yang-ming hsien-sheng chi-yao* [Collection of Important Works by Master Yang-ming] originally of 1636,⁷ Ni Hsi-en's *Hsiang-chu Wang Yang-ming ch'üan-shu* [Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming, Fully Annotated],⁸ as well as the *Yang-ming ch'üan-shu* of Ssu-pu pei-yao [Essentials of Four Libraries] edition,⁹ have also been consulted.

In his article, 'Tegami yori mitaru Ō Yōmei no shisō taiyō' [The Essentials of Wang Yang-ming's Thought as Seen in His Letters],¹⁰ the Japanese scholar, Yasuda Kiyoshi, has pointed out for us the importance of studying Yang-ming's letters in order to attain a better appreciation of his philosophy. Referring first to the fact that Yang-ming's friends and contemporaries, as well as later Ming scholars, have offered varying ideas of what they consider to be the philosopher's 'essential thought', he goes on to indicate six recurring themes, which, he contends, have

been important in the evolution of Yang-ming's ideas. Five of these themes are taken from one early letter, that of 1509, written to his students at Ch'en-chou,¹¹ shortly after the end of his exile. They show Yang-ming's concern for the all-pervading universal truth or wisdom, his preoccupation with the cultivation of the inner self and the contrary attraction of official service, his disapproval, however, of working for motives of gaining reputation and profit, and his conviction of the need for mutual encouragement and admonition as a help to those seeking the same moral goals. The sixth theme is taken from a letter, written in 1518, to Wang's younger brothers.¹² There, he explains how the minds of sages and those of ordinary men are similarly prone to error, the difference being that the sages know how to correct and avoid faults. Yasuda then refers extensively to other letters where these themes are also present and traces especially the gradual development of Yang-ming's most important contribution to philosophy—the idea of *liang-chih*, and, even more, that of *extending liang-chih*—which pervades the letters of 1527 and 1528. He also explains how the letters of 1527 provide a background for a better understanding of the theory of 'Four Axioms', expounded that same year, and given in *Ch'uan-hsi lu*, part 3.¹³

An example of how the letters of Yang-ming provide further light on ideas expressed in the *Ch'uan-hsi lu* and in the *Nien-p'u* [Chronological Biography] is shown in Yang-ming's answer to his student, Liu Yüan-tao [Liu Chün-liang], who desired to retire to a life of contemplation in the mountains. The *Ch'uan-hsi lu* gives only a few sentences:

Liu Chün-liang wanted to engage in sitting in meditation in the mountains. The teacher said, 'If you seek tranquillity because you feel disgusted with external things, you will only build up an air of arrogance and laziness. But if you are not disgusted with external things, it will be good for you to cultivate yourself in a quiet place.'¹⁴

The *Nien-p'u* states:

Liu [Chün-liang] asked about retiring into the mountains for the cultivation of tranquillity . . . He [Yang-ming] told Liu that the

gentleman's learning regarding the cultivation of the mind resembles the art of healing of a good physician, who measures the gravity of the disease and the temperature of the patient, in order to decide on the use of medication. The essential need is to remove the disease. He has no fixed prescription in the beginning, which must be followed by everyone. If a person is merely intent upon retiring into the mountains, abandoning the affairs of the world, and giving up thought and worry, he [Yang-ming] fears that when a disposition for emptiness has once been developed, even if the person wishes no longer to fall into such emptiness, he can no longer prevent it.¹⁵

The letter written to Liu, which is much longer, is Letter 44 in this work. A comparison of the three passages will show that Yang-ming regards quiet meditation as one of the means of self-cultivation, but not as the only or absolute means. The emphasis he makes is always on flexibility and judgment. The parable of the good physician is thus important. But that is not given in *Ch'uan-hsi lu*. The *Nien-p'u* refers briefly to the parable, but does not explain the issue sufficiently to show the recognition by Yang-ming of the role of quiet meditation in self-cultivation, as well as the need for flexibility of judgment in making use of this means.

The translation of certain philosophical terms, especially those used most frequently by Wang Yang-ming, has posed a real problem. I realise that Professor Wing-tsit Chan and others have made a great contribution in this regard by their lucid translations of Neo-Confucian texts. However, to preserve the richness and ambiguity of meaning inherent in the Chinese characters, I have preferred to transliterate certain key-words, such as *hsin* [mind or heart, principle and source of all human activity], *liang-chih* [man's inborn capacity for knowing and doing the good, that which, when developed to the utmost, unites him with heaven and earth and all things], and so on. I have included in this book a brief selection of terms—'On the Interpretation of Certain Key-words'—endeavouring thereby to point out the hidden richness of the words themselves as well as the difficulty which every translator of Chinese philosophical texts encounters.

Finally, the translations presented here have been arranged, as much as possible, in chronological order. This has been done in accordance with the wishes of Yang-ming himself, who desired

that readers in later ages should be able to discern the development of his thought.¹⁶

The translator hopes that this work will serve to promote greater knowledge and understanding of the philosopher who has exerted such an important influence on East Asian thought for the past five hundred years, and who also has much to say to the Western reader of the twentieth century.

¹ *Wang Wen-ch'eng kung ch'üan-shu*, Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an double-page lithograph edition (hereinafter referred to as *WWKC*). See Wing-tsit Chan (trans.), *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings* (1963), pp. 88 ff. (hereinafter referred to as *Instructions*).

² An important letter written by Yang-ming shortly before his death in 1528 was that to Nieh Wen-yü (1487-1563). It has been included in *Ch'uan-hsi lu*, pt 2. See Chan's *Instructions*, pp. 172 ff.

³ Liu's dates are 1578-1645. The edition used is of 1850.

⁴ Huang's dates are 1610-95. Ssu-pu pei-yao edition.

⁵ Sun's dates are 1584-1675.

⁶ Library of Congress Microfilm No. 2015.

⁷ Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an edition.

⁸ Published in Shanghai by Shao-yeh shan-fang, 1935. The edition used was of 1568.

⁹ This is the same as *WWKC*, but contains many mistakes.

¹⁰ In *Tetsugaku kenkyü* [Philosophical Studies], vol. 380 (1949), pp. 665-82.

¹¹ See Letter 3 in this work.

¹² See Letter 28 in this work.

¹³ See Chan's *Instructions*, p. 243.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁵ *WWKC*, 34:961-2.

¹⁶ See Preface by his student, Ch'ien Te-hung (1496-1574), in *WWKC*, p. 12. The dates given are those found on the pages of the printed letters, even though it is recognised that there are certain conflicts with the chronology set forth in the *Nien-p'u*. In the case of Letter 3 (to Students at Ch'en-chou), however, I have followed the chronology of the *Nien-p'u* because all known data point to its accuracy.

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J.C.

Australian National University
Canberra, 1970

Events in the life of Wang Yang-ming

- 1472 Birth of Wang Yang-ming at Yü-yao on 31 October.
1482 The family moves to Peking.
1484 Death of Yang-ming's mother.
1488 Journey to Kiangsi to get married.
1489 Visit to the philosopher Lou Liang (1422-91).
1492 Yang-ming passes provincial examinations.
1499 Yang-ming obtains the *chin-shih* degree and serves in minor official posts.
1501 Visits to many Buddhist and Taoist monasteries in Anhwei.
1502 Retirement to the 'Yang-ming Cave' and practice of Taoist cultivation (several months).
1504 Return to official life and Confucian principles.
1505 Yang-ming begins to receive disciples as a Confucian teacher.
1506 Flogging and imprisonment as a result of the memorial intervening on behalf of some officials imprisoned unjustly by the powerful eunuch Liu Chin.
1507 Exile to Kweichow.
1508 Enlightenment.
1509 Yang-ming begins to speak of the unity of knowledge and action.
1510 Return from exile, to Kwangsi and Peking.
1511 Minor official posts and teaching of philosophy in Peking, Nanking, and other places.
1516 Yang-ming appointed Censor-in-Chief and Grand Co-ordinator of the border regions of Kiangsi, Kwangtung, and Fukien.
1517-18 Pacification of bandits and re-organisation of local government.
1518 Publication of two works: 'The Old Version of the *Great Learning*' and 'The Definitive Views of Chu Hsi, Arrived at Late in Life'. Hsüeh K'an, Yang-ming's

- disciple, publishes the first collection of his recorded conversations with the Master, the *Ch'uan-hsi lu*.
- 1519 Suppression of the rebellion of Prince Ch'en-hao. Southern expedition of the Emperor Wu-tsung (r. 1506-21).
- 1520 Emperor Wu-tsung returns to Peking.
- 1521 Yang-ming begins to speak of the 'extension of *liang-chih*'. Accession of the Emperor Shih-tsung (r. 1522-66). Honours accorded to Yang-ming.
- 1522 Death of Yang-ming's father.
- 1522-7 Six years of teaching in retirement.
- 1527 Yang-ming recalled to active service to suppress rebellions in Kwangsi. Teaching of the 'Four Maxims'.
- 1528 Pacification and re-organisation of Kwangsi. Yang-ming's health deteriorates steadily. Homebound journey.
- 1529 Death of Yang-ming at Nan-an, Kiangsi, on the way home, on 9 January.

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Abbreviations

CTYL	<i>Chu-tzu yü-lei</i>
CWKW	<i>Hui-an hsien-sheng Chu Wen Kung wen-chi</i>
HSCC	<i>Hsiang-shan ch'üan chi</i>
MJHA	<i>Ming-ju hsüeh-an</i>
SPPY	Ssu-pu pei-yao edition
SPTK	Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an edition
TSD	Taishō shinshū daizōkyō
WWKC	<i>Wang Wen-ch'eng kung ch'üan-shu</i>
<i>Classics</i>	<i>The Chinese Classics</i>
<i>Instructions</i>	<i>Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings</i>
<i>Li Chi</i>	<i>Li Chi, Book of Rites [The Li Ki]</i>
<i>Reflections</i>	<i>Reflections on Things at Hand</i>

On Prayers for Rain

1. TO PREFECT T'UNG, ON ASKING FOR RAIN¹

1503

Yesterday, your two subordinates, Yang and Lee, came with your letter, and inquired about the art of making rain.

... The Way of Heaven is hidden and distant. How can an ordinary mortal probe and understand it? However, your concern for the welfare of the people, and your diligence on their behalf, are so sincere, that I must not neglect sending you a word of reply.

Confucius once said, 'I have already been praying for a long time'.² The prayer of a gentleman is not limited to the moments spent in formal prayer for Yüeh, but refers especially to daily conduct. You have been governor in Yüeh for several years already. All that pertains to removing evils for the people, promoting their welfare and benefit, can be called 'prevenient' prayer, and need not wait until today. But the summer drought is still with us, and the rain has not yet come. Is there perhaps some reason for this? In the ancient times, during periods of drought, the ruler would eat less and refrain from enjoying music, re-examine judicial cases, and decrease taxation. He would pay special attention to sacrifices, to inquiring about the sufferings of the people, and take the blame for the drought on himself—distributing alms, and praying for the people to the spirits of the mountains, rivers, of earth and harvest. That was why there were sacrifices begging Heaven for rain, and proclamations of self-criticism and examination, and vows for self-reform. What historical records referred to by saying, 'King T'ang [d. 1753 B.C.?] blamed himself for six things',³ what the *Book of Rites* said: 'During the great summer sacrifice for rain to God, all the instruments of music are employed',⁴ what the *Spring-Autumn Annals* recorded: 'In autumn, during the ninth month, there was a great sacrifice for rain'⁵—all belong to this category. I had heard of these ancient practices, but never of magic or charms for obtaining rain. Only later magicians practised these from time to time. When these were men of integrity and

perseverance, then, even if their actions were not always in accordance with the Mean, but differed from the ordinary, they were still able to obtain rain. All such reports, however, come to us from miscellaneous accounts of minor importance and not from the Classics. The gentleman tends to consider these happenings as coincidences. As to our present-day priests and sorcerers, many of these are little different from the loafers and ruffians of the market places. How can we therefore expect them to rebuke the thunder, to call forth wind and rain?

I would rather advise you to come out and contemplate yourself at the official hall, to stop whatever business is not urgent, open the door for the reform of self, to set aright cases of injustice, forbid luxury and sophistication, strengthen your sincerity and purify your mind, reproaching yourself, and praying on behalf of the people of the eight counties [of Yüeh],⁶ the spirits of the mountains, rivers, of the earth and grain. And, if the people wish to employ the service of priests to pray for them, let them do so without interference, but also without your sponsorship, and without your relying on them. For, with your style of conduct, you have certainly nothing to be ashamed of in front of the spirits. And if, facing such events, you examine yourself even more, leading your subordinates to beg sincerely for rain, then, even though Heaven sends us drought, there will be no harm. If only human affairs can be regulated, some response from Heaven ought to come within ten days. And, on my part, though I am no different from the common people, if I did know the art of obtaining rain, how would I dare to sit back and watch the people suffer without doing anything about it? . . . In one or two days, I too shall pray at Nan-chen,⁷ to help your fervour. If only you beg with your whole heart for the people, without allowing yourself to be deceived by false teachings, and without anxiety to obtain a better reputation, then, although the way of Heaven is distant, it has never failed to respond to a case of such fervour.

WWKC, 21:634-5

¹ According to Hsiao Liang-kan *et al.* (comp.), *Shao-hsing fu-chih* [Shao-hsing Prefecture Gazetteer] pub. 1586, 26:11b. T'ung Chen was Prefect of Shao-hsing.

- ² *Analects (Lun-yü)*, VII:34. See James Legge (trans.), *The Chinese Classics* (1893, reprinted by Hong Kong University Press, 1960; referred to hereinafter as *Classics*), vol. I, p. 206. I have modified Legge's translation nearly every time, but still refer to him in the footnotes to show that I have consulted him on every occasion.
- ³ Although 'historical records' are mentioned, this line is not found in Su-ma Ch'ien's *Shih-chi*. The reference, rather, is to Wang Ch'ung (b. A.D. 27) and Hsün-tzu (fl. 298-238 B.C.). See 'Kan-hsü' ['Fictitious Influences'] in Huang Hui (ed.), *Lun-heng chiao-shih* [Annotated Version of Wang Ch'ung's *Lun-heng*], Taipei, 1964, vol. 1, pp. 237-8 and Wang Ch'ung, *Lun-heng* [Balanced Inquiries], translated by A. Forke, *Lun-heng* (1962), vol. 2, pp. 183-4. The six things are enumerated in *Hsün-tzu*, 'Ta-lüeh' [Miscellaneous Items], SPPY ed., 19:9b. See Hermann Köster's German translation, *Hsün-tzu* (1967), 27:354.
- ⁴ *Book of Rites (Li-chi)*, 'Yüeh-ling' [Proceedings of Government in Different Months.] See Legge (trans.), *Li Chi, Book of Rites* (1885, reprinted by University Books, New York, 1967, hereinafter referred to as *Li Chi*), vol. 1, pp. 273-4.
- ⁵ The great rain sacrifice often took place 'in autumn, during the ninth month', as, for example, during the sixth and the sixteenth year of Duke Chao, the first year of Duke Ting. See *Spring-Autumn Annals (Ch'un-ch'iu)*, Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, pp. 607, 661, 742.
- ⁶ These counties were: Shan-yin, K'uai-chi, Hsiao-shan, Chu-chi, Yü-yao, Shang-yü, Sheng, and Hsin-ch'ang. See *Che-chiang t'ung-chih* [Chekiang Gazetteer], Shanghai reprint, 1934, 1:114 and *Ming-shih* [Ming Dynastic History], K'ai-ming ed., 1937, ch. 44:100.
- ⁷ The name of a place east of K'uai-chi in modern Chekiang, with a temple dedicated to King Yü. See *Che-chiang t'ung-chih*, 1:210-14. Also see Yang-ming's prayer for rain in *WWKC*, 25:723.

2. IN REPLY TO QUESTIONS ABOUT
SPIRITS AND IMMORTALS

1508

You asked me whether spirits and immortals exist. Thrice you have written and I have not replied, not because I do not wish to reply, but because I did not know what to say! Yesterday, your younger brother came, and desired very much to get an answer. Actually, ever since the age of eight I have been interested in such matters. More than thirty years have passed since then. My teeth are becoming unsteady, several of my hairs have turned white, my eyes cannot see beyond a foot's distance, and my ears cannot hear beyond the distance of ten feet. Moreover, I am often bedridden with sickness for entire months. My need of medicine as well as my capacity for it is growing. These are all the results of my interest in spirits and immortals. But people who know me still say glibly that I can yet attain this Way of Immortality, and you too, having heard such talk and believing it readily, have asked me about it! Since there is no way out for me, I shall say a few foolish words to you about it.

In ancient times, there were perfect men, of genuine virtue and mature *tao*, who lived in harmony with *yin* and *yang* and the four seasons, away from the world and its vanities. Concentrating their sperm [*ching*] and their energies, they moved between Heaven and Earth, seeing and hearing things which were beyond the scope of ordinary experience. Such were Kuang-ch'eng-tzu¹ who lived to the age of one thousand five hundred years without weakening his powers, Li Po-yang² who lived through the dynasties of Shang and Chou, and who went west through the Han-ku Pass. These men really existed. To deny that would be to deceive you. However, to correspond to the *tao* in our breathing and movements, to keep our energy and bones intact, refer to a natural endowment received at the beginning of our existence. This is the work of Heaven, not what human force can compass.

Stories concerning men of later generations who could ascend with their families into the air, transform objects, borrow corpses

and return to life again, refer to deceptive and strange things belonging to the realm of secret magic and ingenious arts—what Yin-wen-tzu³ called illusion, what the Buddhists call heterodoxy. If such actions are called real, you would be equally deceived. After all, words cannot describe what lies between existence and non-existence. One can understand after long reflections and deep self-cultivation. Before having reached the proper state, it is not possible to force such knowledge.

However, we Confucians also have our own doctrine of immortality. Yen-tzu⁴ died at the age of thirty-two, and yet still lives today. Can you believe this? Men of later generations such as Shang-yang-tzu⁵ possessed certain skills, which could not be called the real *tao*. As to Bodhidharma [fl. 460–534?]⁶ and Hui-neng [638–713],⁷ they would be closer to the *tao*. But we can still not be sure of this. If you wish to hear more about this doctrine, you need to retire into the mountains or forests for thirty years, perfect your ears and eyes, unify your mind and ambition, keep your breast free from the least particle of dust. And then you can discuss this Way. But at present, you are still far from the Way of Immortality.—Please forgive my bold words!

WWKC, 21: 638

¹ A legendary immortal who supposedly lived in the K'ung-t'ung mountain and was visited by the Yellow Emperor who asked for his advice on the way of immortality. See 'Tsai-yu' [To Put the World at Peace] in *Chuang-tzu*, SPPY ed., 4:18a; English translation by Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (1968), pp. 118–20.

² One of the names given to Lao-tzu in *Shih-chi* [Historical Records of Ssu-ma Ch'ien]. See Erh-shih-wu shih series, K'ai-ming ed., 63:180–1.

³ A philosopher of late Chou times who studied under the logician Kung-sun Lung (b. 380 B.C.?). See the book ascribed to him, *Yin-wen-tzu*, 2 vols., SPTK ed.

⁴ Favourite student of Confucius.

⁵ Ch'en Chih-hsü, alias Shang-yang-tzu. He compiled the *Shang-yang-tzu Chin-tan ta-yao* [Essentials of the Golden Pill] in late 1335. See Liu Ts'un-yan, 'Ming-ju yü tao-chiao' [Taoism and Neo-Confucianists in Ming times] in *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao* [New Asia Journal], vol. 8 (1967), p. 4.

⁶ The name of the supposed first patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism in China. See Tao-hsüan, *Hsü kao-seng chuan* [Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks], TSD No. 2060, vol. 50, p. 551.

⁷ Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism in China who started the Southern School of Sudden Enlightenment. He lived supposedly from A.D. 605 to 706. See Tao-yüan, *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, SPTK ed., 3:14a–16a.

3. TO STUDENTS AT
CH'EN-CHOU¹

1510

... Since the tradition of learning has been abandoned, few people seek the *tao* [Way]. A man of Ch'i living in the midst of a multitude from Ch'u is very easily swayed by temptation.² Except for men of heroic virtue, very few remain firm and unchanged. . . True, there are some among our modern scholars and officials who know a little about seeking the Way, but they all show off their attainments before having acquired genuine virtue, drawing to themselves criticisms in the world, and therefore often toppling down for lack of solid foundation and becoming even a hindrance to this Way. You, my friends, ought to take that to be a warning. Detaching yourselves from worldly fame, you must apply real effort in your innermost selves. What I said earlier in the temple about sitting meditatively was not meant for the sake of your attaining *samādhi*.³ Rather, since we are usually distracted by many objects and affairs, and do not know how to take care of ourselves, I wished to recommend such a remedy to our lack of learning by an effort of the recollection of the mind. [Ch'eng] Ming-tao [1032-85] had said, 'When one begins to study, one ought to know where to apply one's effort; when one has already studied, one ought to know where one has acquired strength'.⁴ You, my friends, ought to apply your efforts here, in order to make progress. Later, you will see where you have acquired strength.

Study requires directing the whip towards the inner self.⁵ 'The way of the gentleman is hidden but becomes more prominent every day'.⁶ Although reputation and profit imply a greater or lesser degree of purity and impurity, nevertheless they manifest the same desire for gain. 'Modesty brings its reward'.⁷ 'Seek not to be different from others, but to be in agreement with *li* [moral principle or reason]'.⁸ These words should be written on the wall, to be looked at many times by the eyes. Our learning to write examination essays will not prevent our pursuit of knowledge [and virtue], but may injure our firm determination

[to become sages].⁹ If you proceed systematically in your work, according to what we agreed upon the other day, neither will interfere with each other. As it has been said, when we know how to sprinkle water on the floor and sweep it, how to answer the door and respond to the questions of other people,¹⁰ the refined meanings of knowledge will have entered our spirits.¹¹

WWKC, 4:170-1

- 1 These students included Chi Yüan-heng, Chiang Hsin, and Liu Kuan-shih. See 'Nien-p'u' in *WWKC*, 32:911. Ch'en-chou is in the present province of Hunan.
- 2 This refers to the parable given in *Mencius*, comparing the difficulty of keeping one's own convictions alone to that of a man learning the language of Ch'i while living in the midst of people speaking that of Ch'u. His lone teacher, a man of Ch'i, cannot help him very much if the men of Ch'u are continually shouting into his ears. See *Mencius*, 3B:6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 275.
- 3 The Chinese word *ting* is a translation of the Sanskrit *samādhi* rendered into English by Derk Bodde as 'intent meditation'. See his translation of Fung Yu-lan's *History of Chinese Philosophy* (1953), vol. 2, p. 395.
- 4 Ch'eng Ming-tao was the other name of Ch'eng Hao. This saying comes from *Erh-Ch'eng ch'üan-shu* [Complete Works of the two Ch'engs], *Yi-shu* [Surviving Works], SPPY ed., 12:20. *Yi-shu*, *Wai-shu*, *Ts'ui-yen*, *Ming-tao wen-chi*, and *Yi-ch'uan wen-chi* are all from *Erh-Ch'eng ch'üan-shu*.
- 5 A famous sentence of Ch'eng Hao, advocating the direction of our efforts inwards, *Yi-shu*, 11:11b. See also Chiang Yung, *Chin-ssu lu chi-chu* [Collected Commentaries on Chu Hsi's *Chin-ssu lu*], SPPY ed., 2:11b, and Wing-tsit Chan's translation, *Reflections on Things at Hand* (1967; hereinafter referred to as *Reflections*), p. 58. Chan translates this: 'In learning it is only necessary to drive with a whip, as it were, so that one may get nearer to the inside and be genuinely concerned with one's internal life'. The expression *p'ien-p'i* (drive with a whip), according to Chu Hsi, was a colloquial expression in Lo-yang, where the Ch'eng brothers lived. The driver of a carriage had to whip people to make them get off the streets into the houses. See *Chu-tzu yü-lei* [Classified Sayings of Master Chu], 1473 ed. (Taipei reprint, 1962), 45:3a. This book will be abbreviated as *CTYL*.
- 6 *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-yung)*, 33:1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 431.
- 7 *Book of Documents (Shu-ching)*, 'Ta-Yü mu' ['Counsels of the Great Yü']. See Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 65.
- 8 *Mencius*, 6A:7, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 430.
- 9 Ch'eng Yi (1033-107), *Wai-shu* [Other Works], 11:5a. See *Chin-ssu lu chi-chu*, 7:6b; also Chan's *Reflections*, p. 199.
- 10 Confucians and Neo-Confucians have always esteemed manual work and training in the ways of ordinary life as part of their program of education, following the instance given in the *Analects*, 19:12 (Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 343). Ch'eng Hao had said, 'Even sprinkling and sweeping the floor and dealing with and answering questions belong to the realm of what exists before physical form, for in principle there is neither great nor small.' See *Yi-shu*, 13:1b.
- 11 Allusion to *Book of Changes (Yi-ching)*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 2, James Legge (trans.), *The Yi King*, Oxford, 1822, Delhi reprint, 1966 (referred to hereinafter as *Yi King*), p. 390; also *Yi-shu*, 4:4b, 15:8a.

... The perfection of self and the government of men are not actually two different things. Administrative duties are complicated, but remain within the realm of learning. I believe that you, my Ch'eng-chih, benefit much from every situation

While reflecting recently upon your efforts to make progress in learning, I had the slight impression that you are over-exerting yourself. Former scholars have said that while the earnest determination to attain the *tao* [Way] is sincerity, too much haste and impatience in seeking it would make of it instead selfishness.² This cannot be left unattended to. In our daily life, is there anything that is not the functioning and movement of *T'ien-li* [Principle of Heaven]? If we only guard this mind and not allow it to become dispersed, the principles of reason will mature themselves. This is what Mencius meant when he said: 'Let not [the mind] forget its work or assist [the growth of the vast, overflowing *ch'i*]',³ and also: '[The gentleman] advances in learning with deep earnestness, [wishing] to get hold of it in himself'.⁴ True, how can the work of learning be left to move slowly? And yet, I fear that too much effort to force and exert ourselves, even if it brings progress, may not allow us to have security

WWKC, 4:171

¹ His private name was Hsü Shou-ch'eng, and he was, like Yang-ming, a native of Yü-yao. See *Shao-hsing fu-chih*, 41: 48a-b.

² A paraphrase of one of the sayings of the Ch'eng brothers, identified by Chu Hsi as Ch'eng Yi. See *Yi-shu*, 2A:1a and *Chin-ssu-lu chi-chu*, 2:7b, Chan's *Reflections*, p. 48.

³ *Mencius*, 2A:2. Earlier in this passage, Mencius had spoken of the 'vast, overflowing *ch'i*', or *hao-jan-chih-ch'i*, as a certain moral rectitude in one's character which can somehow unite the gentleman to Heaven and Earth. Later in the passage, he gave the parable of a foolish man who seeks to assist the growth of his crop by 'pulling up' his plants, only to cause them all to wither away. For Legge's translation of this passage, see vol. II, pp. 190-1.

⁴ *Mencius*, 4B:14, *ibid.*, p. 322.

5. TO HUANG TSUNG-HSIEN¹ AND
YING YÜAN-CHUNG²

1511

... The heart and mind of the sage cannot tolerate the least particle of dust and has naturally no need of polishing. The heart and mind of the average man, however, 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 our having to spend much energy.³ At this stage, one already knows the substance of perfect *jen* [virtue]. When the dirt is not yet removed, the mirror may still have certain bright spots, which allow us to detect falling particles of dust and to rub them off. But whatever accumulates on top of the dirt and dust cannot even be seen. This shows why learning benefits from hard and diligent work.⁴ Please do not doubt my words because of the difficulties involved. Human nature tends to prefer ease and dislike difficulty; it is naturally affected by selfish desires and habits. But when we see through this, naturally we no longer find it difficult. There were men in ancient times who gladly risked their lives ten thousand times, on account of this realisation. Formerly, we did not understand the meaning of directing efforts inwards; and so we could say nothing of this work. Now that we realise this, we fear being dragged by love of ease and hate of difficulty into Ch'an Buddhism.⁵ Yesterday we discussed the difference between Confucianism and Buddhism. Ming-tao had already disclosed eighty or ninety per cent of the truth when he said that [the Buddhists] straighten their interior disposition by reverence, but do not perfect their exterior conduct by righteousness, and therefore, in the end, do not even succeed in straightening their interior disposition by reverence.⁶

WWKC, 4:171-2

¹ Huang Tsung-hsien (1477-1551), private name Huang Wan, literary name Chiu-an. He met Yang-ming and Chan Jo-shui in 1510, and later became Yang-ming's disciple,

- and also relative through the marriage of his daughter to Yang-ming's son. Huang rose to the official rank of Minister of Rites. In later life, he was much displeased with the excesses of some of Yang-ming's disciples, and wrote the controversial *Ming-tao p'ien* [Elucidation of the Way] to criticise them. For his biography, see Huang Tsung-hsi, *Ming-ju hsüeh-an* [Philosophical Records of Ming Scholars], SPPY ed. (hereinafter referred to as *MJHA*), 13:5b-6b and *Ming-shih*, 197:470.
- ² Private name Ying Liang. For his life, see *WWKC*, 33:911; see also *Ming-shih*, 283:699.
- ³ Comparison of the mind or heart to a mirror represents a rich tradition in Chinese thought going back to the philosophers Chuang-tzu (about 4th century B.C.) and Huai-nan-tzu (d. 122 B.C.). But Yang-ming must have had in mind especially the account in the *Liu-tsu ta-shih fa-pao t'an-ching* [Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch] concerning the *gathas* of the two Buddhist monks, Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng, the later Sixth Patriarch (see TSD No. 2007, 48:388). Yang-ming's use of the metaphor manifests a preference for Shen-hsiu's *gatha*. See Wing-tsit Chan's translation, *The Platform Scripture* (1963) and also Paul Demiéville's 'Le miroir spirituel', *Sinologica*, 1 (1948), pp. 117-19.
- ⁴ Allusion to *Doctrine of the Mean*, 20:9. See Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 407.
- ⁵ Again he voices his opposition to Ch'an Buddhism.
- ⁶ This refers to *Yi-shu*, 4:4b. Yang-ming, following Chu Hsi, attributes the saying to Ch'eng Hao (Ming-tao). See *Chin-ssu lu chi-chu*, 13:1b, Chan's *Reflections*, p. 281. The quotation contained in it comes from the *Book of Changes*, Hexagram 2, 'K'un', Appendix 4, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 420. Wing-tsit Chan translates *ching* as 'seriousness'. I prefer 'reverence', implying reverence to one's inner self, or to one's moral nature.

6. TO WANG SHIH-T'AN, THE HAN-LIN
ACADEMICIAN¹

1511

... Pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are emotions. When we refuse to yield to them, they remain *wei-fa* ['unstirred'].² This *wei-fa* of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy refers to their substance, that is to human nature. This explanation began, not with Ch'eng [Yi], but with Tzu-Ssu.³ Since you disagree on this point, let us begin our discussion with Tzu-Ssu's *Doctrine of the Mean*.

Pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy, as well as thought and consciousness, all proceed from the mind (*hsin*). The mind controls nature and emotions.⁴ Nature (*hsing*) is the 'substance' of *hsin*, emotions are its 'functions'. Ch'eng [Yi] said: 'The mind is one'. Where the substance is concerned, it is 'quiet and passive'. Where the functions are concerned, it 'penetrates all things immediately, when it is acted upon'.⁵ I can add nothing to this. You can find the answer in this theory of substance and function. After all, substance and function have the same origin. If you know how substance is function, you would also know how function is substance. But substance is obscure and difficult to know; function is obvious and easily seen. You are quite right in what you said. The person who claims that, from morning till night, there is not a moment of passivity, sees function only and not substance.

In his studies the gentleman seeks 'substance' through 'function'. As Ch'eng-tzu [Ch'eng Yi] said, thought is that which is 'stirred'⁶ (*yi-fa*), to have consciousness is to have that which is active. All this refers to the time before the four emotions have been stirred but does not say that they are never stirred. In the beginning, Chu-tzu [Chu Hsi, 1130-1200] also doubted this theory of *wei-fa*. He held repeated discussions and debates—dozens of them—with [Chang] Nan-hsüan [1133-80]⁷ before he finally made up his mind. The results are now gathered together in his *Chung-yung chu-shu* [Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean].⁸ This is therefore no haphazard theory. Only what he said about beginning with vigilance and apprehension, in the

control of oneself, and arriving at the harmony of supreme tranquillity, as well as beginning with caution in solitude, in refinement of spirit, and arriving at perfect response to events of life, seems to show over-analysis. Later readers divided this into two sections, thinking that there might be a special time of quiet and passivity, for tranquillity and for nurturing and preserving *hsin*, the mind. They did not realise that we should always preserve a vigilant, cautious, and apprehensive mind, without a moment's pause in such effort of self-cultivation, and also without having necessarily to preserve and nurture the mind by vigilance over self at the times when one is neither seen nor heard.

I would recommend that you exert more effort into your activity, without allowing such effort to suffer any interruption. When activity no longer lacks harmony, neither will passivity or tranquillity lack equilibrium. Then would one know what is called the quiet and passive substance. If, before attaining this state, we try to guess its meaning, we would be 'discussing the pagoda's finial while looking at it'.⁹ Even Chu-tzu spoke merely of the conscious person, and not of consciousness. This points to a lack of clarity. You have good reasons, therefore, for your doubts. But pay attention, that your doubt may not resemble the action of a man who abstains from food after an experience of choking. When a gentleman has a theory which differs from those of the ancients, he should not consider it as definitive, but should first investigate it thoroughly, until he really finds it inadequate, before he makes his decision. Thus will he be able to discuss the question clearly and analyse it properly

WWKC, 4:172

- ¹ Private name Wang Chün, courtesy name Che-chih. Shih-t'an was his literary name. He became *chin-shih* (presented scholar) in 1493. Later he was dismissed from office as Minister of Rites (1524) on account of his uncompromising attitude concerning the awarding of posthumous titles to Emperor Shih-tsung's father. For his biography, see *MJHA*, 48:1a-b.
- ² This whole letter is a discussion on the control of emotions as given in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch.1. See Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 384.
- ³ Confucius's grandson, to whom is attributed the authorship of the *Doctrine of the Mean*.
- ⁴ Chang Tsai, *Chang-tzu ch'üan-shu* [Complete Works of Master Chang], 'Hsing-li shih-yi' [Additional Sayings on Nature and Principle], SPPY ed., 14:2a.

- ⁵ Ch'eng Yi, *Ts'ui-yen* [Pure Words], 1:10b. The quotation marks indicate Ch'eng's citation of the *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 1, ch. 10, see Legge's *Yi King*, p. 370. See also the discussion given in Angus C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers* (1958), pp. 51-3. But the translation given for the citation is my own.
- ⁶ *Yi-shu*, 18:14b.
- ⁷ See the correspondence exchanged between Chu Hsi and Chang Shih (Nan-hsüan) in *Hui-an hsien-sheng Chu Wen Kung wen-chi* [Collected Works of Master Chu], SPTK ed., chs. 31-2. This book will be abbreviated as *CWKW*.
- ⁸ Yang-ming is referring to Chu's *Chung-yung chang-chü* [Commentary on the Text of the *Doctrine of the Mean*] which forms part of Chu's *Ssu-shu chi-chu* [Collected Commentaries on the Four Books].
- ⁹ This expression was also employed by the Ch'eng brothers. See *Yi-shu*, 1:4a-b. It means that one cannot discourse about an experience which one has not yet reached.

7. TO CHU YUNG-MING¹

1511

A gentleman has only one fear: that he neglect his study. Whether he succeeds in the civil examinations earlier or later is not important. Besides, my dear brother, I expect much more of you than the passing of examinations. I wonder whether you thought of that. Please tell me of it when you have time. I heard that my two nephews, Chieh and Yang,² both took the examinations last year. Although I do not object to their youthful ambitions, I still do not approve of it. If, unfortunately, they succeeded at this immature stage, would that not spoil their whole lives? The talents of youth should be carefully cultivated in obscurity and hiddenness. If the Way of Heaven does not concentrate, it will not, later on, radiate. All the more so with human beings. The flower with a thousand leaves cannot yield fruit, for its beauty is too manifest. If my nephews would not consider my words as foolish and unrealistic, they would certainly make progress.

In your letter, you advised me to enter the government service. Surely, I have no intention of keeping myself pure from politics. My hesitations are due not only to the times, which prescribe my remaining in obscurity, but also to the fact that my studies are not yet complete

WWKC, 4:173

¹ The younger brother of Yang-ming's first wife, who, together with his two sons, became Yang-ming's disciple. See Yü Ch'ung-yao, *Yang-ming hsien-sheng chuan-tsu'an* [Collated Biography of Master Yang-ming] (1923), pt 1, p. 39.

² Chu Yung-ming's two sons.

... What you said about being broad-minded and vigorous² is very right, but then to say 'we ought neither to abandon our efforts, nor to diminish them, neither to stay at a standstill, nor to stop short of reaching the goal', shows yet a 'forced' feeling of doing what is necessary. Between such 'forced' feeling and the spontaneous feeling of advancing without cease, is yet another step. Ch'eng-tzu [Ch'eng Yi] said, 'to reach it because we know it, implies that it is a joy to conform to principle, and a deprivation of joy not to conform to principle'.³ That which naturally cannot cease to advance is finding joy in conforming to *li* [moral principle]. But this cannot be easily attained except by those who really know their nature. To know nature is to know *jen* [humanity]. Humanity is proper to the mind of man. The substance of the mind is of itself naturally broad and vigorous. When it is not broad, that is on account of some obstruction. When it is not vigorous, that is on account of some hindrance. So when the principle is clearly seen, selfish desires naturally cannot hinder the mind, and then selfish desires present no hindrance, our mind cannot but naturally be broad and vigorous. To be broad does not mean having to expand or enlarge something. To be vigorous does not mean having to do or strengthen something. For there is no need to make any slight addition to what lies within the realm of our duty. Tseng-tzu⁴ said, 'Do not lack in breadth of mind and vigour'. This was meant for the scholar. But Tseng-tzu said this after he had exhausted the depths of principle, and after he had already seen the substance of *jen*. Yet our own scholars only know they must not lack in breadth and endurance, and do not know how to exhaust principle, believing only that to expand [knowledge] is to be broad, to work on strengthening it is to be vigorous. This too comes from a momentary selfishness of the temperament, and is still quite far from the way of *jen*. It shows a distinction between the universal and the particular, between righteousness and working for profit

- ¹ The literary name of Wang Yün-feng (1465-1517), whose courtesy name was Ying-shao. His biography is in *Ming-shih*, 165:388.
- ² *Analects*, 8:7. See Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 210.
- ³ *Yi-shu*, 15:16b, 18:5a. Yang-ming paraphrased Ch'eng Yi's words.
- ⁴ Disciple of Confucius. His name was Tseng Shen. For the quotation, see note 2.

... What men do to me, that I do not wish, I do not do to them.¹ What I do wish, proceeds from the desire of my heart, naturally and spontaneously, without being forced. Not doing to others [what they do not wish] is possible after some effort. This indicates the difference between *jen* [humanity] and *shu* [reciprocity].² But reciprocity, the method of acquiring humanity, is precisely our business. Even Tzu-lu, with all his courage, was not admitted by the Master as having humanity.³ To have courage but not judgment shows that this courage may not completely proceed from the universal *T'ien-li*.⁴

To serve the sovereign to the point of not running away from him when he is in danger, is about all that we can ask of a man of *jen*. But not knowing that to serve Ch'e [Marquis of Wei] as an official and to receive recompense from him for this service is unrighteous, shows that the courage [of Tzu-lu] was not properly directed, and cannot be regarded as *jen*.⁵ But, as a property of *jen*, courage is indeed what people like us yet lack

WWKC, 4:174

¹ *Analects*, V:11, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 177.

² For reciprocity, see *Analects*, XV:23, *ibid.*, p. 301.

³ *Analects*, V:7, *ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Tso-chuan*, fifteenth year of Duke Ai. During the rebellion of K'ung K'uei, the Marquis of Wei escaped to the state of Lu. Tzu-lu, a disciple of Confucius, who was in the service of the Marquis, died during the troubles. Confucius had predicted that Tzu-lu would die an unnatural death. See *Tso-chuan* [Annals of Tso], Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, p. 843, and *Analects*, XI:12, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 241.

. . . I also used to have the habit of looking down on others of the same rank as myself, and of despising the ways of the world. Later, I knew a little better about how to correct myself, but only by resisting [this temptation] and by maintaining an exterior appearance [of modesty]. It was only with my three-year exile in Kweichow, where I suffered every possible difficulty, that I received some insight, and began to believe that the words of Mencius about 'being born in sorrow and calamity'² are no deception. I had often thought that 'the gentleman regulates his conduct according to the condition in which he finds himself, desiring nothing beyond. In wealth and honour, he seeks to adjust himself to wealth and honour. In poverty and abjection, misfortune and suffering, he seeks to adjust himself to poverty and abjection, misfortune and suffering. That is why, always and everywhere, he remains himself'.³ The gentlemen of later times ought also to act thus

WWKC, 4:177

¹ Private name Wang Tao. See *MJHA*, 42:18a-b.

² *Mencius*, 6B:15, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, pp. 447-8.

³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 14, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 395.

... The gentleman considers only righteousness in his relations with others ... Friendship depends on *tao* and *te* [virtue] ... and has nothing to do with age or position ... *Jen* is the virtue of the mind or heart. The man who has no *jen* is not worthy of being a man. To promote *jen* through friendship² is to complete the virtue of the mind. This is what friendship means. . . Mencius said, 'Friendship should not admit presumptions of superiority.'³ Meng Hsien-tzu had five friends, but none of these was from his own family.⁴ Did he entertain considerations of nobility or lowliness of rank? Chung-yu⁵ was three years younger than Yen Lu,⁶ but he regarded Yen Hui⁷ as a friend. Yen Hui and Tseng Tien⁸ were contemporaries, but Tseng Shen⁹ spoke of [Yen Hui] as his friend. Were there considerations of age or seniority? ... Formerly Ch'eng Yi-ch'uan (Ch'eng Yi) and Lü Hsi-che were school friends, and regarded each other as such. Then, Hsi-che became Yi-ch'uan's disciple, and was regarded as a disciple. Could we say that Yi-ch'uan was respectful to Hsi-che when they were school friends, but not when the latter became his disciple? Confucius regarded Yang Huo as an official¹⁰ but Yen Hui and Tzu-kung as disciples. Could we say that he regarded [Yen] Hui and Tz'u (Tzu-kung) with less esteem than Yang Huo? The way of master and disciple has long been neglected. Among younger men, the intelligent and able ones often have the intention of seeking *tao*, but, because their elders do not regard them with sufficient seriousness and do not understand their hearts, they treat the younger men with empty politeness, trying thereby to please them and seek the reputation of practising kindness to scholars ... Hence, the way of master and disciple becomes daily more degenerate ... I often think how fortunate I would be if I had the opportunity to be disciple to such philosophers as Chou Tun-yi [1017-73] and the Ch'engs. If not, I would still be fortunate if I could become a disciple of Chou's and Ch'engs' disciples. However, we no longer have these men with us in the world. Whither then, can men of ambition turn in

disappointment? How can they be free from anxiety? To have anxiety and not to reproach oneself. . . to express oneself and not to seek for help from others, will eventually bring no accomplishment. With regard to the younger men of this generation, I do not presume to consider myself their master. I only seek to discuss with those among them who are intelligent and able, in order also to promote *jen* in myself. But if they regard themselves as my juniors, and seek for my teaching, even though they do not serve me as their master, there is still a relationship of elders and juniors . . . It has been said, 'When the teacher is severe, the Way is honoured; when the Way is honoured, the people esteem learning'.¹¹ Men need some discipline and fear, in order to listen to the words of others. Yi-yin said, 'Heaven, in giving life to the people, causes those who are first enlightened to enlighten those who are later enlightened. . . I am [one of] the first enlightened of Heaven's people. If I do not awake the others, who will do so?'¹² Hence, the very wise enlighten those who possess a little wisdom, while those who possess a little wisdom enlighten those who have no wisdom; the well-awakened awaken those who are slightly awakened, the slightly awakened awaken those who are not awakened. Would it then be better to wait until one is already very wise and awakened before seeking to awaken all under Heaven? But this is not possible. And so, if one considers oneself as possessing only a little wisdom, and as being only slightly awakened, and therefore does not dare to awaken others, one will eventually not awaken any one. Does a man of *jen* act in this way? The man of *jen* establishes others' characters when he wishes his own to be established and enlarges others' [minds] when he wishes [his own] to be enlarged.¹³ My idea is that when one already has a little portion of wisdom, one ought to wish at once to share this little portion of wisdom with others, and when one already has a little bit of enlightenment, one ought to wish at once to share this little bit of enlightenment with others. The more people there are who possess a little wisdom and a little enlightenment, the easier it will be to have them share with one another their wisdom and enlightenment. And then, after this, we might look forward to great wisdom and great enlightenment. With regard to the younger generation of today, I hardly dare to consider myself as one who possesses a little wisdom and

enlightenment. Rather, I should use the example of a man suffering from hunger and cold. He knows that the farming of rice and mulberry can give him food and clothing. He has also heard, by accident, of the ways of planting rice and growing mulberry, and desires to attempt these. Thereupon, he tells others who are also suffering from hunger and cold, to make them take part in this work. For he does not let his own lack of experience in farming prevent him from telling others of its advantages. However, the gentleman first possesses something in himself before he requires it in others. I do not possess anything in myself. How could I therefore require anything of others? But then, I have been speaking about those who, of their own will, come to me. . . .

WWKC, 21:642-4

- ¹ Ch'u Ch'ai-hsü (1457-1513), private name Ch'u Huan and courtesy name Ching-fu. See *Ming-shih*, 286:708.
- ² *Analects*, XII:24. Legge's translation of the whole sentence, from which this part is taken, is: 'The superior man, on grounds of culture, meets with his friends, and by their friendship, *helps his virtue*' (*Classics*, vol. I, p. 262).
- ³ *Mencius*, 5B:3, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 376.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* Meng Hsien-tzu did not wish his friends to consider him as a nobleman.
- ⁵ The other name of Tzu-lu, disciple of Confucius.
- ⁶ The father of Yen Hui, favourite disciple of Confucius. He is mentioned in *Analects*, XI:7, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 239.
- ⁷ See note 6.
- ⁸ Tseng Shen's father, also called Tseng Hsi. See *Analects*, I:25, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 246-7.
- ⁹ Also called Tzu-yu, son of Tseng Tien. To him is attributed the authorship of the *Great Learning*.
- ¹⁰ *Analects*, XVII:1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 317.
- ¹¹ *Book of Rites*, 'Hsüeh-chi' [On Education]. See Legge's *Li Chi*, vol. 2, p. 88.
- ¹² *Mencius*, 5A:7, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 363. For Yi-yin, see *Shih-chi*, 3:11.
- ¹³ *Analects*, VII: 28, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 194.

. . . In your letter, you reproved me for not regarding myself as a teacher, and you fear that I have not sincerely spoken out on everything. But who am I to dare to regard myself as a teacher? In our former letters, when we spoke about the relationship between elders and juniors, it was taken for granted that I would be slightly older, and that my correspondent would have the intention of seeking the *tao*. If he were about the same age as I, and had no intention of seeking the *tao*, I would naturally regard him as a guest or a friend. How can I follow the rule of elders and juniors? I would be making a fool of myself! Moreover, is there any reason in the world why I should presume to regard myself as a teacher without even considering the other person's intention in coming to me? One cannot acquire the dignity of being a teacher by taking it for granted. If someone comes to me to learn the truth from me, then I can respond to him in the appropriate way. Alas, in these days, is there any real 'teacher'? There are teachers today for the apprentices of various arts and crafts. There are also teachers today for those who learn to write examination essays and seek after reputation and profit. Such students know that arts and crafts can procure for them a means of livelihood, while examinations can obtain for them reputation, profit, and a high official position. Unless a person is well aware of the fact that the development of his own nature and endowment is even more important than the means of livelihood or an official position, would he seek a teacher? However, the ignorance of arts and crafts merely brings with it a lack of food and clothing; the ignorance of examination essays merely implies the deprivation of an official position. But if the person's nature and endowments were somewhat obscured, he would no longer be human. People understand the former, but not the latter. Is this not a cause for great sorrow?

Formerly, I attended the *t'ai-hsüeh* [State University] together with Wang Yin-chih and Liu Ching-su. Yin-chih was always ahead of Ching-su in every seasonal examination, but did not

consider himself Ching-su's equal in systematic studies and suddenly one day paid him the respect due to a teacher, and asked for instruction from him. I used to admire him for this. Such a person can really become a hero of virtue. If Yin-chih had only turned his mind to seeking the *tao*, would there be any degree of sagehood beyond his reach? When Tseng-tzu was very sick, he changed the mat on which he was lying.¹ When Tzu-lu was dying he took care to adjust the tassels on his cap.² Chang Heng-ch'ü (Chang Tsai) was humble enough to remove the tiger skin from his seat and make his disciples take lessons from the two Ch'engs.³ Only men of great courage and selflessness in the world can do this.

The world today has long been morally degenerate. It does not differ from a sick man approaching death. And yet, every man continues to hold stubbornly to his own opinions, and refuses to seek in humility for guidance and correction. That is why, in today's world, only the heroic and independent scholars, who really recognise the urgency of the need to seek one's own nature and endowment, take upon themselves the responsibility of seeking the way of sages, and are anxious to find a teacher to follow. And yet, you, my friend, consider it unsuitable to treat as guests those younger scholars, though their talents and purposefulness are not adequate for learning the *tao* . . . True, if there were a great difference of age, the question of seniority remains, and hardly needs mentioning. Even Confucius caused a youth of the Ch'üeh village to take messages for him, and said 'I observe that he is fond of occupying the seat of a full-grown man. He walks shoulder to shoulder with his elders. He is not one who is seeking to make progress in learning. He wishes quickly to become a man.'⁴ However, he did not refrain from giving the youth his instructions. I need not say, all this refers to people who are less perfect than ourselves. In the case of those of great virtue and superior knowledge, who happen to have been born several decades of years after me, I would prefer to consider the greater ones as my teachers, and the lesser ones as my friends. How can I yet take into consideration the difference of age? . . .

WWKC, 21:645

- ¹ *Book of Rites*, 'T'an-kung', Legge's *Li Chi*, vol. 1, pp. 128-9.
- ² To show that he was dying as a gentleman. See *Tso-chuan*, fifteenth year of Duke Ai, Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, pp. 842-3.
- ³ See *Sung-shih* [Sung Dynastic History], 427, p. 1098; also *Wai-shu*, 12:13a.
- ⁴ *Analects*, XIV:47, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 293.

' . . . According to the *Book of Rites*, Tseng-tzu had asked: "Suppose the feudal princes are assembled in a body to appear before the Son of Heaven. They have entered the gate, but are unable to go through with the rites [of audience]. How many occurrences will cause these to be discontinued?" Confucius replied, "Four". Tseng-tzu asked again: "Suppose the feudal princes are visiting one another. [The visitors] have entered the gate after customary bowings and courtesies, but are unable to go through with the rites [of audience]. How many occurrences will cause these to be discontinued?" Confucius replied, "Six, including an eclipse of the sun". Tseng-tzu said: "If, during [an important] sacrifice, an eclipse of the sun occurs, or the grand ancestral temple takes fire, what should be done?" Confucius replied: "The sacrifice should be hurried on. But if the victims have arrived, and have not yet been slain, the sacrifice should be discontinued."² I (Meng-ch'ün), however have doubts concerning these replies. The death of the Son of Heaven, the grand ancestral temple taking fire, the funeral rites of the queen [or of the princess of the state], the robes getting unsightly through soaking rain are all unforeseeable events which may occur. The eclipse of the sun, however, can be calculated in advance. When the feudal princes were performing the rites, could they not have avoided this? And why should they have had to perform sacrifice that very day, and even to hurry it on? If the sacrifice may be discontinued when the victim has not yet been slain, may I ask why the time of the eclipse of the sun was not known when the time for the slaying was fixed? . . . '

[Yang-ming's answer:]

. . . In ancient times, the Son of Heaven had a *jih-kuan* [officer of days], the feudal lords had *jih-yü* [superintendent of days]³ . . . So how could it happen, that it should not yet be known, on the day of the sacrifice, that an eclipse of the sun would occur? I suppose that during the time of the Spring-Autumn Period [722-481 B.C.] these officials were often negligent in their work,

so that eclipses of the sun sometimes took place without their knowing in advance. Yao had entrusted to the families of Hsi and Ho, the work of 'delivering respectfully the seasons to be observed by the people'.⁴ This meant he considered it a very important thing. Yet, during the time of Chung-k'ang which was not so long after Yao, Hsi and Ho were already negligent in their duties. Confused in the reading of the heavens, they did not know when the eclipse of the sun would occur. That was why Yin was sent on a punitive expedition against them.⁵ By the times of Shang and Chou, this position became even less important. With the removal of the capital by King P'ing to the east [770 B.C.], the political control and instructions, the commandments and orders of the government could not reach the whole world. We can therefore imagine how the officials became even more negligent in their duties after that. In the *Spring-Autumn Annals*, thirty-six eclipses of the sun were recorded.⁶ But if we verify these in the *Tso-chuan* [Annals of Tso], we shall find out that one out of three times some transgression was committed against the rites either by the beating of drums and offering of victims and silks, or by other irregularities.⁷ Also two out of four of the officials were negligent in their appointed duties. Tu Yü⁸ regarded all officials who did not record the days on which the eclipse of the sun occurred as being negligent in their duties. That is why these things can be verified. In the *Spring-Autumn Annals* it is recorded: 'In the winter of the seventeenth year of Duke Huan, on the first day of the tenth month, there was an eclipse of the sun'.⁹ The *Tso-chuan* said: 'Not to record the date would be a negligence of official duty'.¹⁰ Again, in the summer of the fifteenth year of Duke Hsi [663 B.C.], in the fifth month, there was an eclipse of the sun. The *Tso-chuan* said: 'Not to record the character "shuo"¹¹ and the date, was a negligence of official duty'.¹² Hence, the *Tso-chuan* has already given us this information. In the winter of the twenty-seventh year of Duke Hsiang on the *yi-hai* day of the twelfth month, there was an eclipse of the sun.¹³ But the *Tso-chuan* said: 'This was really the ninth month. So the mistakes made in calculations led to the omission of two intercalations'.¹⁴ Hence, the ignorance concerning the eclipses of the sun would rather be considered as a small mistake. Besides, in ancient times, before the sacrifice, seven days of

fast and abstinence were observed as a sign of sincerity and respect towards the spirits. When the day for the sacrifice arrived and the eclipse of the sun occurred, since the rites were already begun, it would not have been possible to interrupt them. To hurry on the sacrifice means to go faster, with simplified ceremonies. Thus could the sacrifice also be preserved without harm. Especially with regard to the seasonal sacrifices of the Son of Heaven to Heaven and Earth, these should be completed as the great sacrifices of the state. Other minor sacrifices could perhaps have been stopped. They had to be decided according to their degree of importance. For example, during a sacrifice performed in the ancestral temple, if the temple was to take fire, it would seem that the sacrifice would have to be stopped. Although there is nothing clearly written about this, I would think so. . . .

WWKC, 21:646

- ¹ His private name was Ho Meng-ch'un. A *chin-shih* in 1493, he later became Vice-Minister of Civil Officials. Always interested in questions of rites, he led the opposition to Emperor Shih-tsung's awarding of certain posthumous titles to the Emperor's deceased father, going to the extreme of kneeling and crying one entire morning with a group of officials in front of the palace gate. See *Ming-shih*, 191:453. In the light of his life, it is interesting that the only extant letter written to him by Yang-ming should be on the subject of rites.
- ² See *Book of Rites*, 'Tseng-tzu wen' [Questions of Tseng-tzu], Legge's *Li Chi*, vol. 1, pp. 328-31.
- ³ These were court astronomers. See *Tso-chuan*, Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, p. 69.
- ⁴ *Book of Documents*, Yao-tien [Canon of Yao], *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 18.
- ⁵ *Book of Documents*, 'Yin-cheng' [Punitive Expedition of Yin], *ibid.*, pp. 162-9.
- ⁶ See Feng Cheng, *Ch'un-ch'iu jih-shih chi-cheng* [Collected Proofs of the Eclipses of the Sun during the Spring-Autumn Period], Shanghai, 1929.
- ⁷ For irregularities connected with 'beating of drums and offering of victims and silks', see *Tso-chuan*, Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, pp. 108-10, 268-72.
- ⁸ The Chin scholar (A.D. 222-84) who wrote a standard commentary on *Ch'un-ch'iu* and *Tso-chuan*.
- ⁹ 3 October, in the year 694 B.C., in Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, pp. 67-9.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ It meant the beginning of the lunar month.
- ¹² Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, p. 167. Also, it would seem that the eclipse really took place in the third month. See Feng, *op.cit.*, p. 75.
- ¹³ It was 7 October, the 12th cycle day, in 545 B.C. See Legge's *Classics*, vol. V, pp. 528-36.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*

... Mencius said, 'If anyone loves others but is not loved in return, let him examine himself to see whether his *jen* is perfect',¹ and, 'If anyone does not attain the goal sought after in his actions, let him examine himself'.² Unless we have personally experienced such things, we would not be able to realise the perennial truth and the earnest meaning of these words.

Recently, whenever I discussed learning with friends, I spoke only of two words: 'establishing sincerity'.³ 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 the mind. 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. Thus, the fundamental, universal principle will be established. If an individual only pays attention to the tips of the twigs, to the unessential decorations and to making comparisons, then such things which we usually call learning and inquiry, reflection and making distinctions, will only tend to increase his pride and conscious error, so that while he considers himself to be becoming more intelligent and superior, he fails to realise that he is sinking into the depths of hatred and jealousy. . . .

WWKC, 4:176

¹ *Mencius*, 4A: 4, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 294.

² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

³ *Book of Changes*, Hexagram 1, 'Ch'ien', Appendix 4. See Legge's *Yi-King*, p. 410.

... In your letter you said, 'while the goal of study is certainly the understanding of the good and the attainment of sincerity,¹ I do not know what is really the good, where it comes from, where it now is, how should one make efforts to understand it, how these efforts should be begun, whether the search for sincerity contains systematic stages, and what sincerity is really about. These points are minute and complicated. . . .'

... Your mistake is to have divided things into isolated units, and to have gone outside of yourself too much without being conscious of it. The mind is the master of the person; the nature is within the mind, and the good originates in nature. This is what Mencius meant, when he talked about human nature being good.² The good refers to nature, rather than to any external form or any determinate direction. Since it is formless and resides in no fixed place how can anyone receive it from somewhere? . . . You think as you do because you have not inquired carefully into the real teaching of the school of sages, but are used to stopping at the etymological research of later ages. You think that every thing and object has its own good, and so to seek the supreme good, one must begin with things and objects, before one can be said to 'understand the good'. On that account you use such words as 'Where does it come from?' and 'Where is it now?'. . . .

What one calls 'moral principles' in an event or object, 'righteousness' in our adapting ourselves towards it, and 'good' in nature, are differently designated on account of the things to which they refer, but in reality are all manifestations of my *hsin*.³ There is no object, no event, no moral principle, no righteousness, and no good that lies outside the mind. When my mind regards events and objects purely from the viewpoint of moral principles (*li*) and without any falsity, there is good. This is not fixed in events and objects, and can be sought for in a definite place. Righteousness means to adapt oneself properly to objects; it refers to my mind having done what is appropriate. For righteous-

ness is not an external object,⁴ which one can seize and take over. To 'investigate' means to investigate this, to 'extend' means to extend this. To insist on seeking the supreme good in every event and object is to separate what is one into two things. Yi-ch'uan (Ch'eng Yi) has said, 'If you use that you would know this',⁵ meaning that this and that are not to be distinguished in nature, or principle or goodness. As to what you say about 'how to make efforts to understand the good, how to begin such efforts, whether there are definite steps towards the attainment of sincerity, and what is sincerity all about', these show that you think there is a special effort for the understanding of the good and for the attainment of sincerity. But according to my idea, the understanding of the good is itself the effort of attaining sincerity. When we say sincerity means being without falsehood, we mean also that the attainment of sincerity means to have no falsehood in ourselves. And so the effort of attaining sincerity is also that of understanding the good. That is why the man of wide learning learns this, the man of careful inquiry inquires into it, the man of cautious reflection reflects upon it, the man of discernment discerns it, and the man of earnest belief puts it into practice.⁶ This is all the effort of understanding the good and of becoming sincere. And so there is a way to attain sincerity, and this way is the understanding of the good. If a man does not understand the good, he cannot become sincere. There is no other way outside the understanding of the good which can be called the effort of becoming sincere. When one begins to strive after sincerity, one is not yet sincere, and so one calls this work the understanding of the good. But the goal of the understanding of the good is to become sincere. If we say that understanding the good has its own effort, while attaining sincerity also has its own effort, we are separating it into two things. And then it will be difficult for us not to make a slight error which will take us a thousand *li* astray from our goal. . . .

WWKC, 4:178-9

¹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 20, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 412-13.

² *Mencius*, 6A. See the discussion between Mencius and Kao-tzu who maintained that human nature was neither good nor evil. Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, pp. 394-9.

- ³ This shows the difference between Yang-ming's philosophy and Chu Hsi's. To develop the innate moral knowledge in the mind is, for Yang-ming, the only thing necessary in the pursuit of sagehood, while Chu Hsi had said that one ought to investigate the principles of all things.
- ⁴ Allusion to Kao-tzu's teaching. See *Mencius*, 6A:4, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 396.
- ⁵ Referring to *Yi-shu*, 18:5b.
- ⁶ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 20:19, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 413.

... There is naught else in the way of learning, except to seek for the lost mind.² This one sentence is enough. As to the items of our effort, these multiply endlessly the more we speak about them. ...

I heard from friends that many wish you to keep your aloofness and not come out. But then the various factors involved ought to be weighed. If your parent could continue to get rice, there is no need to talk of remaining aloof, and then, of course, it is not appropriate for you to come out. Otherwise I fear that people might be trying to 'justify' their selfish sentiments. We cannot let this go unnoticed.

WWKC, 4:180

¹ Private name Ts'ai Tsung-tui, literary name Wo-chai. He was an early disciple of Yang-ming. See *MJHA*, 11:5a-b.

² *Mencius*, 6a:11, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 414. The 'lost mind' refers to a mind or heart that has gone astray from the principle of *jen* or humanity and the path of *yi* or righteousness.

... The man of determination will accomplish his desire. I wish you much courage. It is not just for one day already that learning has been obscure. For too few people have the determination to apply themselves to it. Yet, since it is common and normal for people in general to desire virtue,² how could one say that there is absolutely nobody interested? Rather, what happens is that many cannot overcome their selfish desires, and fall eventually into the conventional ways, which means the same thing as saying that they have no firm determination. . . .

WWKC, 4:181-2

¹ His private name was Tai Te-ju. As Prefect of Lin-chiang he assisted Yang-ming in his victorious campaign against the rebel Prince Ning in 1519. See 'Nien-p'u' in *WWKC*, 33:939.

² Allusion to *Book of Odes (Shih-ching)*, 'Tang-chih shih' [Decade of Tang], pt 3, bk 3, ode 6 (Legge's *Classics*, vol. IV, p. 541).

... When a gentleman must live with men of inferior virtue, there is no reason why he should compromise himself and become like them. If, unfortunately, at the end of his power and reason, he is injured by them, he ought merely to endure this in peace. If his reactions are not sufficiently in accord with the *tao*—if he has an excessive hatred of evil, or suffers from justifiable anger—these would be of no help to him, and would only increase the hatred and venom of his opponents. It would then all be the fault of the gentleman. Men in the past have said, in anything which does not oppose the principle of righteousness, custom or convention may be followed. While a gentleman does not follow custom or convention lightly, neither does he mind differing from custom.

To live with evil men would be the same as 'sitting with court robes and court cap amid mire and ashes'. This refers to the purity of Po-yi.² 'Although you stand by my side with breast and arms bare, or with your body naked, how can you defile me?'³ This refers to the peace-loving nature of Liu-hsia Hui. As a gentleman regards the transformation of natural endowments to be learning, it seems to me that you should imitate such a peace-loving method of conducting yourself, by not allowing the three highest dignities of the empire to change your determination.⁴ Surely, he [Liu-hsia Hui] was not without the purity of Po-yi. But my attitude towards you can be described thus: 'Virtue is light as a hair, but few are able to lift it. When I think over the matter, [I find that] only Chung-shan Fu can lift it. I love him but can do nothing to help him.'⁵ Upright men are difficult to find; orthodox learning is difficult to understand. Vulgar conventions are difficult to change; the straight path is difficult to keep to. I feel quite lost as I write this letter. I cannot say all that I wish to say. Only the heart understands.

WWKC, 4:182

- ¹ I have not been able to identify him.
- ² *Mencius*, 5B:1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 369. As a hermit, Po-yi refused to serve the Chou court. He was regarded as a sage of 'purity'.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 370-1. In contrast to Po-yi, Liu-hsia Hui, minister of Lu, the sage of 'peace', was ready to serve under any ruler and in any capacity.
- ⁴ *Mencius*, 7A:28, *ibid.*, p. 466.
- ⁵ *Book of Odes*, 'Tang-chih-shih', pt 3, bk 3, ode 6 (Legge's *Classics*, vol. IV, p. 544).

On Fixing the Determination

19. TO HUANG CH'ENG-FU¹

1513

It sounds almost nagging to talk about fixing our determination. Still, in speaking with close friends, we cannot give it up. For those whose minds are fixed on the attainment of virtue, glory and fame are not sufficient to deter them. For those whose minds are fixed on glory and fame, wealth and honour are not sufficient to deter them. But what the recent ages have considered as virtue, is merely glory and fame. And what the recent ages have considered glory and fame, is merely wealth and honour. A man of *jen* conforms to the requirements of righteousness without seeking profit, and understands *tao* without calculating merit.² When once he has the intention of calculating gain, then even if he conforms to the requirements of righteousness and understands *tao*, it is nothing but vainglory and profit. . . .

WWKC, 4:182

¹ Private name Huang Tsung-ming (d. 1536). See his biography in *MJHA*, 14:4a-b.

² Tung Chung-shu, *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* [Luxuriant Gems of the Spring-Autumn Annals], SPTK ed., 32:33a-b.

On Fixing the Determination

20. TO [WANG] T'IEN-YÜ¹

1514

... You, T'ien-yü, said of yourself, 'I have the determination, but cannot remain diligent'. But then, what is meant by determination, and who is it that cannot be diligent? You also said, 'The learning of the sages and worthy men can control activity by tranquillity'. But then, how can you be tranquil, and do 'tranquillity' and 'activity' refer to two minds? You say, 'When one is performing official and administrative duties, one forces oneself to grasp virtue and to imitate virtuous deeds. In so doing, one is forcing things to conform to the *tao* [Way], though in the end one does not frequently succeed'. But then, '[The gentleman] cleaves [to virtue] in moments of haste and danger'.² What sort of efforts can one make in that regard? You also said, 'One can learn something every time one opens a book, and one is moved by inspiration when one meets wise worthy men and superior men'. But then, what is it with which one is thus inspired? And if one must rely on these two things to be inspired, what must one do without them? Also where is the so-called determination at this moment?

These sentences can only arise because you, T'ien-yü, really apply effort. But they are also sufficient to show that you have not always understood what you have been taught. If you gain any insight after thinking it over, do not hesitate to instruct me in it.

WWKC, 4:183

¹ Private name Wang Ch'eng-yü (1465-1538); T'ien-yü was his courtesy name. See his biography in *MJHA*, 9:5.

² *Analects*, IV:5, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p.167.

On Investigation of
Things

21. TO [WANG] T'IEN-YÜ¹

1514

. . . In your letter you said, 'To investigate things one must attain personal sincerity. On first reading I was not free from doubt. Later, after carefully questioning Hsi-yen [Ts'ai Hsi-yüan], I understood what it meant.

But I have not taught about any such relationship concerning personal sincerity and the investigation of things. Has it, perhaps, come from Hsi-yen? According to my humble opinion, sincerity of intention is essential in the learning of the gentleman, while the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge are the results achieved by sincerity of intention. This can be compared to a hungry man seeking satiation as his goal, and food and drink as the means towards the goal of satiation. Hsi-yen is quite acquainted with my ideas, and ought not give such a different interpretation. Perhaps my teaching has lacked clarity sometimes; please consider it in detail.

You also said, 'The *Great Learning* gives the steps taken systematically by the ancients in their striving for learning.' Chu-tzu said that the intention becomes sincere when the principles (*li*) of all things have been exhaustively [studied].² But then, this would be in contradiction to what he also said about maintaining a reverent and serious disposition and exhausting *li* and about the extension of knowledge being impossible without the employment of the mind.³ For the theory about maintaining reverence and employing the mind comes from an addition in the commentary, while the holy Classic declared directly that the mind is rectified when the principles are exhausted. Beginning scholars use the Classic without investigating its commentary. This leads to mistakes. How can our study, therefore, not become isolated and fragmentary?

The *Great Learning* discusses systematically only the investigation of things, which brings about the attainment of perfect knowledge, and the attainment of perfect knowledge, which brings about the sincerity of intention. As to the intention

becoming sincere after exhausting the principles of things, it is the doctrine of Chu-tzu, and is not so self-contradictory, except that it may not completely conform to the original meaning of the text of the *Great Learning*. As to 'Without employing the mind, it is impossible to extend knowledge', not only does this sentence not conform completely to the *Great Learning*, but also not to what is meant in the *Doctrine of the Mean* about the respect of virtuous nature and of study through inquiry.⁴ But this would require a long discussion, which we can have only when we see each other. Later scholars adhere to added commentaries, and do not investigate deeply the meaning of the Classics. Stopping at the literal understanding of words, they do not pay attention to the direct experience of their mind and person. That is why knowledge becomes fragmentary, and they achieve nothing in the end. This, I fear, is not the fault of adhering to the Classics without consulting the commentary.

You also said, 'To apply oneself to the attainment of personal sincerity without starting from the exhaustive study of *li*, risks the danger of not attaining any real sincerity, but only practising pretence.'

This is very well said. But then how would the effort of seeking personal sincerity operate? I hope you will recognise that.

You also gave the example of a traveller for whom the destination is the capital city which can be called the Supreme Good. The traveller braves any danger, obstructions and difficulties, being determined to advance. This can be called the determination of the mind. Now if this man does not know where the capital city is, but still wants recklessly to go there, it would be a wonder if he did not go south to Yüeh or north to Hu.⁵

This example is generally correct. But to take his fearlessness of dangers, obstructions and difficulties, and his determination to advance, to be the employment of the mind, is somewhat far-fetched and misses the crux of the problem. Not to fear dangers, obstructions and difficulties, but to be determined to advance, is concerned rather with the word 'intention' referred to in the 'sincerity of intention'. In that case, all that pertains to asking for directions, getting travelling provisions, and taking certain boats and vehicles, cannot be neglected. Otherwise, how

can he be determined to advance; how can he go at all? Not to know where the capital city is, but to want recklessly to go there, shows only a desire to go, rather than the reality of going. Because he only desires to go, and does not really go, he neglects asking for directions, getting his travelling provisions, and taking the correct boats and vehicles. Otherwise, if he is determined to advance, he would really get there. How can a person who really goes there act in the way you described? This is where effort must be urgently applied. . . .

You also said, 'Formerly men spoke about the investigation of things as the defence of self from external objects.⁶ When external objects are kept away from us, our minds are properly employed. When the mind is employed, the person can apply himself to knowledge.'

This way of speaking makes of the defence of self against external objects one thing, and the application or extension of knowledge another thing. While the defence against external objects is not so harmful, to stop at defending oneself externally does not imply the removal of the roots of the disease. It is not what has been called the effort of self-conquest to seek *jen*. My theory about the investigation of things is also different from this. What the *Great Learning* means by the sincerity of intention⁷ is exactly what the *Doctrine of the Mean* means by personal sincerity.⁸ What the *Great Learning* says about the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge⁹ is exactly what the *Doctrine of the Mean* calls the understanding of the good.¹⁰ Wide learning, careful questioning, attentive reflection, clear discernment and earnest application are all what is called the understanding of the good and are all efforts in striving for personal sincerity. There is no other effort of making oneself sincere outside of the understanding of the good. Outside of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge, is there another so-called effort of making the intention sincere? What the *Book of Documents* says about having a single purpose,¹¹ what the *Analects* say about having a wide knowledge of books and conforming to the rules of propriety,¹² what the *Doctrine of the Mean* says about the esteem of the virtuous nature and the direction of learning through inquiry¹³—all mean the same thing as we have said. This is the essential point of learning and of

making efforts. It is here that the difference of a hair's breadth can lead one a thousand *li* astray. . . .

WWKC, 4:183-5

- ¹ This letter should be read in relation to Yang-ming's second letter to Wang Ch'un-fu (p. 29) in which he also discusses the problems of attaining personal sincerity and understanding the good.
- ² Referring to Chu's commentary on the *Great Learning*, 1:4-5. See *Ta-hsüeh chang-chü* in *Ssu-shu chi-chu*, SPPY ed., 1b-2a.
- ³ *CTYL*, 11:1a-5b, 12:4b-6b, 15:2a-7b.
- ⁴ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 27:6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 422.
- ⁵ Yüeh refers here to the present province of Chekiang, and Hu to the northern frontier.
- ⁶ Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-86). See *Ssu-ma Wen-kung wen-chi*, SPTK ed., 71:11a.
- ⁷ *Great Learning*, ch. 6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 366. The Chinese word *yi*, sometimes translated as 'thought', refers also to 'intention'.
- ⁸ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 20:17-22, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 412-15.
- ⁹ *Great Learning*, 1:4-5, *ibid.*, pp. 358-9.
- ¹⁰ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 20:17, *ibid.*, p. 413.
- ¹¹ *Book of Documents*, 'Ta-Yü mu', in Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 61. I prefer 'single purpose' to 'being undivided'.
- ¹² *Analects*, VI:25, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 193.
- ¹³ See note 4.

... I heard recently that when you first took charge of your prefecture, you wanted to teach people this learning at once. This is of course natural to the heart of a man of *jen*. On this account, I am really very pleased with you, but at the same time very worried for you.

Since the learning of the sages has been forgotten and the Way of virtue lost, vulgar conventions have been all powerful, and those contaminated may be compared to a man struggling in the midst of great sea waves. He needs to be helped to land on the shore² before he can be given clothes and food. If we threw to him clothes and food into the waves, we would only increase his chances of drowning by adding to his weight. He would thus consider it not an act of kindness, but rather the contrary. Therefore, in our present times, we ought to adjust to opportunities and circumstances in directing and counselling others, making use of special affairs which arise to opening and enriching [the minds of others],³ influencing them in a calm and unagitated manner. When their feelings are awakened and their interest is aroused, we can then begin to expound to them our opinions. In this way, we need expend little energy and yet obtain large results. Otherwise, there would be danger of meeting conflicts and unsurmountable obstacles.⁴ Besides, it would also become a burden for the gentleman to love others. . . .

WWKC, 4:185

¹ I have not been able to identify him.

² Allusion to *Mencius*, 4A:17, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 307.

³ Allusion to *Book of Documents*, 'Yüeh-ming' [Charge to Yüeh], Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 252.

⁴ *Book of Rites*, 'Ch'ü-li' [Minutiae of Etiquette], Legge's *Li Chi*, vol. 1, p. 86.

... We have already discussed in detail the theory concerning an extensive learning. Why should you still be preoccupied by it today? I fear this is also due to lack of firmness of determination, and to the obstacles set up by worldly customs. If I had really no ambitions of renown and gain, then, even though I be engaged in affairs of finance, collecting revenues, or of warfare, of transporting firewood or rice,² I can go nowhere without finding genuine learning, and meet with nothing that will not be full of *T'ien-li*. This is all the more so, if I am reading books on philosophy, history, poetry, and literature. But if I still harbour ambitions of renown and profit, even though I might talk every day about virtue, about *jen* and *yi* [righteousness], these would still be affairs of merit and gain, all the more so if I happen to be reading books on philosophy, history, poetry, and literature. To speak about abandoning and renouncing all things, is still to be hindered by old habits. This happens when our daily efforts and applications to study bring no special discovery. I recommend that you purify yourself of conventional concepts, and recover your original determination. Then, if you think further of [my] parables contained in our daily eating and drinking for the nourishment of the body, and in the planting, cultivating and watering of trees, everything would certainly become very clear to you. 'In all things, we ought to distinguish between the essential and the accessory; in all affairs, we ought to distinguish between the roots and the branches. He who knows what comes first and what comes after is not far from the Way of perfection.'³ ...

WWKC, 4:186

¹ Private name Lu Ch'eng, courtesy name Ch'ing-po. He obtained his *chin-shih* degree in 1517. See *MJHA*, 14:3a-b.

² Allusion to the Ch'an Buddhist idea that enlightenment can be found in menial labour. The Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng was given the task of pounding rice for eight months when he went to the Fifth Patriarch Hung-jen for instruction. See *Liu-tsu*

ta-shih fa-pao t'an-ching, TSD No. 2007, 48:337. See also Wing-tsit Chan (trans.), *The Platform Scripture* (1963), p. 31, and Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (second series, 1950), p. 41, no. 2. See also *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, SPTK ed., 8:18a.

³ *The Great Learning*, 1:3, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 357.

On Moral Cultivation

24. TO YANG SHIH-TE¹ AND HSÜEH SHANG-CH' IEN²

1517

I have reached Lung-nan³ today, and shall invade the bandits' headquarters tomorrow. The soldiers from the four routes are all proceeding according to appointed times, and it looks as if the bandits will certainly be defeated. When I was in Heng-shui,⁴ I once wrote to you, Shih-te, saying: 'It is easy to defeat the bandits in the mountains, but difficult to defeat the bandits in our minds.' That I am able to eliminate a few petty thieves is no cause for surprise. But for you, my worthy friends, to sweep your hearts clean of the bandits inside, and to succeed in restoring inner clarity and peace and calm, would certainly be an epoch-making accomplishment of great men. I suppose that during the past few days, you must have already obtained a strategy which will be sure of victory, so that we can already await the reports of your triumph in the near future. What cause for joy is this!

WWKC, 4:187

¹ Yang Shih-te's private name was Yang Chi. He died before his brother Yang Shih-ming with whom he had studied first under Chan Kan-ch'üan and then under Yang-ming. See *WWKC*, 25:731 and *MJHA*, 30:1a-b.

² Private name Hsüeh K'an (d. 1545). See *MJHA*, 30:3a.

³ In the present province of Kiangsi. During Ming times, it was a county attached to Kan-chou. See *Ming-shih*, 43:97.

⁴ In the present province of Kiangsi; Yang-ming established a county there. See 'Nien-p'u', *WWKC*, 32:926. The letter referred to is not included in these *Complete Works*. But according to 'Nien-p'u', Yang-ming was in Heng-shui two months earlier. See also note 3.

25. TO WEN-JEN PANG-YING
AND [WEN-JEN] PANG-CHENG¹

1518

... When our family is poor and our parents old, how can we not seek after an official's emolument?² Yet, when we do seek after an official's emolument, but pay no attention to preparations for examination, we would merely be negligent in making human efforts, and blaming Heaven and fate in vain. This is silly. If we could only make our determination very firm, and always keep to the *tao* in every affair, without being moved by considerations of gain and loss, then, even if we work hard to prepare for examinations, and even if we talk daily of virtue, we would only acquire the defect of becoming listless and vain. That is why men in the past spoke about losing one's determination [to seek sagehood] as being more dangerous than the hindrances to making efforts.³ Now, to speak of losing determination means that one already has a determination which can be lost. If one has not yet a determination which may be lost, must one [not] therefore think deeply and reflect upon oneself as early as possible? ...

WWKC, 4:187

¹ Wen-jen Pang-ying and Pang-cheng were two brothers, Yang-ming's cousins and disciples. Their private names were Yin and Chüan. See *Shao-hsing fu-chih*, 33:436. Also *Yang-ming hsien-sheng chuan-ts'uan*, pt 1, p. 35.

² *Mencius*, 5B:5, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 383.

³ Ch'eng Yi, *Wai-shu*, 11:5a.

26. TO WEN-JEN PANG-YING AND
PANG-CHENG

1518

... The gentleman only seeks to do what is right. If he takes up an official position, it is not normally on account of poverty, although sometimes it might be on account of poverty.¹ Former men all did that; why should we alone be different? But it is wrong to say that the participation in the civil examinations goes against the learning of the sages. Ch'eng-tzu said that 'if the mind does not forget [its objective] even though one might have to take care of worldly affairs, there is nothing that is not solid learning, nothing that is not *tao* [virtue]'.² The same is true of participation in examinations. However to say that participation in civil examinations does not at all work against the learning of sages is also wrong. Ch'eng-tzu also said that, if the mind forgets [its objective], then even if you spend a whole lifetime, all that you do is but superficial.³ This is all the more so with participation in civil examinations. Between 'forgetting' and 'not forgetting', the difference is slighter than a hair's breadth. The essential is in thinking deeply and understanding in silence, what thing is that which he says one ought not to forget. To know this is to know learning. . . .

WWKC, 4:187-8

¹ Mencius, 5B:5, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 383.

² This saying is attributed to Chang Tsai by Chu Hsi. See *Chin-ssu lu chi-chu*, 2:23b, Chan's *Reflections*, p. 85.

³ This is the continuation of Chang Tsai's saying (note 2).

... Several years of studying together can only help us to fix our determination and to distinguish between righteousness and profit.² If we have not yet acquired strength in this regard, all our daily talk will be vain words, and all our daily insights will be quite unreal. We must not fail to realise and examine ourselves with effort upon this. The man who falls once acquires one more experience. There is no reason why the failure of today cannot very well become the success of the day after. But we have come to the Second Principle, while we really ought to apply our efforts first to the First Principle.³ The truth in one is the truth in all.⁴ Since it is the case with this little thing [*liang-chih*], there is no more need to seek for what is not true.

WWKC, 4:188

¹ See Letter 24.

² *Analects*, IV:16, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 170.

³ 'First Principle' (*ti-yi yi*) and 'Second Principle' (*ti-erh yi*) are Buddhist terms, referring respectively to the Highest Truth and to secondary truths. In Ch'an Buddhism, the First Principle is that which is beyond the realm of the conscious mind and hence inexpressible. The Sanskrit word for 'First Principle' is *paramārtha*. See *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, TSD No. 670, 16:500, English translation by D.T. Suzuki, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra: A Mahayana Text* (1959), p. 35.

In the case of Yang-ming, *liang-chih* is his 'First Principle' and everything else is secondary, as the rest of this letter shows.

⁴ Allusion to the *T'ien-t'ai* philosophy of Buddhism, with its 'one-in-all and all-in-one' proposition. See the *Ta-ch'eng chih-kuan fa-men* [The Method of Concentration and Insight of the Greater Vehicle] ascribed to Hui-ssu (514-577) in *Hsü kao-seng chuan*, ch. 17, TSD No. 2060, 50:562-4. Yang-ming is trying to say that *liang-chih* contains all truth. This is the first time, in these letters, that he hints at his teaching of *liang-chih*. We know this to be so—that 'this little thing' (*che-hsieh-tzu*) refers to *liang-chih*—through the information given in the *Nien-p'u*; see *WWKC* 33:951 for the account of Yang-ming's discovery of *liang-chih*.

28. TO MY YOUNGER BROTHERS
[AND COUSINS]¹

1518

... Our *pen-hsin*² is as bright and clear as the sun in the daytime. No one who has faults does not know them himself. The only fear is that he does not correct them. Once determined to reform, he recovers at once his own mind.

Which human being, indeed, is without fault? The noble thing is to correct one's fault. Ch'ü Po-yü was a very worthy man.³ Yet he said, 'I wish to correct my fault, but am unable to do so'. King T'ang and Confucius were two great sages. And yet one said, 'I willingly correct my faults',⁴ and the other, 'I wish to be free from big faults'.⁵ Everyone says, 'Except for Yao and Shun, who can be without fault?'

This also is a conventional way of talking. We cannot learn adequately from this what the minds of Yao and Shun were like. If Yao and Shun really considered themselves as faultless, they would not be sages. The advice they gave to each other was, 'The mind of man is prone to error, the mind of *tao* is subtle. Keep always to the Mean; practise discernment and single-mindedness'.⁶ Since they themselves regarded the mind of man as prone to error, it shows that their minds were as prone to faults as those of other men. Only because they were always wary were they able to hold fast to the Mean and avoid transgressions.⁷ Sages and worthy men of the past always saw their own faults and corrected them. Hence they were able to avoid faults. This is not due to their minds being really different from those of other men. He who is vigilant without being seen, and apprehensive without being heard,⁸ constantly obtains the results of seeing for himself his faults. Recently, I have really seen where I can apply effort in this aspect of learning, but, on account of accumulated habits and deep-seated faults, I lack courage to correct myself. That is why I warn you of this earnestly in advance as my brothers, so that you may not allow yourselves to develop such deep-seated faults as mine are, and then find it difficult to correct them. When people are young, they have

enough vital energy and physical power to keep up their courage. Besides, family worries are not yet so pressing. So they find it rather easy to apply their efforts [to the task of self-cultivation]. But, as they grow older, they become more and more involved in the cares of the world while their vital energy diminishes daily. If they are able to devote themselves with earnest determination to study, they can yet do something useful with themselves. But by the time they reach forty or fifty, they resemble the setting sun, which decreases in power, and cannot be held back any more. That is why Confucius said, 'The person who at the age of forty or fifty has not yet been heard of by others, is not worthy of being regarded with respect'.⁹ He also said, 'When a man is old, and his physical powers have diminished, he ought to guard against covetousness'.¹⁰ Recently, I have seen this defect also in myself. That is why I earnestly warn you of it in advance, my brothers, so that you may make efforts while you still have time, and not wait until it is too late, when you will only regret in vain.

WWKC, 4:189-90

- ¹ The eldest son of his parents, Yang-ming had three younger brothers: Shou-chien, Shou-wen, Shou-chang, as well as a younger sister married to his favourite disciple, Hsü Ai. He was, however, the only child of his mother, who died when he was twelve. I add 'and Cousins' because of the appearance of the words *ti-pei* (brothers' generation). In China, paternal cousins regarded one another as brothers.
- ² The word *pen-hsin*, literally 'original mind', was frequently used by Lu Chiu-yüan (Lu Hsiang-shan) (1139-93). In the writings of Yang-ming, it does not occur very often.
- ³ A famous minister of Wei, and contemporary of Confucius. See *Analects*, XIV: 26, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 285-6.
- ⁴ *Book of Documents*, 'Chung-hui chih kao' [The Announcement of Chung-hui], Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 180.
- ⁵ *Analects*, VII: 16, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 200.
- ⁶ *Book of Documents*, 'Ta-Yü mu', Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, pp. 61-2.
- ⁷ *Book of Documents*, 'Kao-yao mu' [Counsels of Kao-yao], *ibid.*, p. 73.
- ⁸ *Doctrine of the Mean*, 1:2-3, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 384.
- ⁹ *Analects*, IX:22, *ibid.*, p. 223.
- ¹⁰ *Analects*, XVI:7, *ibid.*, p. 313.

... Although someone might treat him harshly and unjustly, a gentleman would first examine himself saying, 'Could I not be lacking in *li* [propriety] towards him?' And if he then decides he has not failed in *li*, he must still examine himself saying, 'Could I not be lacking in *chung* [fidelity] towards him?'¹ Since, Hsi-yüan, your effort of self-conquest is becoming daily more perfect and sincere and earnest, you certainly will not presume to be perfect in fidelity.

In the past during my exile in Kweichow, not a month passed without my suffering tribulation [at the hands of others]. Yet, when I think of it now, it was there that I could have made the most progress in all that relates to the stimulation of the mind, the strengthening of human nature,² the practice of polishing and perfecting oneself. At that time, however, I only stopped at an imperfect accomplishment of my duties in order to pass time, and so I wasted the precious opportunity. . . .

WWKC, 4:181

¹ *Mencius*, 4B:28, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, pp. 333-4.

² *Mencius*, 6B:15, *ibid.*, p. 447.

... In your letter, you reproached me earnestly for not having written to you for so long. This shows how much you love me. I am really at fault in this respect.

Given the same *hsin* [mind], and the same *li* [moral principles],² if we only know how to apply efforts on this point, then, in spite of a hundred anxieties and different paths, we shall tend to the same goal.³ Otherwise, even if we seek to prove every word, and to pursue the meaning of every sentence, the slightest divergence in our beginnings will lead to a difference of a thousand *li* [Chinese mile] at the conclusions . . . While, in our common purpose of advancing forward with the determination of attaining the goal [of sagehood], our minds may meet unconsciously and inadvertently, it may also not be possible for us not to find occasionally small differences in our insights. But since you manifest no weariness to me in this regard, I also am not anxious to influence you. What is important is that, sharing the same ambition, we resemble two men, both on their way to the capital, but possibly taking different routes, whether straight or circuitous. They both know that at the end they will arrive in the same place.

Formerly, when we were together in the boat at Lung-chiang [Nanking], I used to tell you how I preferred the old version of the *Great Learning*, and also about my theories on the *ko-wu* [investigation of things]. You did not, then, agree with me, and I too put such questions aside without insisting upon them. For I knew you would, soon enough, come to a thorough understanding. Now that my judgment has been proved correct, my joy is of course beyond description! The waters coming from the K'un-lun mountain⁴ may sometimes flow underground, but they will eventually reach the sea. I am like a pauper. Were I to discover a translucent jade, others would not believe me, and would consider it a false imitation. Such a gem must enter the house of Ch'i-tun,⁵ in order to be made manifest to the world, so that its discoverer may at least be free of the crime of forgetting

the gem. However, even this parable remains ambiguous. A translucent jade is obtained after a search outside of self. What I have been referring to, on the other hand, is something I originally possessed, without the need of any external search. But it might occasionally be forgotten, or, without being forgotten, it might get obscured from vision. . . .

WWKC, 4:190

- ¹ His private name was Chan Jo-shui. A native of the present province of Kuangtung, he became *chin-shih* in 1505, and later rose to the rank of Minister of Rites, of Civil Service, and of Military Affairs. He was also a famous philosopher, and a student of the philosopher Ch'en Hsien-chang (1428–1500). See *MJHA*, 37:2a–b.
- ² Allusion to a saying of Lu Chiu-yüan: 'Sages appeared tens of thousands of generations ago. They shared the same *hsin*, the same *li*. Sages will appear tens of generations after us. They will share the same *hsin*, the same *li* . . .'. See *Hsiang-shan ch'üan-chi* [Complete Works of Lu], SPPY ed. (referred to hereinafter as *HSCC*), 22:5a.
- ³ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 2, ch. 5, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 389.
- ⁴ The longest mountain range in China.
- ⁵ An ancient rich man. See *Shih-chi*, ch. 129, p. 276.

Recently I received your letter together with the two letters exchanged between you and Kan-ch'üan. I read quickly through them and felt as refreshed as a man being soothed by a clear, cool breeze after having been in the heat. Your opinions are above the ordinary. You have made rapid progress—going forward a thousand *li* [distance] a day!

The re-publication of the old text of the *Great Learning* is especially a great event. I rejoice very much over it. In your discussions concerning Hsiang-shan, you cited several passages from Mencius with regard to the 'lost mind',² but Kan-ch'üan still did not consider that adequate, and cited in addition: 'Sages arise in the Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern Seas; they have the same *hsin*, the same *li*',³ and also 'all that is within the universe is our concern'.⁴ His quotations are certainly to the point. But I prefer the intimacy and earnestness of your insights, Hsi-ch'iao! He who grasps the essentials must also make intimate and earnest efforts. If such intimate and earnest efforts are not made, his seemingly 'important' insights are mere hypotheses. Ever since Mencius made of original goodness the source of mind and nature,⁵ scholars have often discussed the problem back and forth. But their learning became finally fragmentary and external, without their being aware of it, precisely because their efforts lack in earnestness. . . .

WWKC, 4:191-2

¹ Private name Fang Hsien-fu, literary name Hsi-ch'iao. He became a *chin-shih* in 1505, and a disciple of Yang-ming. See *Ming-shih*, 196: 466-7.

² *Mencius*, 6A:11, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 414.

³ *HSCC*, 22:5a.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Mencius*, 6A: 6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 401.

... Formerly Confucius said to Tzu-kung, 'Tz'u [Tzu-kung's name] do you consider me as a learned man who remembers a great deal of things?' He responded 'Yes—or is that not correct?' Confucius said, 'No, I merely seek an all-pervading unity in my knowledge'.² And so, should the learning of sages not possess certain essential doctrines? The desertion of human morality and of the principles of things by the Buddhists and their consequent fall into the void, certainly cannot be called the understanding of the mind. On the other hand, can the external quest of worldly scholars, who seek for knowledge through investigations, without knowing how to focus on the mind, be called investigation of *li*? . . .

WWKC, 5:194

¹ His private name was Hsia Shang-p'u. He became a *chin-shih* in 1511. In his youth he had studied under the philosopher Lou Liang (1422–91). See *MJHA*, 4:1a.

² *Analects*, XV: 2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 295.

. . . The teaching of [Lu] Hsiang-shan is simple and direct. In this, he ranks only after Mencius. While his theories about study, inquiry, reflection and discernment,² about the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things,³ are not free from 'conformity' to tradition, his basic insights are definitely far beyond what the other philosophers can hope to have. . . .

WWKC, 5:195

¹ His private name was Hsi Shu (1461-1527). He became a *chin-shih* in 1490 and later rose to the rank of a Grand Secretary. See *Ming-shih*, 197:468.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 20, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 413.

³ *Great Learning*, ch. 1, *ibid.*, p. 358.

. . . To recognise everywhere the principle of Heaven¹ is a truthful proposition, and quite free from deceit. I used to teach it too, in the beginning. But when I investigate the starting points of your ideas, I seem to find slight divergences of a hair's breadth from my teaching. However, we should eventually reach the same destination, even by taking different routes.² The cultivation of self, the ordering of one's family, the governing of the country, and the pacification of the world remain always *ko-wu*,³ but if one wished to explain these passages repeatedly, one would seem to be talking too much. Besides, the simpler and more ancient are the meanings of the words used, the harder and more obscure they become when compared to the original text, so that readers would find more difficulty in searching¹ for understanding. Is there not some defect of the mind in this? It would be better to use clear and simple terms, to point out briefly the general direction, and so to enable others to reach the meaning through their own thinking, and in so doing, become more conscious of its depths. What is your honourable opinion thereof? Where the theory of the extension of knowledge is concerned, I fear that I shall not change my ideas, and hope you will have the kindness to think it over more and tell me at your convenience what is your second thought. For it forms the essential core of doctrine in the 'transmission of mind' of the learning of sages. If this is clear, everything else will be too. When the purpose is sincere and earnest, one cannot but be straightforward. Please do excuse my boldness. . . .

WWKC, 5:195

¹ This was the constant teaching of Chan Kan-ch'üan. See *MJHA*, 37.

² *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 2, ch: 5, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 389.

³ *Great Learning*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 355-9.

... The mind (*hsin*) is that which can neither be described as active nor tranquil. Tranquillity refers to its substance, while activity refers to its function. That is why the learning of the superior man makes no distinction between activity and tranquillity.² When he is tranquil he is constantly aware of the tranquillity of the mind and therefore it cannot be said to be non-existent. That is why he responds constantly to the external world. When he is active he is also constantly in control of the activity of his mind, so that it cannot be said to be existent. That is why it seems always to be quiet. Constantly responding and quiet, both activity and tranquillity are present [in *hsin*]. This is called *chi-yi*³ [concentration of righteousness]. Such concentration of righteousness can free one from great regrets,⁴ for the mind remains fixed whether active or tranquil. The mind is only one. Tranquillity is its substance. If you seek for another foundation of tranquillity, you are disturbing its original substance. Activity is its function; if you fear its being easily stirred, you are preventing its functioning. That is why the desire for tranquillity is itself activity, while the aversion for activity is not [necessarily] tranquillity.⁵ This activity is active, and even tranquillity is active, the movement back and forth, up and down, becomes endless. That is why obedience to principles is called tranquillity while assent to unruly desire is called activity. Desire does not necessarily refer to the external luring of music and dancing, women, possessions or profit. All that which the mind is privy to is desire. That is why the following of *li* [moral principles] is always tranquil, even in the midst of changing vicissitudes. This is what [Chou] Lien-hsi [Chou Tun-yi] meant by the emphasis on tranquillity giving no place to desire.⁶ This is what is meant by the concentration of righteousness. When a man follows the impulse of his desire, were he then to practise the fasting of the mind and even attain the [transcendental] state of *tso-wang* [self-forgetfulness], he would remain active.⁷ What Kao-tzu⁸ meant by forced restraint

merely promotes [*ch'i*].⁹ It makes of righteousness an external thing. . . .¹⁰

WWKC, 5:196

- ¹ His private name was Lun Yi-hsün (born in 1498). A *chin-shih* in 1517 (he ranked second that year) he later became Chancellor of the National University in Nanking. See Yü Hsien, *Huang-Ming chin-shih teng-k'o k'ao* [Study on the Successful Candidates of the Chin-shih Degree of the Ming Dynasty] (pub. between 1521 and 1566), in Ch'ü Wan-li (comp.), *Ming-tai shih-chi hui-k'an* [Collected Historical Documents of the Ming Dynasty], Taipei, 1969, 10:33a.
- ² See Ch'eng Hao, *Ming-tao wen-chi*, 3: fig. 1a-b [Answer to Master Heng-chü's letter on calming Human Nature]. See also, in connection with this subject, the letter (p.29) written by Yang-ming to Wang Ch'un-fu (1513).
- ³ *Mencius*, 2A:2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 190.
- ⁴ Allusion to *Book of Changes*, Commentary on the Hexagram 'Fu', see Legge's *Yi King*, p. 108.
- ⁵ See note 2.
- ⁶ See *Chou-tzu T'ung-shu* [Chou Tun-yi's *Book of Penetration*], 'Sheng-hsüeh' [Learning to be a Sage], SPPY ed., ch. 20.
- ⁷ Allusion to *Chuang-tzu*, ch. 5, Watson (trans.), p. 90.
- ⁸ A contemporary of Mencius, see *Mencius*, 2A: 2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, pp. 189-91.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *Mencius*, 2A:2, 4A:4, *ibid.*, pp. 190, 397.

36. TO T'ANG YÜ-TSO,
THE REGIONAL INSPECTOR¹

1521

. . . Fu Yüeh said, 'If you study the instructions of the ancients, you will certainly obtain knowledge'.² To study the instructions of the ancients does not refer to being proficient in letters, to being eloquent in speech,³ and to obtaining knowledge outside of one's self through incidental deeds of righteousness.⁴ To 'obtain' means to get in the mind; it is not infused from without.⁵ One must proceed according to the ancient instructions, learning all that which the ancients learned, and then make oneself sincere. 'Completing such task by silent study, and securing the faith of others without recourse to words'⁶ refers to the fruit of study. 'To have a humble mind and to maintain a constant sagacity'⁷ does not refer to covering up one's feelings by showing external humility, while being anxious to obtain success in one's career and reputation. To have a humble mind means to act like the earth underneath us, which supports everything, or like the empty ocean, which contains everything. To maintain a constant sagacity means to act in accordance with the virtue of Heaven, being always cautious and apprehensive without waiting to see or hear things, somewhat like the *t'ai-ho* [Great Harmony]⁸ which moves without ceasing. Thus one can 'wait for a hundred generations, without misgiving, for the rise of the sage',⁹ [who is] 'all-embracing and vast, deep and active as a fountain, sending forth his virtues in due season, so that he speaks and the people all believe him, he acts, and the people are all pleased with him'.¹⁰ 'His fame will extend to the barbarian tribes',¹¹ and his virtue will last for ever. This is why Yüeh is Yüeh . . . Yen-tzu had said, 'Shun was a man; I am also a man'.¹² Could you not, Yü-tso, say the same of yourself in relation to Fu Yüeh? . . .

WWKC, 5:196-7

¹ His private name was T'ang Lung. A *chin-shih* in 1508, he was to fill many important positions, such as Minister of Justice, of Civil Officials, and of Military Affairs. See *Ming-shih*, 202: 482.

- ² *Book of Documents*, 'The Charge to Yüeh', pt 2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 260. Fu Yüeh was the worthy minister of King Wu-ting (1323-1264 B.C.) of the Shang dynasty.
- ³ *Hsün-tzu*, 'Ch'üan-hsüeh' [Encouraging Learning], 4b-5a. See Burton Watson (trans.), *Basic Writings of Hsün-tzu* (1963), 20.
- ⁴ *Mencius*, 2A:2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 190.
- ⁵ *Mencius*, 4A:6, *ibid.*, pp. 402-3.
- ⁶ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 1, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 378.
- ⁷ *Book of Documents*, Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, pp. 250-1.
- ⁸ An idea developed by Chang Tsai. See his first chapter in *Chang-tzu ch'üan-shu*, *Cheng-meng* [Correcting Youthful Ignorance], 2:1b-5b.
- ⁹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 24, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 426.
- ¹⁰ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 31, *ibid.*, p. 429.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Mencius*, 3A:1, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 235.

... There is only one *tao*!¹ With regard to its ultimate roots and sources, there is not one of the Six Classics and the Four Books that cannot be explained in harmony with it—not just the *Hung-fan* [Great Plan]² in relation to the *Ta-hsüeh* [Great Learning]. This is what I frequently say to my friends. We can use plants as an example. They resemble one another in their growth. But if all is to be alike—the display of flowers and fruit, the height of leaves and branches—I fear that the creator of nature would not do as well as the sculptor of art. . . .

... True learning has remained obscure for several hundred years already. Now, thanks to those who share my ideals, such as Kan-ch'üan and yourself, who discuss learning together and provide one another with the benefit of mutual corrections and encouragements, we have been able to obtain some light. If you suddenly return to such excessive concern with the literal meanings of words, to whom can I turn? True, in discussing learning the gentleman follows only the path of truth, without always seeking agreement with others . . . In what pertains to the extension of learning and the investigation of things, Kan-ch'üan's theory is still slightly different from mine, although that does not prevent their being essentially in harmony. . . .

WWKC, 5:197

¹ *Mencius*, 3A:1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 234.

² A chapter in the *Book of Documents*. See Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, pp. 320-43.

On the Extension of
Knowledge

38. TO YANG SHIH-MING¹

1521

... You spoke of your daily efforts at learning, how you merely follow your own *liang-chih*, doing away with the hindrances, while seeking to expand and complete its substance, and doing all that without complying with the caprices of our epoch by compromising with the conventional practice. This is all very good. To act thus is to extend your knowledge and investigate things,² to understand the good and attain personal sincerity.³ In acting thus, how can your virtue not be renewed daily, and your merits not be enriched?⁴ You spoke of watching yourself every day without being able to permeate the entire day with this vigilance. This means merely that the effort of extension of knowledge is interrupted. After all, the value of *jen* also depends upon [constant practice] bringing it to maturity.⁵

You also spoke about testing such effort with the similarities and differences in what earlier scholars have written, and find that [your effort] does not correspond to what they say. This gives rise to frequent doubts.

What I say about the extension of knowledge is the 'treasure of the orthodox dharma-eye' of the Confucian school.⁶ He who sees the truth of this 'sets it up before Heaven and Earth, and finds nothing in it in which he transgresses. He presents himself with it before spiritual beings, and no doubt arises concerning it. He examines it by comparing [it] with the doctrines of the three sage kings, and finds it free from error. He is ready to wait for a hundred years for a sage, without harbouring any misgiving.'⁷ Only he who knows this can be said to know *tao*. Only he who attains this can be said to possess virtue. He who learns something different from this is a heretic. He who teaches something different from this teaches falsehood. He who acts without understanding this acts blindly. Even though a thousand devils and ten thousand phantoms may delude and confuse us with their transformations,⁸ we have only to touch them in order to pierce the illusions, to

receive them in order to dissolve them, just as the devils and phantoms have nowhere to hide when the sun rises. . . .

WWKC, 5:198

- ¹ Together with his elder brother Yang Shih-te, he was first the disciple of Kan-ch'üan and then of Yang-ming. Both brothers died before Yang-ming. See Yang-ming's *chi-wen* (obituary essay) written in memory of Yang Shih-ming in 1526, in *WWKC*, 25:73 and *MJHA*, 30:1a-b.
- ² *Great Learning*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 356-9.
- ³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 20, *ibid.*, p. 413.
- ⁴ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 1. See Legge's *Yi King*, p. 355.
- ⁵ *Mencius*, 6A:19, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 421.
- ⁶ Allusion to the Buddhist story concerning the origin of Ch'an Buddhism. See *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*, 1:4a. 'Dharma' refers to truth. 'Dharma-eye' is that which looks into the depths of truth. See also Suzuki, *Studies in Zen* (1955), pp. 12, 21.
- ⁷ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 29, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 425-6.
- ⁸ Allusion to the Buddhist notion of man's deception by phantoms which are the products of the delusions of his own mind. The Chinese word *mo* is the abridged form of the transliteration of the Sanskrit word *Māra*, referring to the devil, who sends his daughter or assumes monstrous forms to tempt men. See for example *Surañgama sūtra*, TSD No. 945, 15:629.

... I hear that on account of your frequent sicknesses, you intend to apply yourself to the 'cultivation of life'.¹ In the past, I also did so. Only later did I realise that it was unnecessary, and then I began again to concentrate on the learning of sages. Generally speaking the cultivation of virtue and the cultivation of life are one and the same thing. If what you call 'the real self' could be 'vigilant when not seen, and apprehensive when not heard',² and concentrate on [virtue], then your *shen* [spirit], your *ch'i* [ether] and your *ching* [sperm] will be collected.³ In this case, what the Taoists call physical immortality will also be present. The school of immortals is different from that of sages, but its purpose and starting point is also to direct men to *tao*.⁴ It is said in the epilogue of *Wu-chen p'ien* [Treatise on Awakening to Truth], the Yellow Emperor and Lao-tzu took pity on their covetous desires, and used the art of immortals to give them gradual and systematic direction.⁵ If you will read this over, you will see for yourself its hidden meanings. The sages from Yao, Shun, Yü, T'ang, King Wen, and King Wu down to the Duke of Chou and Confucius, have been all-embracing in their love of the people and for things. If there had been an art of physical immortality, they would not have been unwilling to show it to others. As to people like Lao-tzu and P'eng Chien,⁶ they are naturally endowed with the propensity to long life, which is not a thing one can acquire by learning. Later men, such as Po Yü-ch'an⁷ and Ch'iu Ch'ang-ch'un,⁸ known among the Taoists as patriarchs and teachers, lived only to the age of fifty or sixty, which shows that the so-called theory of physical immortality should certainly refer to something different. Since you have a weak constitution and are often sick, you need merely to abandon the path of honours and reputation, purify your mind and your desires, concentrate on the learning of sages, in the sense in which the theory of the 'true self' was referred to earlier. You ought not to believe easily in heterodox teachings, thus confusing your understanding needlessly, wasting your mental and physical

energies as well as your time. If you stay away long and do not return to society, you will become easily a frenzied and mentally sick man. . . .

WWKC, 5:199

- ¹ Taoist cultivation aiming at prolonging one's life. Its classics include Wei Po-yang (fl. 147-67), *Ts'an-t'ung-ch'i* [Tallying Ideas of Taoist Cultivation with the Book of Changes]. See Liu Ts'un-yan, 'Lu Hsi-hsing and His Commentaries on the *Ts'an-t'ung-ch'i*', *Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 7 (1968), p. 80.
- ² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 384.
- ³ These are Taoist terms. See Liu Ts'un-yan, 'Ming-ju yü tao-chiao', *Hsin-ya hsieh-pao*, vol. 8 (1967), pp. 1-38, for an exposition of Taoist practices and influence in Yang-ming's time.
- ⁴ Here Yang-ming probably means by *tao*, transcendental human destiny.
- ⁵ The *Wu-chen p'ien* of Ch'en Chih-hsü (see Letter 2, note 5, p. 5) was criticized earlier by Yang-ming in a poem of 1514; see *WWKC*, 20:606. Here he speaks of the Epilogue of Chang Po-tuan (dated 1078) given in the *Tao-tsang* (Ming ed., Shanghai reprint, 1923-6), 64, Epilogue, 1b. See Liu Ts'un-yan, 'Taoist Self-cultivation in Ming Thought' in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (1970), pp. 311-15.
- ⁶ His name was Chien K'eng. P'eng was given to him as a fief. He was supposed to have lived for over 800 years, during the Hsia and nearly throughout the Shang dynasty. For his story see *Lieh-hsien chuan*, attributed to Liu Hsiang (first century B.C.) in *Ku-chin yi-shih* [History of Hermits of Past and Present] (Ming ed., reprinted in Shanghai, 1937), pt 1, 8a, French translation by Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-Sien Tchouan* [Biographies of Immortals] (1953), p. 82.
- ⁷ His real name was Ko Ch'ang-keng. He lived during the Southern Sung dynasty and is regarded as the last of the five patriarchs of the Southern branch of religious Taoism. See Chi Yün (1724-1805) *et al.*, *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao* [Essential Information on the Complete Catalogue of the Four Libraries], Shanghai, 1933, 28:88.
- ⁸ His real name was Ch'iu Ch'u-chi (1148-1227). A native of Shantung, he was summoned by Genghis Khan to the region between Kabul and Anderob in present-day Afghanistan to preach to him. He lived to the age of 79, though Yang-ming gave him much less. See 'Yüan Ch'iu Ch'u-chi Nien-p'u' [Chronological Biography of Chiu Ch'u-chi of the Yüan dynasty] in Yao Ts'ung-wu, *Tung-pei-shih lun-ts'ung* [On the History of the North-east] (1959), vol. 2, pp. 214-76.

. . . To stop criticisms by not arguing, was what was taught by former men. In our present situation, would this not be even more correct? On account of differences and similarities in their teachings, heroes of virtue and leaders everywhere are now engaged in many discussions. Would our people be able to win arguments with them? We should rather reflect upon ourselves, to see whether what they say may be true, and whether there are yet things which they say, which we have not accepted. We ought to try hard to seek for the truth, and not always consider ourselves right and others wrong. On the other hand, if what they say is wrong, and we are right in our own convictions, we should the more put our principles into practice, and seek to be humble. This is what is meant by 'Meditate upon it and you will complete it, use no words and people will believe you'.¹ However, are not the many criticisms of today occasions for us to practise patience, forbearance, and mutual admonition?² Besides, the criticisms do not necessarily arise out of personal grudges. People say such things because they consider themselves the defenders of truth. Moreover, their sayings come originally from the general theories of former scholars, and so they do have their proofs, while our words appear suddenly as being different from those of the past, rather like forced interpretation and things invented by the imagination. For people do not know that the teaching of the sages was originally so, but, through transmission, has lost its pristine purity. The teachings of former scholars became daily so fragmentary, also because later scholars kept on copying from one another and thereby accumulated many errors. Since they [our critics] decided first not to believe, and refused to investigate with humility, while we, in our discussions, may also be carried away by a desire to excel and by other superficial dispositions, without avoiding certain excesses of expression, we deserve their ridicule and alarm. This is our responsibility, for which we ought not blame them solely.

Alas, when we teach today, do we seek to say things that differ

from what others say, or do we seek to say the same things as the others? Do we seek to excel by goodness, or to educate others by goodness? We only pay lip service to the theory of the unity of knowledge and action. When have we really united our knowledge and action? If we seek the source of the difficulty, then someone like myself will be found most guilty, since, ordinarily, I merely expound this with my lips, and have not applied it to myself, so that my words do not correspond to reality, and my actions cannot cover my words. Without having really practised the extension of knowledge, I say that the teachings of former men on this subject are incomplete, in the same way as a poor beggar may talk about gold, and yet still follow and beg for food from others. You, my friends, have suffered through your faith in and your affection for me. You liked me so much that you did not see my faults, and this [indulgence] has led to many [unpleasant] talks today . . . [Ch'eng] Yi-ch'uan and [Chu] Hui-an were not able³ in their times to avoid slander, criticism, and exile. This is all the more for us, as our actions have often fallen short of our ideals, so that the slander, abuse, and criticism of others are just what we deserve. Besides, the people today who argue about learning must necessarily desire to learn. We ought not remain distant from them just because their ideas are different from our own.

Everyone has the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Only on account of long established habits, they are unable easily to understand our teachings. After all, did not some of you, my friends, when you first heard my words, ridicule and slander them? After some time, you have come to an understanding, and even express theories that show a certain excess. How do we not know that the strength expended today in criticism will not become the depth of belief at some later date? . . .

All men have this moral ability to judge between right and wrong.⁴ This is what we call *liang-chih*. Who does not have this *liang-chih*? There are only people who do not know how to extend it. The *Book of Changes* speaks of 'knowing the utmost point to reach, and reaching it'.⁵ To know the utmost point is real knowledge. To reach it is to extend knowledge. This is how knowledge and action become united. In recent ages, the

teaching concerning *ko-wu* and *chih-chih* cover only one word: *chih* [knowledge], and that quite inconclusively. As to the effort of *chih* [extension]—this has been completely omitted. This is why knowledge and action have become two things.

WWKC, 5:200

¹ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 1, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 378.

² *Mencius*, 6B:15, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 447.

³ See *Sung-shih*, K'ai-ming ed., 1937, 427:1097-8 on Ch'eng Yi and 429:1101-3 on Chu Hsi.

⁴ *Mencius*, 6A:6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 402.

⁵ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', Legge's *Yi King*, p. 410.

You asked me about the similarities and differences between the philosophers Chu Hsi and Lu Chiu-yüan [Lu Hsiang-shan]. . . As I read carefully over your letter, I would say that while [Wang] Yü-an¹ is mistaken in preferring Lu to Chu, you too are mistaken in preferring Chu to Lu. The world has long held that Chu is right and Lu is wrong. Such opinion has become difficult to change . . . But it is my opinion that in your present dispute you should not seek to win the argument, to put Hsiang-shan definitely in the wrong and Hui-an definitely in the right. Rather, go back to the roots and to the source, in order really to see the nuances of their strong and weak points in very small things. This would be acting like a clever judge, hearing judicial cases. He has to see why the man in the wrong might have done something because he could not help it, while the party in the right may also have shown some faults. In this way, he would allow the persecuted party to state his situation, while the party receiving redress also must not escape responsibility. This would be to exhaust to the utmost the justice of the cause and its principles, rest the minds of men, and wait a hundred generations for a sage.²

You two, however, have discussed this question, each with the idea of seeking to win over the other. To seek to win is to be moved by passion. And does not being moved by passion take [one] more than a thousand *li* away from the course of reason and righteousness? . . .

In discussing the qualities and defects of the ancients, one must never rely on the imagination and decide the case summarily. Now, in speaking of Hsiang-shan, Yü-an said, 'Although he concentrated on the respect of the virtuous nature,³ he did not avoid falling into the emptiness of Ch'an Buddhism. However, his conduct and faith would still be adequate to allow him to be counted as a disciple of the sage. But Hui-an, on the other hand, insisted on study and inquiry,⁴ and became fragmentary and divided in his knowledge, teaching what was no longer the

sincerity of thought and the rectification of the mind of the school of sages.' And you, in speaking of Hui-an, said: 'Although he insisted mainly on knowledge and inquiry, and did not avoid keeping to the conventions and becoming fragmentary in his learning, he followed the teaching of order and gradual improvement, without going against the instructions of the *Great Learning*. Hsiang-shan, however, in concentrating on respect for virtuous nature, became empty and abstract, and no longer taught the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge in the *Great Learning*.'

However, if one speaks of the respect of virtuous nature, one cannot also speak of falling into the emptiness of Ch'an Buddhism. And when one speaks of falling into the emptiness of Ch'an Buddhism, one cannot also speak of respect of virtuous nature. Also, when one speaks of study and inquiry, one cannot speak of keeping to the conventions and becoming fragmentary in knowledge. While when one speaks of keeping to the conventions and becoming fragmentary in knowledge, one cannot also speak of study and inquiry. The distinction between the two is very minute indeed. Yet the discussion which you two have held was not free from imaginative judgments. Formerly, when Tzu-ssu discussed learning, in an essay not less than a thousand and several hundred words,⁵ he summarised these in the sentence concerning 'respecting virtuous nature yet studying through inquiry'.⁶ In your argument, however, with one emphasising respect for virtuous nature, and the other study and inquiry, you are each insisting too much on one aspect, and so cannot decide who was right and who was wrong. But how can each of you take one thing to be right and the other wrong? I wish you would both keep your minds fair and broad, without any desire to win. How can the discussion of learning with the motive of winning be called respect of virtuous nature, or study and inquiry? It would seem that not only are your criticism of Hsiang-shan and Yü-an's criticism of Hui-an both wrong, but your approval of Hui-an and Yü-an's approval of Hsiang-shan are also not given in their right contexts. . . .

WWKC, 21:639

- ¹ See 'Nien-p'u', *WWKC*, 32:912.
- ² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 29, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 426.
- ³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 27, *ibid.*, p. 422.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Referring to the *Doctrine of the Mean*.
- ⁶ See note 3.

... In your earlier letter you said that I made a vague and equivocal reply to you which, on close reading, you found to be secretly on Yü-an's side. I could not help but laugh as I read that!

... Yü-an favoured Hsiang-shan, and said that he concentrated on the respect of virtuous nature. Now, when I read the *Collected Writings of [Lu] Hsiang-shan*, I find that he too taught his disciples to read books and exhaust principles, and where he claimed himself to be different from others in understanding words, he meant that he did this through experience of life. What he constantly instructed others to do was: 'Always maintain respect. Practise reverence in the management of affairs, and fidelity in dealing with others',¹ and also: 'Conquer yourself and recover *li* [propriety]',² and again: 'All things are already complete in us. There is no greater delight than to be conscious of sincerity on reflecting upon ourselves',³ and then: 'There is naught else in learning except the recovery of the lost mind',⁴ and: 'Remain steadfast in that which is great [the mind] and that which is little will not be taken from you'.⁵ These are the words of Confucius and Mencius. Can we say they are empty? Only his teaching 'on ease and freedom'⁶ concerning awakening and enlightenment was held in doubt by his contemporaries. But this teaching on ease and freedom came from the Appended Remarks to the *Book of Changes* and while what he said about enlightenment bears resemblance to Buddhist teachings, it may also be said that these Buddhist teachings also bear resemblance to our Confucian teachings, except for certain nuances of difference. And so, why should such similarity be hidden and not proclaimed? Why should the differences also keep us away from a close examination of them? So even Yü-an, taking Hsiang-shan's side, has not exhausted all the reasons in his favour. You, on the other hand, taking Hui-an's side, say that he concentrates on study and inquiry. But Hui-an had said: 'We should keep reverence and exhaust principles',⁷ and: 'Unless we employ our minds, we cannot extend knowledge',⁸ and: 'The mind of

the gentleman constantly preserves reverence and apprehension. He is not negligent, even when he is not seen or heard. Thus, he preserves the foundation of the principle of Heaven, without letting it leave him even for a minute.⁹ Although such words are not entirely clear, they show that he too was concerned with the respect of virtuous nature. And so, how can one say he was fragmentary in his knowledge?

However, Hui-an paid a great deal of attention to the interpretation of the Classics, and even wrote commentaries on, and did textual criticisms of such works as the writings of Han Wen Kung [Han Yü], the *Ch'u Tz'u* [Songs of Ch'u], *Yin-fu Canon*,¹⁰ and the *Ts'an-t'ung-ch'i*. Others suspected that he was merely being superficial. Then again, his worry that students might not follow the proper steps in learning, and thus waste their efforts, caused him to make them first investigate things and extend knowledge until all was clear, before making their intentions sincere and their minds upright and therefore free from error. The scholar in the world, however, becoming preoccupied with one thing, forgets ten thousand others. The more he seeks, the more he loses. Some even use up the energy of a whole lifetime, and still attain no real insights. Thus, they criticise Hui-an for being fragmentary in his quest for knowledge, without realising that this was rather the error of later scholars, while Hui-an himself was not at fault. And so, even your approval of Hui-an has not gone far enough. Now, since both of you have not exhausted the reasons for which you considered either of the two scholars to be correct, have you, in your disapproval of the one or the other, exhausted all the reasons that exist? Because you argue back and forth, you cannot, for once, reflect upon yourselves. This is why I suspect that you do so out of the motive to win the argument. Yet such motivation destroys the foundation of learning. How can you still be discussing it? So I wish you two would reflect upon yourselves. How could I have given vague and equivocal explanations, which sought to help Yü-an secretly?

When a gentleman discusses learning, the essential is what he has received in his mind. When one considers something correct, yet reflects upon it without finding that it agrees in his mind, he does not dare to proclaim it correct. When one considers something to be incorrect, and yet, when he reflects upon it and

in his mind finds it correct, he does not dare to proclaim it incorrect. The mind is the principle that we receive from Heaven. It is not different in Heaven and man, in the past and the present. If I exhaust my mind to seek truth, even if I do not attain it, I cannot be far from it. To study means to seek to exhaust my mind. That is why one ought to respect virtuous nature and study through inquiry. This is what we respect. This is what we inquire. If we do not acquire something in our mind, and only believe the external words of others, considering this to be learning, how can we call it study? I used to think that while Hui-an and Hsiang-shan were different as scholars, they both remained followers of the sages. Today, however, the teaching of Hui-an is studied by every man and child in the world. It has penetrated deeply into the minds of men, and can hardly tolerate any questioning. The teaching of Hsiang-shan, however, on account of his disagreement with Hui-an, has been neglected. Actually, if the two had been considered different as were Yu [Tzu-lu] and Tz'u [Tzu-kung]¹¹ it would be more acceptable. Rather, Hsiang-shan has been criticised and rejected, as though the difference between the two was like that between an inferior agate and a precious gem. Is that not somewhat excessive? Hui-an synthesised the teachings of many scholars, in order to proclaim to the world the meaning of the Six Classics, of the *Analects*, and of the *Book of Mencius*. The ensuing benefit to later students is indisputable. But Hsiang-shan also distinguished between righteousness and profit, established the great foundation [of learning], taught the recovery of the lost mind, and pointed out to later students the way towards a genuine and solid self-discovery. Can we forget his contributions and berate him entirely? However, the scholars of the world, out of motives of conformity to established patterns, and without studying the facts, all regard him as a teacher of Ch'an Buddhism. This was certainly undeserved. That was why I once used to wish to risk the ridicule of the world by explaining the teaching of Hsiang-shan. Were I to be condemned for it, I should have no regret. However, even towards Hui-an I remain greatly indebted. How could I want to take up his lance to enter his house? For since the teachings of Hui-an are illuminating the world as the sun and stars, while Hsiang-shan alone is being unjustly berated, already

for four hundred years, without anyone to proclaim his innocence, I would imagine that if Hui-an were conscious of the situation, he would certainly not enjoy for a day the position accorded him in the annex of the Confucian temple! This is my personal feeling, which I must finally reveal to you. So, how could I have wanted to give an equivocal explanation, in order to help Yü-an surreptitiously? I still find Yü-an's saying incomplete!

The learning of the sages of the past and the present is the public property of the whole world and not a private possession of the three of us. The learning of the whole world should be publicly and justly proclaimed to the world; it does not belong just to Yü-an.

You also mentioned the argument concerning *t'ai-chi*,¹² saying that Hsiang-shan did not even understand completely the meaning of these words, and yet argued with such confidence. Where, therefore, was his self-cultivation? However, to say that he was not entirely clear on the meaning of the words does not alter the fact that he did not go into details. To say that his self-cultivation left something to be desired, does not mean his not having attained the highest degree of cultivation was his fault. When one has studied, and yet has not attained sagehood, how can one avoid excess or deficit? Yet, people try to vilify him entirely on this ground. I fear that Hui-an's criticism of Hsiang-shan being influenced by Ch'an Buddhism shows a certain amount of injustice due to passion. For it is the one who failed to know well the meaning of words, and the other who was unfair. Both show some defect in self-cultivation. Confucius was a great sage, and yet he said: 'Give me a few years to study the *Book of Changes*, and then I should be without faults.'¹³ Chung-hui praised King T'ang, saying merely, 'He was not slow in correcting his errors.'¹⁴ How can the fact that these men were lacking in self-cultivation alter the fact of their being virtuous? This shows precisely why the perception of Hui-an and Hsiang-shan did not reach that of Yen-tzu and [Ch'eng] Ming-tao. It is precisely here that we ought to admire their unequal qualities, and reflect over their deficiencies, as a means to cultivation and self-correction. We should not allot to them selfish motives, thus adding to or subtracting from their greatness. 'The faults of a gentleman are like eclipses of the sun and the moon. Everyone

sees them. Also, everyone looks up to them when he corrects them.’¹⁵ ‘But the mean man is sure to gloss over his faults.’¹⁶ The scholars of the world consider that Chu Hui-an, as the great Confucian, should not have faults, and so try to cover these up for him and add to his greatness. However, they have only ridicule for Hsiang-shan, as a Ch’an Buddhist, for they believe that in this way they aid the orthodox side, the side of Hui-an. They do not understand that the faults of Hui-an were those of a gentleman, but regard them from the viewpoint of a mean man who tries to gloss over them. Hui-an possessed the virtue of knowing how to rejoice when he heard of his faults.¹⁷ Why should we follow him vainly, and engage in making excuses for him? Hui-an had hoped that later generations would follow the teaching of sages and worthy men, yet the world’s scholars regard him with the etiquette more appropriate for a mean man. How can we not say they slander Hsiang-shan generously, and yet treat Hui-an with coldness. If I say these things, it is not only in regret for Hsiang-shan, but also as a lament for Hui-an. You know well my unusual regard for Hui-an. That is why I say this now. So you should be able to understand my motive . . . Mencius said, ‘The gentleman seeks only *jen*. Why should he wish to be the same as the others?’¹⁸ I hope you will reflect carefully over this and correct your views.

WWKC, 21:640-2

¹ *Analects*, XIII:19, Legge’s *Classics*, vol. I, p. 271. See *HSCC*, 1:3b, 34:24b.

² *Analects*, XII:1, Legge’s *Classics*, vol. I, p. 250. See *HSCC*, 1:1b, 10:3a, 13:2b.

³ *Mencius*, 7A:4, Legge’s *Classics*, vol. II, pp. 450-1. See *HSCC*, 1:3b-4a, 35:7b, 35:18a.

⁴ *Mencius*, 6A:11, Legge’s *Classics*, vol. II, p. 414. See *HSCC*, 32:1b-2a, 35:22a.

⁵ *Mencius*, 6A:15, Legge’s *Classics*, vol. II, p. 418. See *HSCC*, 11:1a, 13:7a, 34:5a.

⁶ *Book of Changes*, ‘Appended Remarks’, pt 1, Legge’s *Yi King*, p. 349. See also *HSCC*, 11:6a.

⁷ This is not a direct quote from Chu Hsi, but refers to his teaching. See *CTYL*, 15:2b-7b.

⁸ This too is not a direct quote from Chu, but refers to his teaching. See *CTYL*, 11:1a-5b, 12:4b-6b, 15:2a.

⁹ This is a direct quote from Chu’s *Chung-yung chang-chü*, in the *Ssu-shu chi-chu*, SPPY ed., 1b.

¹⁰ *Yin-fu Canon* is a Taoist book attributed to the Yellow Emperor.

¹¹ These were two disciples of Confucius.

¹² Referring to Chu Hsi and Lu Chiu-yüan’s arguments concerning Chou Tun-yi’s ideas on *t’ai-chi* (Ultimate) and *wu-chi* (Ultimateless). See *CWKW*, 36:4b-5b and *HSCC*, 2:5a-11b.

- 13 *Analects* VII:16, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 200.
- 14 *Book of Documents*, 'Chung-hui chih kao', Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 100.
- 15 *Analects* XIX:21, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 346.
- 16 *Analects* XIX:8, *ibid.*, p. 342.
- 17 See Huang Tsung-hsi and Ch'üan Tsu-wang, *Tseng-pu Sung-Yüan hsüeh-an* [Philosophical Records of the Sung and Yüan Dynasties, expanded version], SPPY ed.
- 18 *Mencius* 6B:6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 433.

... You said, 'The increase of respect and reverence entails the loss of spontaneity and freedom', and that 'Respect and reverence imply conscious effort of the mind. But how can one go beyond such conscious effort of the mind? How can one act with natural spontaneity, without having any doubt concerning his actions?' All this refers to what I mean by the danger of desiring to assist at the rapid growth [of the vast, overflowing *ch'î*].² What the gentleman means by respect and reverence has nothing to do with what is called fear and anxiety. It refers rather to practising vigilance³ without being seen, and apprehension without being heard. What the gentleman means by spontaneity and freedom also has nothing to do with dissipation and the free play of passions. It refers rather to the substance of the mind not being hindered by unruly desire, so that he finds himself in no situation in which he is not himself.⁴ The substance of the mind is the principle of Heaven. That which is bright and spiritual and conscious in the principle of Heaven is what we call *liang-chih*. The gentleman practises vigilance and apprehension, lest that which is bright and spiritual and conscious becomes obscured and dissipated, and even degenerates into perversion and falsehood, thus losing the correctness of its original substance. The effort of vigilance and apprehension should never be interrupted, so that the principle of Heaven may always remain, and its bright and spiritual and conscious substance may suffer no loss or hindrance, no complication or involvement, no fear or anxiety, no preference or anger,⁵ no foregone conclusion, no stubbornness, obstinacy or selfishness,⁶ no discontent, disgrace, discouragement. But rather, it enjoys harmony and brilliance, filling up all space in its operations; its 'movements and countenance are natural but in accordance with propriety',⁷ 'following the desires of the heart without transgressing what is right'.⁸ This can be called true spontaneity and freedom. Such spontaneity and freedom arise out of the constant presence of the principle of Heaven, and the constant presence of the principle of Heaven

arises out of the continuity of caution and apprehension. Who can say, then, that the increase of respect and reverence can become a hindrance to spontaneity and freedom? This only happens when one does not know that spontaneity and freedom belong to the substance of the mind, while respect and reverence are the functions of spontaneity and freedom. These are then regarded as two separate things, which divide the efforts of the mind, and so come to mutual conflict, causing contradiction in action, and degenerating into a process which hastens the growth [of the vast, overflowing *ch'i*]. Thus, what you, Kuo-yung, call respect and reverence, refers rather to the fear and anxiety of the *Great Learning* than to the vigilance and apprehension of the *Doctrine of the Mean*. Master Ch'eng [Yi] often said that when people speak of *wu-hsin*—literally, not having a mind—they can only mean not having a selfish mind. They cannot mean not having any mind.⁹ To practise caution when one is not seen, and apprehension when one is not heard, refers to a state of the mind which one ought to have. But to be fearful and anxious refers to a selfish mind, which one ought not to have. The efforts of Yao and Shun in 'being wary and fearful',¹⁰ of King Wen in being 'watchful and reverent',¹¹ all refer to respect and reverence, and all arise out of the natural operation of the substance of the mind. To arise out of the natural operation of the mind, to do something without conscious action, refer all to natural spontaneity. The effort of respect and reverence makes no distinction between activity and tranquillity; this is what we mean by 'practising respect to straighten the interior, and righteousness to square the exterior'.¹² When reverence and righteousness are established, the way of Heaven is attained, and one no longer harbours doubt concerning one's own action. . . .

WWKC, 5:201-2

¹ I have not been able to identify him. He may be related to Shu Fen (1484-1527), a disciple of Yang-ming's, also known as Shu Kuo-shang. See *MJHA*, 58:13b-16a.

² *Mencius*, 2A:2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 190.

³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 384.

⁴ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 14, *ibid.*, p. 395.

⁵ *Great Learning*, ch. 7, *ibid.*, p. 368.

⁶ *Analects*, IX:4, *ibid.*, p. 217.

- 7 *Mencius*, 7B:33, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 495.
- 8 *Analects*, II:4, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 147.
- 9 Cheng Yi, *Wai-shu*, 12:16a.
- 10 *Book of Documents*, 'Kao-yao mu', Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 73.
- 11 *Book of Odes*, 'Ta-ya' [Greater Odes], Wen-wang chih-shih [Decade of King Wen], pt 3, bk 1, ode 2 (Legge's *Classics*, vol. IV, p. 433).
- 12 *Book of Changes*, Hexagram 2, 'K'un', Appendix 4, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 420.

In your letter you spoke of your desire to retire into the depths of the mountains, to abandon worldly affairs, to give up thought and worries, in order to nourish your intelligence and clairvoyance, until you know they can penetrate ceaselessly day and night, and then you will respond with unfeeling equanimity to the affairs of the world. You also said that it seemed to you more direct to seek such a goal in tranquillity, as long as you can avoid falling into the danger of emptiness.

Reading this, I see well the firmness of your sense of responsibility with regard to *tao* and the unusualness of your determination.² However, when a good physician treats an illness, he must follow the reality and gravity of the disease, the inside and outside temperatures, before he can decide on medical prescriptions and the quantity of drugs. The essential goal being to remove the disease, he does not begin with a fixed formula . . . This is not different from what the nurture of the mind is for a gentleman. You, Yüan-tao, ought to measure the degree of your sickness, the state of your physical constitution, and then you will know how to decide on a treatment, without doing yourself any harm. If you are only intent on abandoning worldly affairs, on giving up thought and worry, on seeking tranquillity, I fear that you have already developed the emptiness of your nature beyond your control. In your free time, reflect upon what Ch'eng Ming-tao wrote in his *Ting-hsing shu* [Letter on Calming One's Nature].³ Your disposition will then become different. . . .

WWKC, 5:202

¹ His private name was Liu Chün-liang. See Chan's *Instructions*, p. 243, and Translator's Note to this work.

² *Analects*, VIII:7, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 210-11.

³ *Ming-tao wen-chi*, 3:1a-b.

In your letter you blamed yourself, attributing your faults to carelessness and pride. This shows how earnestly you are applying your efforts. But it is *liang-chih* which recognises these faults. For this *liang-chih*, to eliminate carelessness and pride is to investigate things. The extension of this knowledge is the secret transmission of the ancient learning of the school of sages. Formerly, when I was in Ch'ien-chou [in Kiangsi] I spoke of this all the time, but many among our friends did not comprehend it well. Recently, I changed a few words in my Preface to the edition of the old version of the *Great Learning*, developing these ideas further. But those who read it do not always notice them . . . This is the 'treasure of the orthodox dharma-eye'¹ of the Confucian school. Many former scholars did not realise it, and therefore promulgated fragmentary teachings. . . .

WWKC, 5:208

¹ For an explanation of this expression, see p. 64, n. 6.

On the Art of
Government

46. TO YANG SUI-AN,
THE GRAND SECRETARY¹

1523

... Since your Excellency entered upon the confidential charge of government, scholars and officials of the world have been visibly joyous and pleased in the belief that the great peace would soon be attained. However, your humble student alone has been most worried, for I consider the goal still very difficult of attainment ... A rudder weighing 10,000 *hu*² cannot be controlled by one hand alone. Questions concerning speed and direction cannot be decided completely in accordance with one's own wishes. To lack the authority of managing alone the direction of the ship, and yet to have to be blamed for the loss of the ship when affairs go wrong, is what I mean by the difficulties involved ... But does that mean that one can do nothing for the affairs of the world? Only he who makes himself responsible for the calamity of the world can handle the power of the world. And only he who handles the power of the world can remedy the evils of the world ... Those who usually strive to obtain control of the rudder weighing 10,000 *hu* do so out of motives of gain. Once the winds and storms shake the ship, and suddenly its future becomes unknown, everyone gets frightened and seeks merely to escape death. Who else will then compete for her control? If, at that time, someone comes forth to take over the control, everyone else will rely on him to mitigate fear, and the affair may be remedied. If this person also follows the crowd in showing cowardice and passivity, all will undoubtedly drown. That is why I say, when power is given to him, it becomes easy to exercise. The gentlemen of former times understood the direction of affairs and held fast to the pivot. They observed the waxing and waning of *yin* and *yang* and made use of their movements. That is why their activity was always rewarded with success, and fortune smiled upon them. This was how Yi-yin and Tan, the Duke of Chou, served Shang and Chou. In the Han and T'ang [dynasties] it was almost like this. For while

learning was somewhat deficient in those ages, it was yet adequate for strengthening the foundation of the state and for appeasing the altars of Earth and Grain.³ Later generations of cowardly opportunists could not achieve even this. For power controls the benefit or the harm of the world. An inferior man who steals it uses it to accomplish evil, while a gentleman exercises it to bring about good. That is why the government cannot be without the gentleman for a day, nor can it tolerate the inferior man for a day. If you wish to cure the evil of the world, without taking up the reins of power, you act as though you are holding a sword backward, giving someone else the handle, and hoping that he will not thrust it. So the gentleman has a way of gaining power. He should be rooted in complete sincerity, to establish his virtue, and surround himself with good men to assure the help of others, show forth a boundless magnanimity to stabilise their feelings, extend it with a mind that seeks no emulation to calm their passions, make it radiant with an immovable strength of moral character to justify his direction, apply to it an unfathomable intelligence to ward off the wicked and cunning, and give it form with a reliable knowledge so as to attract the confidence of all. He should lower himself in an easy and natural way so that he will be raised by others, yield precedence so that he will be made the foremost of by others. In this way, his merits can cover the whole world without attracting envy. He can do good to all things, without occasioning strife. All this is something your ability and resourcefulness enable you to do and it is moreover what you have undertaken to do in a moment of urgency, when you take responsibility for the calamity of the world, and decide to accept the direction of affairs. To take upon himself the calamity of the world is not what a gentleman would prefer to do, were there a choice. But when he does take this responsibility, knowing that he will not be able to escape from the calamity of the world, and so preferring to take it upon himself, he does so in order to save the world from that calamity. The inferior man, on the other hand, does not realise that one cannot escape from calamity by chance, and so attempts a hundred intrigues in order to save himself, but finishes only in creating a great calamity from which he cannot run away. That is why only those gentlemen who are faithfully and sincerely devoted to the country can

take upon themselves the calamity that faces them, while the inferior men are incapable of doing so . . .

WWKC, 21:649-50

- ¹ Private name Yang Yi-ch'ing (1454-1530). He became a *chin-shih* in 1472 and was Grand Secretary from 1515 to 1516. In late 1524 he was recommended again to this post and in late 1525 he was finally summoned. See *Ming shih-lu* [Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty], Taipei, 1966, 43:8b, 57:5-6 and *Ming-shih*, 198:471-2. It is not known whether this letter bears an erroneous date, or refers to an office other than that of Grand Secretary.
- ² The rudder refers to the direction of government. A *hu* was a corn measure holding 5 or 10 pecks (*tou*). A peck contains 316 cubic inches.
- ³ Originally, the emperor was entitled to sacrifice on the altar of Earth and the feudal lords on the altar of Grain. The two words 'Earth' and 'Grain' came to represent the state itself. See *Book of Rites*, 'Ch'ü-li', pt 3, Legge's *Li Chi*, vol. 1, p. 116.

. . . Mencius said, 'There is naught else in learning outside of finding one's lost mind'.² The reading and studying of the classics and of history certainly belong to the realm of learning, and ought not to be neglected. But the danger is to forget the root and to chase after the branches. Ch'eng Ming-tao warned against 'trifling with things to the detriment of our determination'.³ As to making theories and transmitting one's own instructions [when they are considered yet imperfect], these above all are not what a scholar should anxiously pursue. You were very kind to show me your *Ko-wu shuo* [Book of Investigation of Things] and *Hsiu-tao chu* [Commentary on the Cultivation of *Tao*], but it is hardly what I would dare to expect of you. Besides, what you said in these is not completely in harmony with what I have in mind. I shall explain everything to you when you put these together. Please do not yet show them to others. . . .

. . . I only did my explanation of the Old Text of the *Great Learning* because I had to do so, but even then I did not dare to say too much, fearing precisely that the weeds and ivy might obscure the tree and its branches. I amended my short foreword three times, and then sent the last copy to the engraver [1518]. Now I am sending you a copy of each, so that you will know that my earlier opinions should not be considered as definite theories.

WWKC, 5:203

¹ His private name was Huang Hsing-tseng (1490-1540). He became Yang-ming's disciple. See *MJHA*, 25:4a-b.

² *Mencius*, 6A:11, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 414.

³ Originally from the *Book of Documents*, 'Lü-ao' [The Hounds of Lü], Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, pp. 348-9. Reference to this was attributed to Ch'eng Yi-ch'uan in Sun Ch'i-feng (1584-1675), *Li-hsüeh tsung-chuan* [Orthodox Transmission of Neo-Confucianism], reprinted in Taipei in 1969, 3:13.

... In your letter you said, 'Considering your teaching on *liang-chih* I find that it alone is present in activity and tranquillity, by day and night, past and present. It does not depend upon the tiniest bit of reflection, does not increase even the smallest part of [*ch'i*],¹ adjusts correctly [to things and events], remains conscious and bright, responds to stimulus, perceives through experience, reflecting all things, being conscious of all things, attaining all things. It is the same path by which a thousand sages have travelled, over which ten thousand virtuous men have left their marks. There is no spirit other than this spirit, no *T'ien* [Heaven] to imitate other than this *T'ien*, no *Ti* [God] to submit to other than this *Ti*. By nature, there is nothing in it that is against the Mean, nothing in it that is not perfectly just. One can deal with affairs all day without it being noticeably stirred, one can stay home all day without it remaining noticeably inactive. This is the real, intelligent substance of *Ch'ien* [Heaven] and *K'un* [Earth], the marvellous principle of operations for us men. Besides, I think that what the *Book of the Mean* calls the understanding of sincere people is precisely this *liang-chih*, and what is called the vigilance and apprehension of the man practising sincerity is also precisely this *liang-chih* under the aspect of caution and apprehension. These, like compassion and the hatred of evil, are all conditions of *liang-chih*. To know vigilance and apprehension, to know compassion, to know hatred of evil, means *liang-chih* which is also understanding. ...'

In this you discussed the question very clearly. Knowing this, one knows that there is no other effort outside that of extending knowledge, and to call it 'that which is set up in face of Heaven and Earth, and does not go against them, presented before the spirits, and arouses no doubt, prepared to wait for a hundred generations for the rise of a sage, and has no misgivings',² is not incorrect. Sincerity, understanding, caution, apprehension, did not originally have two meanings where effects and

efforts are concerned. Since it is known that what penetrates activity and tranquillity, death and life, is nothing but this [*liang-chih*], therefore, how can understanding and sincerity, caution and apprehension, as well as compassion and hatred of evil, be something different?

You also said, 'The *ch'i* [ether] of *yin* and *yang* interact in harmony and produce all things. Hence all things receive this harmonious *ch'i* in their existence. That is why man's principle of life was originally harmonious, and not without joy. If you observe the hawks flying, the fish leaping, the birds singing,³ and the animals dancing, and the plants flourishing, you see that they all share this joy. However, this joy is sometimes interrupted by the invasion of extraneous *ch'i*, and by unruly desires. Confucius recommended "learning with constant perseverance and application"⁴ as a means to attaining an uninterrupted effort. For pleasure is the beginning of joy. When friends come, learning is complete and the joy of the original substance of my nature is restored. That is why he said "Is it not pleasant [to have friends come]?" and also "Though others may not know me, I feel no sorrow": he means, not the least sorrow which interrupts the joy of my nature. The sage feared that the scholar's joy is not continuous. That was why he said this. As to the other things he said about "not murmuring, not complaining",⁵ "joy being in the midst of this",⁶ and "without changing his joy"⁷—do they all refer to the uninterrupted joy?

Joy belongs to the mind-in-itself. The man of *jen* is one with Heaven and Earth and all things, being united with all in harmony and concord without experiencing any hindrance. What you said about man's principle of life originally being in harmony and full of joy, until disturbed by extraneous *ch'i* [ether] and unruly desires, is quite right. To learn with constant perseverance is to seek the recovery of the mind-in-itself. When 'we are pleased',⁸ we gradually recover this mind-in-itself. When 'friends come',⁹ the peaceful harmony of the mind-in-itself fills everything without meeting any hindrance. This peaceful harmony of the mind-in-itself was originally so, and did not receive any increase [from the friend's visit]. Even if no friends come, and no one in the world knows us, the harmony should not decrease.

You also said that 'the meaning of joy not being interrupted' also refers to the sage, to his being 'perfectly and continually sincere'.¹⁰ The only effort required is to learn constantly, and the essential of learning constantly is to watch over ourselves when we are alone, and this vigilance in solitude¹¹ is precisely the extension of *liang-chih*, while *liang-chih* is nothing other than joy-in-itself.

In this section, also, what you said is generally right. But it is important that [the person concerned] should not be clinging to the matter with undue effort.

You also said, 'Han Ch'ang-li [Han Yü] said that "universal love is called *jen*".¹² This seems quite right on the whole. Why should the Sung scholars criticise it, by taking love to refer to feeling, and *jen* to refer to nature, so that love cannot be identified with *jen*? I would propose that "nature is emotion before it is stirred, emotion is nature after it is stirred. *Jen* is love before it is stirred, love is *jen* after it is stirred. Why cannot we call love *jen*? For to speak of love is also to speak of *jen*!"¹³ Chou-tzu said, "Love is *jen*".¹⁴ Hence what Han Yü said here is not so different from what Mencius and Chou-tzu meant. We ought not to ignore it just because he was a man of letters [and not a philosopher].'

The teaching of universal love is not really much different from the teaching of Chou-tzu. When Fan-ch'ih asked what *jen* meant, Confucius said, 'to love others'.¹⁵ Hence, why can one not use the word 'love' to speak of *jen*? Formerly, when the scholars read the words of the ancients, they often manifested preference for this person or that. Here is an instance of this. But while the original substance of love can be called *jen*, there is a kind of love that is correct and a kind that is not correct. Only the correct kind of love is the original substance of love, and can be called *jen*. If one knows only universal love, without distinguishing between the correct and incorrect kinds of love, there will be a difference. I used to say that the word *po* [universal] was not as good as the word *kung* [just]. On the whole, when one seeks to explain the meanings of words, one can merely get a general idea. The refined subtle nuances are only reached through personal reflection, not through verbal explanations. Later scholars frequently clung to words and form, trying to dig

through the vocabulary. Their minds merely rotate with the *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharma puṇḍarīka sūtra*.)¹⁶

You also said, '*The Great Learning* says, "... as beautiful colours (or women) are liked; as evil odour is disliked" [and so on].¹⁷ What is said about the dislike of all bad odour presents no difficulty. But if all beautiful women everywhere must be liked, should one delight in every beautiful woman who passes before the eye? This instruction of the *Great Learning* probably made use of ordinary, instinctive feelings of like and dislike to describe the sincerity of the sage and the worthy man in loving good and hating evil. But what is meant here may be that while sages and worthy men like beauty, they can keep their thoughts pure even when a beautiful [woman] passes before their eyes, and not [have] any disturbance in the substance of their minds. It is said in the *Book of Odes*: "There are beauties like clouds".¹⁸ The person concerned was quite aware of their beauty, yet, in spite of that, he continued to say, "but my thoughts are not of them".¹⁹ Since his thoughts are not of them, his thoughts are pure and do not hinder the substance of his mind. The same can be said of a man who sees pavilions and coronets, gold and jade. While recognising them to be pavilions and coronets, gold and jade, he does not become envious or greedy in his mind. I wonder whether my interpretations here are correct? ...'

Ordinarily, in human likes and dislikes, there may be lack of genuineness. However, the love of beauty and the hatred of bad odour both emanate from the real mind, and seek for their satisfaction, without the least bit of pretence. The *Great Learning* merely refers to that which is genuine in everyone's likes and dislikes, to show us that we should be just as sincere in our love of good and hatred of evil. It only describes the one word 'sincerity'. Now, if you develop so many reflections over the words 'love of beauty', you would seem to suffer from the defect of an excessive imagination, taking the finger to be the moon.²⁰ Many men in the past were hindered by words and sentences, and misinterpreted the holy Classics. They did that on account of this same fault. You must therefore watch over it. ...

Your letter said: 'There are people who wish to stop thinking completely, because Hsüeh Wen-ch'ing [Hsüeh Hsüan, 1390-1456] thought to excess and did violence to his *ch'i* [ether].'²¹

I remember Confucius once said, "I once refrained from food for a whole day, and from sleep for a whole night, in order to think".²² Would one say that Confucius went to an excess and did violence to his *ch'i*? It would seem to me that one goes to excess when one thinks outside of *liang-chih*. If one seeks, in every thought, to experience *liang-chih*, then, even though he may think all day and all night as did Confucius, he would not go to excess. "If one thinks nothing outside the sphere of *liang-chih*, when can he be at fault in employing his mind or contemplating. What excess will there be?..."

To say that excessive thinking may lead to a bad temper is quite correct. But to wish therefore to give up thinking would be like abandoning eating after having got something caught in your throat. What you said in your letter concerning 'going to an excess when one thinks outside of *liang-chih*', and, 'If one seeks, in every thought, to experience *liang-chih*, then, even though he may think all day and all night, there would be no excess', and also 'If one thinks nothing outside the sphere of *liang-chih*, when can he be at fault in employing his mind and contemplating?', —these words express well my thought. Confucius said, 'I once refrained from food for a whole day, and from sleep for a whole night, in order to think. There is nothing more beneficial than studying.'²³ He does not necessarily mean that he really acted in this way. He merely pointed out the danger of only thinking without learning. If one only thinks and does not learn, how can one avoid thinking to excess?

WWKC, 5:204-5

¹ *Mencius*, 2A:2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 189. The word *ch'i* refers here to that moral rightness which unites man to the universe.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 29, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 426.

³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 12, *ibid.*, p. 392.

⁴ *Analects*, I:1, *ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵ *Analects*, XIV:37, *ibid.*, p. 288.

⁶ *Analects*, VII:15, *ibid.*, p. 200.

⁷ *Analects*, VI:9, *ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸ *Analects*, I:1, *ibid.*, p. 137.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 26, *ibid.*, p. 419.

¹¹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1, *ibid.*, p. 384.

¹² 'Yüan-tao' [Inquiry into the Original Way] in *Han Ch'ang-li ch'üan-chi* [Complete

Works of Han Yü], SPPY ed., 11:1a-b. An English translation can be found in Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963), p. 454.

- 13 Mencius, 6A:6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 402.
- 14 See *Chou-tzu T'ung-shu*, 1:1a.
- 15 *Analects*, XII:22, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 260.
- 16 Allusion to the *Liu-tsu ta-shih fa-pao t'an-ching*, TSD No. 2007, 48:343. See Chan (trans.), *The Platform Scripture*, p. 115. 'If your mind is correct, it will turn the *Lotus Scripture* around. If it is perverse, the *Lotus Scripture* will turn it around.' Men should be masters of words, not vice versa.
- 17 *Great Learning*, ch. 6, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 366.
- 18 *Book of Odes*, 'Odes of Cheng', *ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 146.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Allusion to the parable contained in *Surāṅgama sūtra*. If a man mistakes a finger stretched out to be the moon he loses sight of the true nature both of the finger and of the moon, see TSD No. 945, 19:111. This story, however, is contained in a late version of the sutra. It is not in the earlier version of TSD No. 642, 15:629-45. See also Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (first series, 1927), p. 17.
- 21 His private name was Hsüeh Hsüan. See his biography in *MJHA*, 7:2a-3b.
- 22 *Analects*, XV:32, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 302-3.
- 23 *Ibid.*

. . . A scholar who has already determined to become a sage in order to gain insight needs merely to extend his *liang-chih*, in its intelligent and conscious aspects, to the uttermost, proceeding gradually and naturally day by day. He does not need to worry about externals and details. Criticisms, praises and blame from others can also be used profitably as warning, correction, and encouragement, but without having these affect his mind in the least; otherwise he would become daily more and more fatigued without his being aware of it himself. . . .

In his action, the sage does not really differ so much from ordinary men. When the people of Lu had a hunting contest,² Confucius also took part in the hunting contest. When the villagers performed their exorcist ceremonies to drive away pestilences, Confucius also [showing his interest], put on his court robes and stood on the eastern steps.³ He received in interview a boy from Hu-hsiang, a village where the people had a bad reputation for being argumentative and difficult.⁴ Already, there were those who could not help wondering over such conduct. And then, when Confucius visited Nan-tzu, his disciple Tzu-lu showed visible displeasure. Not knowing, at that point, how to explain to Tzu-lu the reasons for his action, Confucius could only have recourse to swearing.⁵ And why was that so? If he had tried to explain his reasons for seeing Nan-tzu, it would have required much labour on his part. On the other hand, if he was to follow Tzu-lu's ideas and acknowledge his conduct as having been incorrect, then Tzu-lu would never have discovered the real motives of the sage, and his learning would have remained obscure. Such mental deliberation was only understood by Yen-tzu. That is why he said of him: 'In nothing that I said did he not take delight' . . . ⁶

I offer you these examples, because I desire to see you also keep a humble mind, broaden your capacity for understanding, remove distinctions between the self and others, and abandon any foregone conclusion and stubbornness.⁷ Then will you

certainly receive insights on this essential point, and sigh [in the company of Yen-tzu], wishing to follow Confucius in everything, and yet finding him beyond your reach.⁸

In general, the strange and extraordinary feats of the men of old easily provoke admiration among later generations. Sages and worthy men do not consider that as something very valuable. 'The man who lives away from society, and works wonders, will be remembered by posterity',⁹ while the gentleman who 'acts in accordance with the Mean, feels no regret even though he may be completely unknown to the world' . . .¹⁰

WWKC, 5:206-7

¹ I have not been able to identify him.

² *Mencius*, 5B:4, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 381.

³ *Analects*, X:10, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 233.

⁴ *Analects*, VII:28, *ibid.*, p. 204.

⁵ *Analects*, VI:26, *ibid.*, p. 193. Nan-tzu was the wife of the Marquis of Wei.

⁶ *Analects*, XI:3, *ibid.*, p. 238.

⁷ *Analects*, IX:4, *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁸ *Analects*, IX:10, *ibid.*, p. 220.

⁹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 12, *ibid.*, p. 391.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

You told me, 'I am by nature obedient, straightforward, conscientious, and submissive. On meeting eloquent persons, I often feel ashamed of my slowness. I fear that my natural endowments are very feeble.'

All this suggests a certain emphasis on externals, and neglect of the inner life. If you would only practise *chi-yi* [concentration of righteousness]² in your ordinary life, then you would naturally cultivate the 'vast, flowing, sublime *ch'i*',³ which fills Heaven and Earth, so that 'wealth and nobility will not be able to corrupt you, poverty and lowliness will not be able to change you, might and power will not be able to subdue you',⁴ and you will naturally 'understand the words [of others]'⁵ while all that is prejudiced, extravagant, depraved and evasive speech, will become quite powerless in front of you. How could you still remain ashamed of yourself? To accumulate righteousness is only to extend the *liang-chih*. For righteousness is what is appropriate to the mind, and in extending *liang-chih* the mind will attain what is appropriate to it.

WWKC, 5:207-8

¹ His literary name was Lo-shih (1457-1533). A poet without official position or degree, he became Yang-ming's disciple at the age of 67. See *MJHA*, 14:1a-b.

² *Mencius*, 2A:2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 190. It refers to the practice of virtue. See Letter 4, n. 3.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Mencius*, 3B:2, *ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵ *Mencius*, 2A:2, *ibid.*, p. 191.

Recently, I have had many family troubles, and the application of effort has become very arduous for me. However, the two words *liang-chih* have become even more personal and meaningful to me now than before, 'This is really the 'great root' and the 'broad way'.² Outside of this, there is no learning that can be discussed. Concerning our efforts, the teaching to recognise everywhere the principle of Heaven³ is, generally speaking, not incorrect. However, if we merely pursue this, we should only be chasing the wind and running after shadows. Even if we turn our direction towards the inner self,⁴ our efforts would still remain slightly different from what the school of sages teaches regarding the extension of *liang-chih*. If again, we make there a tiny error, we would risk going astray for a thousand *li*. . . .

WWKC, 6:209

¹ His private name was Tsou Shou-yi (1491-1562). A *chin-shih* in 1511 (he ranked first that year), he was Yang-ming's disciple and frequent companion. After Yang-ming's death he continued the 'Yang-ming school of thought' in Kiangsi, and is said to have received the 'correct transmission'. See *MJHA*, 16:2a-3a.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 384-5.

³ The teaching of Chan Kan-ch'üan. See *MJHA*, 37.

⁴ Allusion to Ch'eng Hao, *Yi-shu*, 2:11b.

Thank you for explaining to me *Yü-su li-yao*.¹ These follow in general the principles laid down in the *Wen-kung Chia-li*,² while simplifying them, and remaining very true to human nature. All this is very good indeed . . . Of the ancient rules of propriety still extant, many venerable masters and aged scholars found their teachings too difficult to exhaust even in a lifetime. The people today usually regard them as being too complicated, and so put them aside and do not act in accordance with them. That is why those who are placed in official positions of responsibility over the people today, and wish to instruct them in propriety, find it hard, not so much to give detailed explanations, but to present in a simple and clear way inducements which would lead the people to practise them.

Concerning the arrangement of the ancestral tablets of four generations, and questions of the associated sacrifices, these I had formerly wanted to adapt to conventional usage. Your adaptation has been found to be in harmony with human feelings, which is the best thing. After all, men of the past and present share the same nature and the same feelings. Former kings gave due consideration to the rules of propriety according to what is universal in human feelings, and that is why these have become a pattern for all generations. If there are certain points which cause our minds to be ill at ease, these may be due either to errors of transmission, or to differences of customs and manners between the past and the present. . . .

If we were to remain so attached to ancient customs that we followed rules blindly without understanding them in our mind, we would not be acting according to real *li* [propriety] . . . The learning of the mind was forgotten by later generations. Man lost his genuine feelings, and now finds it hard to speak about real propriety. However, since *liang-chih* remains the same throughout all ages in human hearts, we need merely to follow our minds' *liang-chih*, then 'even if, without knowing the size of the foot, one tries to make sandals, we know he will not end up making a

basket'.³ 'It belongs to the Son of Heaven only to order ceremonies, to fix the measures.'⁴ If we discuss this subject now, it is not for the sake of ordering ceremonies, but only because, in this degenerate age when rites have become so utterly neglected, we wish to point out its meaning a little, in order to begin to revive it. This is why I wish to explain it in a simple and easy manner, so that it can be easily understood and followed.

To add to ceremonies for capping, marriage, mourning and sacrifice, certain village regulations can be quite beneficial to the people's ways and manners . . . As to arrangement of tablets in the ancestral temple, . . . someone remarked, 'According to the *Weng-kung Chia-li*, the tablets of the great-great-grandfather, great-grandfather, grandfather, and father are all placed in the west, in a line which goes towards the east. This does not make me very happy at heart.' I had answered, 'In ancient temples, the gates all faced the south, the tablets all faced east. When a general sacrifice is made, those on the left were moved to the northern windows, those on the right were moved to the southern windows, so that all would be in accord with the prior dignity of the first ancestor, who ought to face east. That was why the tablets are placed from the west, eastward. Now that the ancestral temples are no longer the same as those of old, and the tradition of having the first ancestor's tablet face east has been lost, the arrangement of the tablets in the west does seem incorrect.' He said thereupon, 'What should we do about it now then?' and I answered, 'The rites should be in accord with the times. If we are to serve the dead as we serve the living, then the great-great-grandfather's tablet should face south, the great-grandfather's, grandfather's, and father's tablets should be arranged on the east and west, on slightly lower places, without facing each other. This seems to put our hearts more at ease . . . However, I fear that the ordinary people's halls are often too small and narrow, and lack often the required vessels, so that this course of action is difficult for all to follow.'

I was then asked, 'In the case of someone who dies without descendants, if he happens to belong to the generation of my sons and nephews, then there is no difficulty in placing his tablet in a lower position. But what should be done if he happens to belong to the generation of my ancestors?'

I answered: 'In the past, the Great Officers were entitled to three temples, which did not include their great-great-grandparents. An Officer of the First Grade was entitled to two temples, which did not include his great-grandparents.⁵ Now, however, the ordinary people are allowed to sacrifice to their great-great and great-grandparents, which shows a real recognition of genuine human feelings. If ancient customs were to be again followed, this would be considered a transgression, all the more so if such sacrifice included those who died without descendants. In the past, an official who had no son was given adopted heirs, so that there were few people who were without descendants. In later ages, human feelings became crass, so that the poor and lowly were neglected. In the past, those who died without descendants were usually people who died before maturity.

'According to "Chi-fa" [Laws of Sacrifice],⁶ under the rank of king, there were five classes of deceased young who received sacrifices: rightful son, rightful grandson, rightful great-grandson, rightful great-great-grandson, rightful great-great-great-grandson—five generations in all [always the children of the first wives]. Those under the rank of feudal princes had the right to sacrifice to three generations, the Great Officers could sacrifice to two generations, the Officers of the First Grade and the common people could sacrifice only to their sons. Hence, the sacrifice offered to those who died without issue referred to one's sons and grandsons. Now, since the common people of today can sacrifice to four generations, then, it would be all right to sacrifice to those of a younger generation, such as our nephews.

...

WWKC, 6:210-11

¹ [Instructions on the Essentials of Customs and Propriety], probably an essay written by Tsou Ch'ien-chih.

² [Chu Hsi's Treatise on Family Rites]. See *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao*, 22: 29-31.

³ *Mencius*, 6A:7, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 405.

⁴ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 28, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 424.

⁵ *Book of Rites*, ch. 12, 'Wang chih' [Royal Regulations], Legge's *Li Chi*, vol. 1, p. 223.

⁶ *Book of Rites*, ch. 46, 'Chi-fa', *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 207.

... Recently, I find the words *liang-chih* daily more genuine and simple.¹ Day and night, when I speak with my friends, I merely regret that I cannot develop this concept to its fullest. For these two words represent something which everyone has in himself, and even the most foolish and least endowed awakens to truth on hearing of it. If we only extend this to the utmost limit, we shall find in it that which even sages [do not know], and even Heaven and Earth cannot satisfy. Hence, the meaning of these words cannot be exhausted even if we go on until the end of *kalpa*.³ If worldly scholars still maintain doubt with regard to it, and find it still rather inadequate, this would be only due to their not really having seen it. Recently, a retired official invited me to give a lecture, saying, 'Beside *liang-chih*, is there anything else [you can] talk about?' I answered, 'Besides *liang-chih*, is there anything else [to] talk about?''⁴

WWKC, 6:212

¹ According to Ch'ien Te-hung (1496-1574), Yang-ming's disciple from 1521 on, Yang-ming's teaching became more and more simplified and he spoke almost always of '*liang-chih*'. See his preface to the *Wen-lu* [Collected Writings] of Yang-ming, *WWKC*, 1:13.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 29, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 425-6.

³ The Chinese word used here, *chieh*, is the translation of *kalpa*, the Sanskrit word meaning a Buddhist aeon or world period.

⁴ In the original Chinese, the question and answer are phrased in a similar way.

... There is only one *tao*. The man of *jen* [humanity] sees it, and calls it humanity. The man of *chih* [wisdom] sees it, and calls it wisdom.¹ What the Buddhists call Buddhist, what the Taoists call the following of Lao-tzu, what the common people do daily without knowing²—all are *tao*. How can there be two *tao*? The true or false, orthodox or perverse doctrines of the past and present, resemble *mock jade* and jade. Yet many people remain confused during their whole lives, without being able to distinguish between them. It is precisely because this *tao* is only one, and its changes and transformations fill up all space, vertically, horizontally, and in every direction, that all can be inferred from it. The worldly Confucian scholars start from a partial view of it, and embellish their image with comparisons and imitations, giving expression to it through divisions of chapters and sentences and borrowed explanations. They are used to such practices, which can instil enough self-confidence, producing sections and items which give them a sense of make-believe security, with which they can deceive themselves and others, remaining in this pitfall for a whole lifetime without realising it. And yet, it was a very slight divergence which led to this difference of a thousand *li*. Those who do not have the sincere determination to become sages, and to devote themselves to being 'discerning and single-minded'³ will not be able to diagnose the root of this disease, and unveil the hidden, mysterious evil. . . .

WWKC, 6:212-13

¹ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', pt 1, Legge's *Yi King*, p. 356.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Book of Documents*, 'Ta-Yü mu', Legge's *Classics*, vol. III, p. 61.

... To recognise the principle of Heaven in every event¹ refers to the effort of vigilance and apprehension.² I consider this still slightly different [from my own teaching], for it implies that every event and object in the world has its own fixed principle, which one must seek outside of one's self. If the effort of the extension of *liang-chih* is understood, this teaching will be without harm. If not, the danger remains that a slight divergence may lead one a thousand *li* astray. In your letter you mentioned the fear that this [searching to recognise the principle of Heaven] may lend too great emphasis on events or affairs. This shows that you have thrown light on its weak point.

Thank you for sending me Kan-ch'üan's essay—"Tsun-ching-ko Chi" [Record on 'Respect the Classics' Pavilion]. It is very good. His general theme is similar to that which I expressed in my essay on the Chi-shan Shu-yüan [Chi-shan College].³ I had formerly sent that essay to Kan-ch'üan, thinking that it did contain some real insights. Now Kan-ch'üan speaks about 'those today who say that intelligence and consciousness need not be sought externally in the Classics, and need not be invoked in order to be awakened',⁴ and so on. In so doing, he seems too anxious to set up theories, without taking time to see carefully what I mean. If the later generations found learning obscure, this has not been due to the lack of intelligence and understanding of later men when compared to the ancients. Rather, this is generally due to their great desire to excel, which prevents them from learning from each other's good points with modesty. While knowing that someone has propounded a right theory, one wishes all the same to propose another theory in order to excel the first. That is why the more theories there are, the more confused people become . . . This is therefore the fault of people like us, who seek to excel each other. Now the theory of *liang-chih* has already made very concrete the essential points of learning. If only all could eliminate the desire to excel, and seek rather to co-operate in propagating this teaching, and, paying attention

to endowment and individuality, teach and persuade others systematically to follow this doctrine, we should certainly achieve real results. Otherwise, if we merely seek to establish different schools of thought, using the external pretext of the defence of doctrine, to obtain the goal of excelling others, and without paying attention to the growing neglect of orthodox teaching, people's minds will become increasingly confused. To form one's own party in order to attack others, to conceal our shortcomings while we argue about our supposed qualities in order to promote certain selfish interests, is not what a man of *jen* can tolerate. Kan-ch'üan may not have this intention. But his words stirred me up and I just give my general impressions of what I consider to be the common sickness of today's teachers. Even I myself may not perhaps be free from this. However, I would not dare not to seek to cure myself of it radically. . . .

WWKC, 6:213-14

¹ A constant teaching of Chan Kan-ch'üan. See *MJHA*, 37.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 384.

³ See *WWKC*, 7:250.

⁴ Quoting Chan Jo-shui's essay. See [Chan] *Kan-ch'üan wen-chi* [Collected Writings of Chan Jo-shui], Preface 1581, republished 1866, 18:8a-9b.

The learning of the gentleman is concentrated merely on the quest within himself.¹ Should there be criticisms, praise, glory, or disgrace, these things not only cannot move his mind, but can even provide him with something with which he can polish and improve himself. That is why the gentleman can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself,² since whatever he does is, for him, learning. If one is glad on hearing praise, and sad on hearing criticism, one becomes always fearful, and may even find the day not sufficiently long³ for all his fears. How can such a person be a gentleman? Formerly, when His Majesty Emperor Wu-tsung was in Nanking [1520], his entourage vied with each other to slander me in his august presence. At that time, I faced unknown calamity, and my equals and subordinates all feared for me, saying that since I was being suspected by so many, I ought to attempt to explain myself. I answered that the gentleman does not expect the world to believe him, but is rather satisfied with his belief in himself. Since I already lacked adequate time to cultivate such belief in myself, where would I find time to persuade others to believe me? . . .

WWKC, 6:214

¹ *Analects*, XV:20, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 300.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 14, *ibid.*, p. 395; *Mencius*, 4B:16, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 323.

³ *Book of Documents*, 'T'ai-shih' [The Great Declaration], *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 290.

57. IN REPLY TO INQUIRIES
FROM A FRIEND

1526

You asked: 'The former scholars all regarded study, inquiry, reflection and discernment as belonging to the realm of knowledge, while earnest action was assigned to the realm of action.¹ These were therefore clearly regarded as two different realms. Now you alone say that knowledge and action are one. I cannot but doubt your words.'

I answer thus: 'I have spoken many times of this already. All that is meant by activity is to do something concretely. If one applied earnest effort to study, inquiry, reflection, and discernment, these four things would therefore become action also. Learning means learning to do this, inquiry means seeking to do this, reflection and discernment also mean reflecting upon this and discerning between it and other things. If one is first to study, inquire, reflect and discern before one acts, how can one not study, inquire, reflect and discern in a vacuum? And how can one do these things during one's action? In its intelligent, conscious, and discerning aspects, action is knowledge. In its genuine, concrete, and practical aspect, knowledge is action. If one acts without intelligence, consciousness, and refined observation, one is acting blindly. This is what is meant by "Learning without thinking is labour lost".² That is why one must also remember knowledge. However, if one knows without being genuine, concrete, and practical in knowledge, one is merely harbouring illusions. That is what "Thinking without learning is perilous" means.³ Therefore one must also speak of action in knowledge. Essentially, it is the same effort all throughout. Where the ancients spoke of knowledge and action, they did so always to correct or clarify some effort, and so differ from the people today who divide them into two separate things. When I speak now of the unity of knowledge and action, I do so also to correct and remedy certain present errors. However, in substance and procedure, knowledge and action are also fundamentally one. We need merely to experience it in our minds in order to

reach this realisation. But if one seeks only to understand it through the meanings of words, one gets very involved in hair-splitting, and more and more confused. This is precisely the disadvantage of not being able to unite knowledge and action.'

You also said: 'There are many similarities and differences between the teachings of [Lu] Hsiang-shan and those of [Chu] Hui-an. You used to say that Hsiang-shan saw very directly and clearly whatever concerns the great point of departure of learning. Now, when I consider the teachings of Hsiang-shan, I find that he divides learning into clear exposition and concrete application. He regards also the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things as belonging to the category of clear exposition. Thus I find his teaching quite similar to that of Hui-an, but rather different from your teaching on the unity of knowledge and action.'

I answer: 'With regard to learning, the gentleman does not place importance on similarities and differences, but only on what is right. If my teaching presents similarities with the teaching of Hsiang-shan, it is not due to any imitation on my part. If there are differences also, I should not try to hide these differences. Where I do differ from Hui-an, it is not due to my seeking to be different. Where I teach as he did, there is no harm either coming from this similarity. If Po-yi,⁴ Liu-hsia Hui,⁵ Confucius, and Mencius were to find themselves in the same room, and each were to express his particular views, it would be impossible for them to hold identical views. What is essential is that they are all sages. Later scholars, however, sought merely to defend those who have similar opinions and attack those who differ from themselves, being moved this way by selfish minds and superficial habits, regarding the work of sagehood as a child's game.'

You asked also: 'The unity of knowledge and action is an essential part of your teaching. Since this differs from the teaching of Hsiang-shan, may I ask what in it is the same?'

I answer: '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 a person sees clearly the essential point of departure, he would know this is only one, and that though these may be described as two activities,

they really remain one effort. If, in the beginning, the two activities do not seem to harmonise, they would always tend towards unity in the end. If, however, someone does not see clearly the great point of departure, and regards them as two entirely different things, then, even if he were to speak of the two as one, they would still lack harmony, and would be separated into two things in action, resulting in losing head and tail of the body'. . . .

You asked also: 'Since the teaching of the extension of *liang-chih* is viewed by one who, having held it, may "wait for a hundred generations for a sage, without having any doubt",⁶ and since Hsiang-shan saw clearly the essentials of learning, why would he present different views in this regard?'

I answer: 'Scholars have followed one another in similar interpretations of the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things. Hsiang-shan followed their footsteps, and did not cast doubt on their explanations. This showed also that Hsiang-shan's teachings present imperfections, which it is not necessary for us to hide.'

I also wish to add: 'Action is knowledge in its genuine and concrete aspects. Knowledge is action in its intelligent, conscious, and discerning aspects. If, when one knows, the mind is not genuine and concrete, then one's knowledge also lacks intelligence, consciousness and discernment. It does not mean that one needs merely to know with intelligence, consciousness and discernment, without having to seek after genuineness and concreteness. And, when one acts, if the mind is not intelligent, conscious, and discerning, then one's action cannot be genuine and concrete. It does not mean that one needs merely to be genuine and concrete in action, without having to seek after intelligence, consciousness, and refinement. The substance of the mind knows the changes and transformations of Heaven and Earth.⁷ Together with Heaven, it also knows the great beginning.'⁸

WWKC, 6:215

¹ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 20, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 413.

² *Analects*, II:15, *ibid.*, p. 150.

³ *Ibid.*

- ⁴ See *Shih-chi*, 61:179. Also see *Mencius*, 5B:1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, pp.370-1.
- ⁵ His real name was Chan Ch'in. A man of Lu, he lived under Liu-hsia, and became the symbol of a sage-minister. See *ibid.*, pp. 370-2. See also p. 35, n. 3.
- ⁶ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 29, *ibid.*, p. 426.
- ⁷ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 33, *ibid.*, p. 340.
- ⁸ *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', Legge's *Yi King*, p. 349.

... Only a scholar of real virtue can see the brilliance and conscious intelligence of his *liang-chih* in harmony and penetration, one with *t'ai-hsü* [Great Void].² *T'ai-hsü* embraces all things, without letting anything become a hindrance to itself. For the substance of my *liang-chih* is naturally and originally 'quick in apprehension, clear in discernment, of far-reaching intelligence and all-embracing knowledge'³ as well as 'magnanimous, generous, benign, and mild',⁴ and also 'unfolding, energetic, firm, and enduring',⁵ 'self-adjusted, grave, never swerving from the Mean',⁶ 'accomplished, distinctive, concentrating, and searching',⁷ 'vast and all-embracing, deep and active as a fountain, sending forth its virtues in due season'.⁸ Essentially there are no wealth and honours to be admired, no poverty or lowliness to be anxiously avoided, no gains or losses that merit joy or sadness, no love or hatred to choose from.⁹ For if my ear is not *liang-chih*, it cannot hear, and how can it be called quick in apprehension? If my eye is not *liang-chih*, it cannot see, and how can it be called clear in discernment? If my mind is not *liang-chih*, it cannot think and become conscious, and how can it be said to be far-reaching in intelligence and all-embracing in knowledge? ... That is why the admiration of wealth and honours, the anxiety over poverty and lowliness, the joy or sorrow over gains or losses, as well as love and hatred, can all obscure the apprehensive and intelligent substance of *liang-chih*, and hinder its function in sending forth [virtues] in due season. They are what dust is to the eye, and wooden plugs to the ears ... Scholars of virtue regard the removal of such things ... as bathing their eyes of dust, and as extracting the wood from their ears. For them, wealth, poverty, gain, loss, love, and hatred are worth as much as the passing storm and the floating smoke, which move and change in the *t'ai-hsü*, while the substance of *t'ai-hsü* remains always vast and unlimited. ...

WWKC, 6:216-17

- ¹ His private name was Nan Ta-chi (1487-1541). A *chin-shih* in 1511, he became Prefect of Shao-hsing, Yang-ming's home country. He was also Yang-ming's disciple. See *MJHA*, 29:11a-b.
- ² The term *t'ai-hsü* was used by Chang Tsai; see *Chang-tzu ch'üan-shu*, *Cheng-meng*, ch. 1:2a. It refers to the universe or to space.
- ³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 31, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 428.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 429.
- ⁹ *Mencius*, 3B:2, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 265.

... Recently, a friend told me to change to *Pei-mu* pills² [for my cough]. I have found them quite effective. However, this is nothing compared to your advice about using the methods of cultivation of life³ to remove the roots of the disease and reach the source [of the problem]. This is valid not only for curing sickness, but also for our application in study.

You told me that your determination to study has increased, that you consider sagehood as certainly attainable by study, that you cautiously learn from experience in concrete affairs, and besides, that feelings of annoyance arising from your relationship with friends are decreasing. This is a cause for rejoicing. You also said that the teaching of sagehood requires also the accumulation of gradual efforts. This is all very solid. As to your using the teachings of Yao, Shun, King Wen, Confucius, and Lao-tzu to develop the meaning of the chapter on 'Fixing Determination in Learning' in the *Analects*,⁴ it adequately shows your diligence in seeking progress . . . Ming-te! It would be all right to make use of this idea to encourage your own spirit, and improve your own morale. But if you wish also to divide up every section of these writings, giving commentaries and citing proofs, taking these to be systematic steps of the pathway by which a sage advances in *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 might give some insights but would tend to make of the status of sagehood something very high and far away, without showing everyone that it is really attainable . . . There is much in the instructions of the sages that cannot be adequately given in books and words.⁵ In reading the Classics, we must use what helps our learning in order to extend our *liang-chih*. Thus, all that is in thousands of classics, in whatsoever inverted and transposed order, can serve our purpose. But if we fall into fixed types of comparisons, we become fettered by these, and, in spite of occasional insights, which have some value, prejudiced and

arbitrary judgments will be lurking around and hindering our *liang-chih* without our being conscious thereof . . . To speak of *liang-chih* would make things easier for people to understand. That is why I have been saying recently that the *liang-chih* of *hsin* is sagehood . . . Man is the *hsin* [mind] of Heaven and Earth and all things. The mind is the master of Heaven and Earth and all things. The mind is the word of Heaven; the mind suggests Heaven and Earth and all things. This is direct, simple, and intimate. So it would be better to say, for study one merely needs to develop the mind. . . .

WWKC, 6:218-19

- ¹ His private name was Chi Peng. He became a *chin-shih* in 1517. See *MJHA*, 13:1a-2a.
- ² A species of *Fritillaria thunbergii* used in Chinese medicine.
- ³ Referring to Taoist physical-mental cultivation.
- ⁴ *Analects*, II:4, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 146.
- ⁵ Allusion to *Book of Changes*, 'Appended Remarks', Legge's *Yi King*, p. 377.

... You spoke about following one's *ch'ing* [feelings] and thoughts,² and acting according to these as though they were *liang-chih*, rather than according to the real *liang-chih*. This shows that you have already located the danger. Thought and *liang-chih* should be clearly distinguished one from the other. Thought arises out of response to an object, and may be either good or bad. *Liang-chih* is that which can distinguish between the good and the bad in the thought. When one follows one's *liang-chih*, all that one does cannot be wrong.

As to your questions concerning considerations of 'face' and the modification of circumstances, all refer to *hsin* [mind], which, while applying itself to the extension of *liang-chih*, does not succeed in concentrating itself with sufficient earnestness. If [the mind] could apply such earnest concentration [in this work], there would be no such difficulty. Those who, in doing things, find the beginning difficult, or tend to be careless and compromising, all do so because they are not sufficiently concentrated in extending their *liang-chih*. This means that they have not completely understood *liang-chih*. If they clearly comprehend it, then, even such considerations of 'face' and circumstances become its operations, and there is no other *liang-chih* beyond 'face' and circumstances. And so, how can one be disturbed by 'face' or circumstances? When that happens, a man has already been moved by selfish desire, and has already lost his original *liang-chih*. Although now our companions all know that *liang-chih* is present everywhere, they tend to separate human feelings and the principles of things from *liang-chih* whenever they are involved in human affairs. This is certainly something for which we should be on the watch.

WWKC, 6:221

¹ His private name was Wei Liang-pi (1492-1575). See *MJHA*, 19:19b-20a.

² The Chinese word *yi* is translated here as 'thought'. It refers actually to 'intention' also, as the Chinese do not separate the operations of the intellect from those of the will.

... Even before, we often spoke of *liang-chih*; I wonder whether you have now a clearer understanding of it. [Ch'eng] Ming-tao said, 'Although I derive my teaching partly from others, yet the two words *T'ien-li* is what I myself have discovered by experience'.² *Liang-chih* is *T'ien-li* [principle of Heaven]. To experience it means actually to possess it in oneself.³ It is not the same as what is done by those in the world who teach what they imagine. In these days, all our companions speak of *liang-chih*, but I have not yet seen any who can really experience it, which is why they are still not free from doubt. For some say that *liang-chih* itself is not adequate to exhaust all the principles in the world, so that a thorough external investigation is still necessary in order to complement its work. Others say that the mere extension of *liang-chih* may not bring one into complete conformity with the principle of Heaven, so that it is necessary to use *liang-chih* to seek what is called principle of Heaven. Thus they hold on to certain fixed rules which they follow systematically in order to be free from defect. With regard to such theory, unless one can really apply the effort of experience and attain to real insight of *liang-chih* one will not be able to distinguish between what is true, and what only seems true. . . .

WWKC, 6:222

¹ His private name was Ma Ming-heng. A *chin-shih* in 1517, he was Yang-ming's disciple, and was to bring Yang-ming's teachings to the province of Fukien. See *Ming-shih*, 207:497.

² *Wai-shu*, 12:4a.

³ *Great Learning*, ch. 9, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 371.

62. TO MAO KU-AN, THE VICE
REGIONAL COMMISSIONER¹

1527

. . . What I teach concerning the extension of *liang-chih* and what is being taught today concerning the recognition of *T'ien-li* [principle of Heaven]² is not so very different except for certain slight divergences, with one taking a straight road and the other a detour. Take planting, for example. He who extends his *liang-chih* cultivates life from the root upward until it reaches the branches and leaves. He who recognises the principle of Heaven enriches the life in the branches and the leaves, and then seeks to return it to the roots. However, while promoting life in the roots, one can certainly conduct it to the branches and the leaves. In enriching the life in the branches and the leaves, how can one abandon the roots and seek elsewhere for life with which to enrich the branches and the leaves? . . .

WWKC, 6:222-3

¹ His private name was Mao Hsien (1469-1535). Together with Hsi Shu, he became Yang-ming's disciple during Yang-ming's exile in Kweichow. See Chiao Hung (ed.), *Kuo-ch'ao hsien-cheng lu* [Documentary Records of the Ming dynasty], Ming ed., reprinted in Taipei, 1965, 80:51.

² The constant teaching of Chan Kan-ch'üan. See *MJHA*, 37:1a-23a.

For the man in an official position, the task [of self-perfection] is ten times more difficult than when he is living in retirement in mountains or forests. Without the help of friends who warn and correct him, his original determination will easily be weakened. . . .

Recently, I was telling [Huang] Ch'eng-fu that, since you have few friends in Peking, the two of you should arrange in advance with each other, so that, when one observes a slight movement of passion,¹ the other should at once talk about the extension of *liang-chih*, in order that you may correct each other in this way.

Only the bravest man in the world² can stop himself suddenly and keep silent while he is in the course of an interesting conversation, can recollect and control himself when his temperament is about to become manifest, and can melt his anger and desire, just when these are near the boiling point. However, for one who sees intimately the *liang-chih*, even such effort is not so difficult. Hence the difficulties mentioned do not originally belong to the realm of *liang-chih*. They only appear when *liang-chih* becomes obscured and obstructed. When *liang-chih* awakens, it is as though the bright sun has arisen, and ghosts and spirits naturally disperse. The *Doctrine of the Mean* says, 'He who possesses the sense of shame is close to being brave'.³ The shame to which this sentence refers is due merely to not being able to extend one's own *liang-chih*. People today often feel ashamed of not being able to win over others in speech, to subdue others through temperament, or to follow their own impulses of anger or desire. They do not know that these difficulties all arise from obstruction of *liang-chih*, which is really what a gentleman should be ashamed of. Now, if they consider as shame not being able to obstruct their own *liang-chih*, they are really feeling shame in what they ought not to feel shame, while they do not feel shame in what is really shameful. Is this not a very sad thing? . . . I only wish that you will become like the officers of ancient times.

They were not noted for any crafty knowledge and ability, but were 'plain and sincere, without other ability, but with a straightforward and generous mind, which is capable of holding much'.⁴ Your knowledge and ability are certainly beyond those of most people. If you have not yet self-confidence, it is because you are not yet able to extend your own *liang-chih* and have not yet attained the state of 'plain sincerity and straightforward generosity'. The present situation in the world resembles that of a man who is seriously sick with accumulated diseases. The only hope of restoring the dead to life rests with you. If you have not yet removed your own sickness, how can you cure the sickness of the world? . . . You must really overcome your own selfish desires and become one with Heaven and Earth and all things, in order really to bring benefit to the world, to restore the perfect rule of the Three Dynasties,⁵ and thus be not unworthy of our intelligent Sovereign, manifest gratitude for the trust placed in you, and avoid wasting the great privilege⁶ of having lived this life in the world. . . .

WWKC, 6:223-4

¹ *Mencius*, 2A:2, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 189.

² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

³ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 20, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 407.

⁴ *Book of Documents*, 'Ch'in-shih' [The Speech of the Duke of Ch'in], *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 629.

⁵ The three dynasties are Hsia (2205?-1766? B.C.), Shang (1766?-1122 B.C.), Chou (1122-221 B.C.), according to traditional Chinese chronology.

⁶ The Chinese term used—*ta-shih*—suggests a Buddhist term—alluding to the 'great cause' for which Buddha appeared in the world. See *CTYL*, 13:7a, where Chu Hsi says that the sage also lives for a great cause. See also the *Saddharma puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, TSD No. 262, 9: 7; Eng. trans. by W. E. Soothill, *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law* (1930), 71.

... When sages speak of learning [they teach] that there is no effort which cannot be applied. However, the three words *chih liang-chih* [the extension of *liang-chih*] are especially simple and clear, providing a concrete starting point for our efforts, so that we shall not go astray. Among our companions now, there is not one who does not know this theory of the extension of *liang-chih*. Yet there are very few who really apply their efforts in this direction. This is so because they do not yet see their *liang-chih* clearly, and especially take the word *chih* [extension] too light-heartedly, so that from many points of view they do not gain much in strength. Although this represents a slight improvement when compared to their former attachment to fragmentary teachings, their real progress is like the difference between two soldiers, one of whom retreats a hundred paces, and the other retreats fifty. . . . ²

WWKC, 6:225

¹ His private name was Ch'en Chiu-ch'uan. He became a *chin-shih* in 1514. See *MJHA*, 19:15b-19b.

² *Mencius*, 1A:3, Legge's *Classics*, vol. II, p. 130.

... Ming-tao once said, 'I prefer to learn to follow the sages and not succeed, rather than to become famous for one good deed'.² He said this for the sake of those who have the ambition to become sages and yet have not attained the learning of sages. The teaching of *liang-chih* which we are promulgating today is the genuine doctrine transmitted by the sages. If we only learn from this, we may be certain to attain sagehood. The only fear is that we still prefer to become famous through one good deed, and are therefore unwilling to devote our minds to such efforts ... Our efforts must be simple and true. The truer they are, the simpler they become. The simpler they are, the truer they become. ...

WWKC, 6:225-6

¹ This was a county in the present province of Kiangsi belonging to Chi-an, from which many of Yang-ming's disciples came. See especially *MJHA*, 19.

² This is actually taken from a eulogy written in honour of Ch'eng Hao after his death by Lü Yü-shu [Lü Ta-lin, 1044-90]. See *Chin-ssu lu chi-chu*, 14:6b, and Chan's *Reflections*, p. 305.

... When a man does what is not good, even acting to the extreme of unreasonableness and the disruption of morality, the *liang-chih* of his mind will not be without awareness of its evil. However, because he cannot extend his naturally endowed *liang-chih* he does not investigate things, he does not render his intention sincere, and so he enters finally the ranks of the mean men. Hence all who extend their knowledge extend merely their naturally endowed knowledge of the good (*liang-chih*). What the *Great Learning* calls *chih-chih* and *ko-wu* [the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things],² what the *Book of Documents* calls *ching-yi* [being discerning and single-minded],³ what the *Doctrine of the Mean* calls *shen-tu* [watching over self when one is alone],⁴ and what Mencius calls *chi-yi* [the concentration of righteousness]⁵—all refer to the application of the same effort. . . .

WWKC, 27:769

¹ Another name of Lu Ch'eng, also known as Lu Yüan-ching. See Yang-ming's other letters to him in 1516, 1521, and 1522 (pp. 43, 65, and 67).

² *Great Learning*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, pp. 358-9.

³ *Book of Documents*, 'Ta-Yü mu', *ibid.*, vol. III, p. 61.

⁴ *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 6, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 384.

⁵ *Mencius*, 2A:2, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 190.

On Emotions

67. TO HSÜ T'AI-CHUNG¹

no date

... When joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are stirred to movement and remain moderate,² they are said to produce the state of harmony. There is harmony in sorrow. This refers to its taking rise from complete sincerity and without any affectation. The excess of emotion is not harmony. The movement of *ch'i* [temperament] is not harmony. To be attached to selfish desires and stubbornness is not harmony. The infant cries all day without hurting his throat.³ This is the extreme of harmony. To know this is to know that the teaching concerning the observation of mourning does not differ from the teaching concerning practical living. . . .

WWKC, 27:769

¹ His private name was Hsü Hsiang-ch'ing (1479-1557). He became a *chin-shih* in 1517. See *Ming-shih*, 208:500, and *WWKC*, 4: 186.

² *Doctrine of the Mean*, ch. 1, Legge's *Classics*, vol. I, p. 384.

³ *Lao-tzu*, 55. See Chan's translation in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 165.

On the interpretation of certain key-words

The following key-words, all substantives, have been selected for discussion because of their frequent occurrence in the writings of Wang Yang-ming, and also because they illustrate the *unitary* character of his thought. Very often, these words manifest the different dimensions of the same truth which persistently pre-occupied Yang-ming's mind. That this truth pertains both to the ontological (the given, as well as the goal to be attained) and the methodological (the way of attaining the goal) realms is a fact which should emerge from the reading of his letters and from this discussion of certain key-words he used.

hsin : literally, the heart or mind, the seat of consciousness

For Wang Yang-ming, it is the source and principle of all human activity, identical to moral conscience, to human nature, to the self, to the person.

hsing : literally, nature, the natural

Chu Hsi regarded *hsing* as the source and principle of moral and ontological goodness in man and the universe, that which is full of *li*, while he took *hsin* as that which contains both *li* and *ch'i*, being and therefore morally ambivalent.

Wang Yang-ming considered that *hsing* and *hsin* represent one and the same reality. For him, *hsing* is somehow the tranquil dimension of this reality, that by which man shares in *T'ien-li* [principle of Heaven], while *hsin* is the more dynamic principle, that which directs all human activity, the 'given' nature of man as well as that which is to be acquired, through experience and action—in other words, both starting-point and goal.

li : etymologically, the veins in jade; according to ordinary usage, reason or truth, pattern

For Chu Hsi, it is being, reality, the principle of organisation,

that which constitutes the essence of a thing, moral truth and goodness, the principle of moral action.

Wang Yang-ming considered *li* especially under its moral aspect. He regarded *hsin* to be full of *li*, thus departing from Chu Hsi's views.

T'ien-li : literally, heavenly reason, 'principle of Heaven'

For Wang Yang-ming, it represents the supreme moral truth or the plenitude of moral goodness in which man participates, as well as that to which our moral judgments and actions should conform. At times he also opposed it—as did Chu Hsi—to *jen-yü* [human desire in a pejorative sense].

ch'i : literally, breath, ether, vital force, temperament

Chu Hsi considered it to be the concrete, material, differentiating principle of things, that which together with *li* constitutes all beings, that which gives life to things.

For Wang Yang-ming, *li* and *ch'i* represent, not distinct principles, but the rational and moral *versus* the irrational and vital manifestations of the same human nature or of nature at large.

liang-chih : literally, knowing the good, knowledge of the good

In *Mencius*, 7A:15, the expression refers to man's inborn capacity to know the good.

For Wang Yang-ming, it is that in man which enables him to discern between right and wrong, the inborn capacity to know and do the good, a capacity to be developed as well as a goal to be attained, since the perfect development of *liang-chih* would signify sagehood.

Yang-ming also spoke of *liang-chih* as the principle of vitality, of consciousness, and of conscious activity in man. Besides, he identified it with *hsin*, especially to the latter in a state of 'equilibrium'—before emotions are aroused. In this sense, he spoke interchangeably of the 'original substance' [*pen-t'i*] of *hsin*—the 'mind-in-itself'—and of the 'original substance' of *liang-chih*—'*liang-chih-in-itself*'.

jen : literally, kindness, benevolence, humanity, goodness, love

In Confucian philosophy, the perfect and universal virtue.

Ch'eng Hao and other Sung philosophers gave this word a cosmic, life-giving connotation, making it that power or virtue by which man becomes one with Heaven and Earth and all things and shares in the creative processes of the universe.

Wang Yang-ming also identified *jen* with the 'original substance' of *hsin*, that is, with the 'mind-in-itself'.

t'ai-chi: literally, the Great and Ultimate, or the Supreme and Ultimate

For Chou Tun-yi, it represents the source and principle of all being and goodness, the Beginning, the One behind the Many, the Fullness of Perfection, of Being, of *li*.

Wang Yang-ming seldom referred to it, and then usually as the source and principle of moral goodness.

t'ai-hsü: literally, the Great Void

For Chang Tsai, it is full of *ch'i* [ether], the shapeless stuff which makes up the universe. Wang Yang-ming spoke of *liang-chih* as being somehow one with *t'ai-hsü*, thus endowing the latter not only with life and vitality but also with consciousness and a certain intelligence and spirituality.

tao: literally, the Way

In Taoist philosophy, the ultimate truth and reality.

In Confucian philosophy, virtue, the fullness of moral teaching, the authentic doctrine of the sages. Wang Yang-ming understood this word in its Confucian meaning. He identified his own teaching of *liang-chih* with the Confucian Way or *tao*.

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Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529) was a Neo-Confucian philosopher of the Ming Era, whose thoughts have had a profound influence in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. But, although there has been a wealth of material published in Chinese and Japanese on his life and philosophy, the English-language world has only two previous translations of Wang Yang-ming's selected writings.

This translation contains sixty-seven letters, thirty-one more than previously translated, which help reveal the philosophy of the great Chinese thinker. Included are a preface with background information, critical annotations and references, bibliography, and a glossary of Chinese and Japanese words.

The book is an important contribution to the literature of Chinese philosophy, knowledge of which assists our understanding of China yesterday and today.



Julia Ching was born in Shanghai, China, and obtained her M.A. degree at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. She has also studied in Rome and Vienna. At present she is lecturing at the Australian National University and preparing a doctoral thesis on the philosophy of Wang Yang-ming. She has published a translation into Chinese of Pascal's *Pensées* (Taiwan, 1968).

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