Chapter 12

Spiritual and Bodily Exercise

The Religious Significance of Zhu Xi's Reading Methods

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Yu Ying-shih 余英時 once pointed out that "Zhu Xi's affable explications of traditional Chinese reading methods are unsurpassed. Zhu Xi not only uses his own experience as an example, but also summarizes the experiences of reading the Classics since Xunzi. He points out the best pathway for us. I once compared the similarities and differences between Zhu Xi's reading methods (*dushufa* 讀書法) and the so-called 'hermeneutics' (*quanshixue* 詮釋學) of the contemporary West and have found them to have much in common. A variety of levels analyzed in hermeneutics can be found in Zhu Xi's *Yulei* 《語類》(*Topically Arranged Conversations*) and *Wenji* 《文集》 (*Collected Writings*)."[2] Indeed, Zhu Xi emphasizes the importance of reading, and thus has a complete set of reading methods for the study of discourse. Not only are there two volumes in the *Zhuzi Yulei* 《朱子語類》that focus on "Reading methods" (*dushufa*), but Zhu Xi's remarks on this topic abound within the *Wenji* as well. Zhang Hong and others from the Song Dynasty surveyed Zhu Xi's works and compiled his remarks on reading into the *Zhuzi Dushufa* 《朱子讀書法》(*Zhu Xi's Reading methods*) in four volumes. Cheng Duanli 程端禮 from the Yuan Dynasty wrote the *Dushu fennian richeng* 《讀書分年日程》 (*A Daily Schedule for Reading According to*

Age) in three volumes and almost all of them adopted Zhu Xi's reading methods. Recently, Qian Mu in his great *Zhuzi xin xue 'an* 《朱子新學案》 (*A New Critical Study of Zhu Xi*) selected Zhu Xi's arguments from the *Wenji* and *Yulei* and divided them into three parts to discuss the details of "Zhu Xi's Reading methods." Therefore, it is no accident that from the Song Dynasty's Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235) to the contemporary Yu Ying-shih almost all treat Zhu Xi's reading methods as the unobstructed orthodox *dao* 道 of learning and self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). Zhu Xi's reading methods contain exuberant content and can be mutually innovative with the modern Western theory of hermeneutics. It is only natural, or rather inevitable, that within the entire East Asian tradition of the explication of Confucian Classics the research of Zhu Xi's reading methods has become an important topic.[3]

However, I believe that although the various levels analyzed in hermeneutics can generally be found in Zhu Xi's *Yulei* and *Wenji*, we cannot argue contrariwise that the theory of modern Western hermeneutics can cover all the activities found in Zhu Xi's reading methods and interpretations of the Classics. I think when we employ modern Western hermeneutics as the background reference to examine the activities found in Zhu Xi's reading methods and interpretations of the Classics, something inevitably will be concealed while others are revealed. The key reason for this rests on the fact that it is difficult for the Confucian tradition to be exclusively categorized into the Western academic discipline of philosophy. In other words, at least according to the current academic classifications, it is very hard to excavate fully and completely the exuberant content of the Confucian tradition and its different implications if we exclusively employ the discipline of philosophy. Modern Western hermeneutics, particularly the philosophical hermeneutics developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, emphasizes that understanding goes beyond theoretical meaning and thinking. It inevitably points to praxis and eventually becomes a practical philosophy.[4] However, setting aside the differences between the concept of praxis in philosophical hermeneutics and "spiritual and bodily exercise" (*shenxin xiulian* 身心修煉) in daily life that the Confucian tradition emphasizes, modern Western hermeneutics (as a branch and ramification of Western rationalist philosophy) is based on reflection on the phenomenal activities of human understanding. As such, its essence and starting point lie within cognition. By contrast, Confucianism never took cognition as its core or starting point because it prioritizes moral practice over theoretical thinking and argument. Accordingly, although traditional Confu-

cian interpretations of the Classics may share many characteristics with modern Western hermeneutics, there are still great differences between the two. Zhu Xi is perhaps the most rational and intellectual thinker in the Confucian tradition. For this reason he has become a focus for those who would use modern Western hermeneutics as a reference to examine traditional Confucian interpretations of the Classics. Even with this perspective on Zhu Xi's reading methods and his interpretations of the Classics, researchers from the past could not help but notice a phenomenon worthy of further investigation. Zhu Xi viewed the Classics as sacred "words of the sages" (*shengren zhiyan* 聖人之言). His reading and interpretation of the Classics is a kind of spiritual transformation and practice that goes beyond hermeneutics as philosophy for it touches on religious and spiritual issues.[5] Even though previous researchers have pointed this aspect out, it has not been discussed sufficiently in depth. To this end, what follows is a further exploration into Zhu Xi's interpretations of the Classics as spiritual and bodily exercise.

Zhu Xi's readings and interpretations of Confucian Classics are more than rich hermeneutical activities that examine the phenomenon of self-reflection; they are spiritual and bodily exercises that culminate in sage-hood and have strong religious meanings and significance. As such I adopt the following three definitions of religion: John Hick's "human responses to the transcendent"; Frederic Streng's "the way of ultimate transformation"; and Tu Wei-ming's "the way of ultimate self-transformation."[6] The religious significance of Zhu Xi's interpretations of the Classics fully reveals Confucian religiosity—as one cultivates the body-and-mind through interpreting the Classics one achieves a continuum between the self-transformation of ultimate and inner reality.

My argument includes the following. First, I point out that reading plays a decisive role for Zhu Xi because reading entails the mastery of all the Confucian Classics, especially the "Four Books." Moreover, almost all the practices advocated by Zhu Xi such as "abiding in reverence" (*jujing* 居敬), "probing principles" (*qiongli* 窮理), and "investigating things" (*gewu* 格物)[7] need to be realized by reading. Second, I point out that in Zhu Xi's view, the activity of reading or interpreting the Classics is itself a spiritual and bodily exercise. For Zhu Xi, the Confucian Classics are not cognitive objects, but are records of the sages' words; we need to understand these words wholeheartedly. Reading is in itself not a goal, but is rather a necessary path one must embark on if one wants to become a sage. In other words, Zhu Xi treats the activity of interpreting the Classics as a spiritual and bodily exercise. The

activity of interpreting the Classics as a spiritual and bodily exercise has the benefit of improving the whole person because it has both physical and psychological therapeutic significance. It is precisely because of this that reading in Zhu Xi's sense not only has hermeneutic significance in epistemology, but it also has a religious significance in axiology. Finally, I further explain the religious significance of Zhu Xi's activities of interpreting the Classics as spiritual and bodily exercise through the basis of observing the similarities and differences between Zhu Xi's reading methods and the so-called *lectio divina* (or "divine reading") in the Christian tradition. Building on this reading, I try to reveal a unique characteristic of Confucian religiousness entailed within Zhu Xi's reading methods as spiritual and bodily exercises.

The Importance of Reading

Reading (*dushu* 讀書) no doubt plays a decisive role in Zhu Xi's thinking. Whenever someone first approached him to engage in study, Zhu Xi would require that they first read his Annotations to the Confucian Classics: "When friends would see the Master for the first time, the master would say to each one: 'if you want to study here you must first read my explications of the texts'" (*Yulei* 121, Zhuzi 18, "Instructing Disciples" 9). And when someone asked about the key to his teachings, Zhu Xi explicitly stated that reading was the key: "Shichang once asked, 'what is the key to your teachings?' [The Master] replied: 'there is no key, usually when I teach, I simply ask students to practice reading'" (ibid). Also, reading is not only a key, it is simultaneously the beginning of learning: "When asked about the beginning of learning, [The Master] replied: practice reading according to one's position" (*Yulei* 115, Zhuzi 12, "Instructing Disciples 9"). It must be noted, however, that what Zhu Xi calls "reading" refers basically to studying the Confucian Classics, especially the "Four Books" and is not just reading general books. In his curriculum, the "Classics" (*jing* 經) are greatly superior to the "Histories," the "Various Masters," and so on. Thus, reading amounts to the activity of interpreting the Confucian Classics and Zhu Xi's reading methods naturally constitute the theory of the interpretation of the Confucian Classics. Zhu Xi did not limit his reading to the "Four Books" and Classics because he thoroughly mastered the Histories, and also set a program for reading history. By emphasizing the "Four Books" as the core of the Classics, however, can be said to be an essential feature of

Zhu Xi's program of reading. It is in this sense that reading for Zhu Xi is first and foremost the activity of the interpretation of the Confucian Classics. Therefore, this essay holds that the concepts of reading and the interpretation of the Classics are interchangeable.

Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) once questioned Zhu Xi during a meeting at Swan Lake: "What books were there to read before Yao and Shun?"[8] Although Xiangshan himself was not the kind of person who would abolish books, the intent of his question was to emphasize the innateness of "original heart-and-mind" (*benxin* 本心) in human beings, which is not shaped from the "external luster" of reading. Zhu Xi addresses this question while discussing Zilu's question about "why one must practice reading before one can be considered learned." He replies that "In ancient times when there was no literature, the learned had no books to read. Average or better persons obtained [*dao*] themselves without reading books. However, once the sages and worthies started writing, the *dao* recorded in the Classics was explicit. Even Confucius the sage could not leave [the Classics] in the pursuit of learning" (*Wenji* 43:7a). Zhu Xi's position is very clear. Although theoretically we can say that "average or better persons obtained [*dao*] themselves without reading books," in reality, ever since the sages recorded the *dao* of the heavens and earth in the Classics, anyone who did not participate in reading or in the interpretation of the Classics was not able "clearly to comprehend *dao*."

These central ideas in Zhu Xi's thought are closely linked to reading and interpreting the Classics. From the indivisible relationship between reading and the three important ideas of abiding in reverence (*jujing* 居敬), probing principles (*qiongli* 窮理), and investigating things (*gewu* 格物), we can further see the importance of reading.

Abiding in reverence (*jujing* 居敬) is the central concept of Zhu Xi's thinking and reading is its method.

> Beginners of learning are sure to have interruptions in their reverence (*jing*). However, if as soon as we become aware of an interruption, we arouse the heart-and-mind, then our awareness will put us in a position to resume [our reverence]. I want people to practice reading and thereby realize the patterns and principles of appropriate behavior. If we frequently practice reading during the day, the heart-and-mind will not depart from the work. But if we get lost in things and affairs, then the heart-and-mind will easily become inundated.

> Knowing this, if we practice reading and thereby realize the patterns and principles of appropriate behavior, then we can turn ourselves around. (*Yulei* 11.1a, *Dushufa* b, Xue 5)[9]

Here, we already see that Zhu Xi clearly takes reading as a process of spiritual and bodily exercise. Thus he says "if we frequently practice reading during the day, the heart-and-mind will not depart from the work." This is precisely the religious significance of the activity of reading and interpreting the Classics that is discussed later.

If "investigating things and probing principles" (*gewu qiongli* 格物窮理) is the most prominent feature of Zhu Xi's scholarship, then probing principles consists primarily in reading. This point is explicitly and sincerely expressed by Zhu Xi when he says:

> For learning, probing principles is primary. The essentials of probing principles necessarily consist in reading. For reading methods, nothing is more valuable than step by step and intensive reading. The root of intensive reading lies in abiding in reverence (*jujing*) and maintaining commitment (*chizhi* 持志). . . . Everything in the world has its principle. The manifestations and consequences of all the principles in the world are recorded in the Classics and historical books. . . . So, if you want to probe principles, you have to read. (*Wenji* 14)

In this passage, probing principles, abiding in reverence, and maintaining commitment are all closely related to reading. From this we can see how reading for Zhu Xi is a spiritual and bodily exercise.

For Zhu Xi, not only do "the essentials of probing principles necessarily consist in reading," but the work of investigating things must be concretely embodied in the activity of interpreting the Classics. Moreover, reading is the most important work for investigating things.

> Reading is a matter of investigating things. We must ponder the subtleties of each paragraph, over and over again. If in one or two days we only read one paragraph, then the paragraph will become part of us. Mastering this paragraph, continue to the next one. Proceed like this, one by one. After a few days, we will comprehend the major patterns and principles of *dao*. In this work our thinking will progress by

> rethinking what we already think we know, and enlightenment emerges even though we had not planned for it. Even if the structure and meaning of a text have a certain explanation, each new reading increases our understanding. This is why with some texts a further reading produces a revised understanding of doctrine; and with fixed explanations a further reading produces even deeper understanding. So I say, when reading, do not value quantity, only value the quality of your understanding. Thus, we must boldly work to advance our understanding and never think of turning back. (*Yulei* 11, Dushufa a, Daxue 4)[10]

Although the ideas of investigating things, probing principles, and abiding in reverence are all inherited from Cheng Yi, the relationship between these ideas and the interpretation of Confucian Classics is not clear in Cheng's philosophy. Basically, these ideas for Cheng Yi are simply general principles for moral and practice concerns. Once they are transmitted to Zhu Xi, these principles are considerably focused on (but not reduced to) the activity of interpreting the Confucian Classics. Zhu Xi develops a complete curriculum and program of reading in which investigating things, probing principles, and abiding in reverence involves very practical work that belongs to the activity of interpreting the Confucian Classics.

Even though Zhu Xi places extreme emphasis on reading, if one cannot understand what he means by reading, what books to read and why, one will inevitably be drawn onto the path of pure intellectual inquiry rather than moral practice. The critique of Lu Xiangshan and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995)that Zhu Xi focuses too much on the learning of knowledge rather than the inquiry of the morality is actually excessive and unfair. In fact, Zhu Xi always maintains a high level of vigilance when reading because only indulging in a purely intellectual inquiry deviates from spiritual and bodily exercise that aims at sage-hood.

In any case, judging from the passages quoted earlier, for example where he says "if we frequently practice reading during the day, the heart-and-mind will not depart from the work" and by the fact that Zhu Xi takes reading to be a concrete practice involving investigating things, probing principles, and abiding in reverence, we can see that the activity of interpreting the Confucian Classics is not limited to only cognitive significance. Rather, it is a practice of spiritual and bodily exercise.

Reading as Spiritual and Bodily Exercise

Why does Zhu Xi regard reading as a spiritual and bodily exercise? Primarily, it is because the Confucian Classics for Zhu Xi are not only meaningful in only an epistemological sense because they have a sacred significance similar to that of a "holy book" (*shengshu* 聖書) or "scripture" (*shengdian* 聖典) of Western religious traditions. This understanding of reading as a spiritual and bodily exercise is featured by three specific aspects in Zhu Xi's discourse: his views on the nature of the Confucian classics, the manner and the attitude of reading the classics, and the ultimate goal of reading the classics.

Zhu Xi has many statements that reading requires that one must deeply penetrate the meanings of the Classics through the practice of "emptying and opening the heart-and-mind" (*xuxin* 虛心). For instance, "Reading requires emptying and opening the heart-and-mind and staying calm (*xuxin pingqi* 虛心平氣). One should follow literal meanings (*wenyi* 文義) and embody the texts without stubbornly projecting one's own intentions and attitudes into them. Otherwise, one will only succeed in producing a fabrication, and not see the original intentions of the sages and worthies" (*Wenji* 53, Daliuji 10).[11] On the surface this seems close to the standpoint of what hermeneutics calls pursuing "the original intention" of the text, which includes an attitude of cognitive objectivity. The notion of "empting and opening the heart-and-mind" can also be connected with what Gadamer calls "disregarding ourselves." However, from the perspective of Zhu Xi, the nature of the Classics lies not as an object of cognition, but rather as a pathway to meet with the sages. The phrase to "see the original intentions of the sages and worthies" (*jian shengxian benyi* 見聖賢本意) reveals this point. Moreover, because the sages perfectly embody the patterns and principles of the heavens (*tianli* 天理) as well as the *dao* of the heavens (*tiandao* 天道)—as in the saying "observe the sages then one sees the heavens and earth"[12]—the Confucian Classics as records of the "words of the sages" in fact reflect the constant patterns, principles, and *dao* of the heavens. Thus "the Six Classics embody the best books from the three dynasties and come from the hands of the sages. They encompass the patterns and principles of the heavens" (*Yulei* 11.13b, Dushufa b, Xue 5).

Through repeated reading and experience "the words of the sages and worthies must constantly pass before one's eyes, revolve in one's mouth, and turn in one's heart-and-mind" (*Yulei* 10.162, Dushufa a,

Xue 4). Ultimately, one wants to achieve a state in which "one's excellence is continuous with the heavens and earth, one's illumination is continuous with the sun and moon, one's procession is continuous with the four seasons, and one's auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are continuous with the spirits of the dead and the divinities. Preceding *tian* 天, *tian* is not incompliant, following *tian*, one respects timing of *tian*" (*Yizhuan*, Wenyan Commentary to the Qian Hexagram). What Zhu Xi calls "reading in order to see the intentions of the sages and worthies; and according with the intentions of the sages and worthies in order to see the patterns and principles of spontaneity" (*Yulei* 10, Dushufa a, Xue 4 / I:162) illustrate this point.

From this, it is clear that the Confucian Classics possess a sacred status and significance in Zhu Xi's view. In modern Chinese it is unknown when we started to use *shengjing* 聖經 ("classics of the sages") to translate the Bible of Christianity, but this shows that in the eyes of the translators the phrase *shengjing* 聖經 is sacred in nature, and that it is not just used to refer to a text that is only meaningful in an epistemological sense; otherwise it would not be used to translate "Bible." Zhu Xi often uses the term *shengjing* to refer to the "Four Books" and other Confucian Classics.[13] He also often uses *shengjing* and *xianzhuan* 賢傳 ("commentaries of the worthies") in conjunction.

It has already been pointed out that Zhu Xi's attitude toward reading the Classics (*jing* 經) is different from his attitude toward reading the "Histories," the "Various Masters," and so forth. The key point is that the Classics in Zhu's view entail the characteristics of a "holy book" or "scripture." This attitude toward the Confucian Classics—that of "revering them as divinities" (*fengruo shenming* 奉若神明)—is the result of considering the activity of reading the classics as a spiritual and bodily exercise. Because the Confucian Classics are not general objects of cognition (but are rather the words of sages that reflect the heavenly principle), they are the pathways by which scholars may achieve a sage-like state. One's attitude toward reading the Confucian Classics, then, naturally cannot be assimilated to common approaches. Words such as the following abound in Zhu Xi's documents: "The sayings and conversations of the Sages and Worthies should be read with an open heart-and-mind (*xuxin* 虛心) and cannot be read with pre-established opinions" (*Yulei* 140) and in the *Ercheng yishu* 25 Zhu Xi cites the following passage from Cheng Yi that "Readers should contemplate the intentions by which the sages produced the classics, the devotion and

sagacity by which they attained sage-hood, as well as the reason that I have not yet attained. If you do not grasp the [intentions by which the sages produced the classics], seek them in each and every sentence, savor them by reciting the texts during the day, and seriously contemplate them through the middle of the night. Steady your heart-and-mind, transform your life-energy, put aside your doubts, then you will see the intentions of the sages." Zhu Xi highly praises this attitude toward reading. In fact, besides the cognitive openness, for Zhu Xi, "emptying and opening the heart-and-mind" implies a theory of value and spiritual significance with regard to the words of the sages that are documented in the Classics as well as a commitment and belief in a heavenly principle.

The understanding of the nature of the Classics and the reading methods and attitudes of reading them are closely related. For Zhu Xi, neither reading nor the activity of interpreting the Classics seeks objective knowledge; rather, their purposes are practicing of spiritual and bodily exercise, transforming the materialized life-energy (*bianhua qizhi* 變化氣質), and ultimately achieving sage-hood. In other words, reading or interpreting the Classics is not a goal in itself. For example, Zhu Xi begins his reading methods (*Dushufa* 讀書法) with the following three statements: (1) "Reading is a secondary business for students." (2) "Reading is of secondary importance. Even though it may seem in living a life that the patterns and principles of *dao* are already comprehensive and complete in us, one needs to practice reading because it is apparent that we have not experienced that much. The sages experienced a great deal, and as a result, they wrote down their experiences for others to see. Now when we practice reading we simply need to apprehend the many patterns and principles of *dao*. Once we understand the patterns and principles we will discover that they were all complete in us from the beginning, not added from outside"; and (3) "Learning, then, is to focus on the essentials that we need to understand the patterns and principles ourselves, and thus, reading is of secondary importance. The patterns and principles of *dao* are complete within us and never added from outside. So when the sages teach us that we need to read their books, it is because even though we might possess the patterns and principles of *dao*, we need experience if our attainment is to be real. The sages speak about that which they have experienced."[14] Similar sentiments are found in many places throughout Zhu Xi's works. It is precisely because the ultimate goal for Zhu Xi is not knowledge, but is sage-hood that is achieved through reading as a spiritual and bodily

exercise that we can understand why he begins his reading methods with the above words, and why he repeatedly emphasizes these points while teaching his disciples.

Nevertheless, it is a consensus for Confucianism in general and Neo-Confucianism in particular that reading itself should not be regarded as the ultimate goal of the Confucian way. There is no difference between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan or Wang Yangming on this point. What differentiates Zhu Xi from Lu and Wang is the key point that although Zhu Xi considers that "reading is a secondary business for students" and that reading is not the purpose of learning, he at the same time believes that reading is a necessary and indispensable way to practice spiritual and bodily exercise, achieve self-transformation, and eventually achieve sage-hood. This makes reading in Zhu Xi not only have a hermeneutical meaning in an epistemological sense, but also religious implications and significance in an axiological and practical sense.

For Zhu Xi, the lack of reading will even produce physical and mental illness. This is because reading for Zhu Xi is not only a practice of spiritual cultivation (nourishing the heart-and-mind and abiding in reverence), but also a practice of bodily cultivation. As he writes that "When reading, students must compose themselves and sit upright (*zhengzuo* 正坐), read slowly and give voice to every subtlety, empty and open the heart-and-mind, chant with resonance, continually embody the readings, and carefully examine themselves" (*Yulei* 10, Dushufa b, Xue 5; 11.3b:5/179:3). To "compose themselves and sit upright" and to "read slowly and give voice to every subtlety" are physical requirements. These requirements constitute a prerequisite for proper reading. Moreover, reading and thinking well will certainly have an impact on the body.

Precisely because reading as an exercise is not only spiritual but also bodily, Zhu Xi often used the metaphor of "curing illness with medicine" to describe reading and its effect on one's body. For Zhu Xi, reading as a spiritual and bodily exercise has a therapeutic significance. If selfishness, parochialism, and immoderate emotion emerge at any moment in our daily lives (as the "fire of the heart-mind" [*xinhuo* 心火]), then they will be causes for people's illness. From Zhu Xi's perspective, reading as a spiritual and bodily exercise has the effect of "calming the fire of the heart-and-mind" (*pingxinhuo* 平心火) so that illness (*bing* 疾) will naturally dissipate without medicine. Unfortunately, scholars often overlook the therapeutic significance of this Confucian spiritual and bodily exercise advocated by Zhu Xi for maintaining health and cultivating longevity.

Zhu Xi's Reading Methods and Christian *lectio divina*: A Comparison

To further clarify the religious implication and significance and reveal the features of Confucian religiousness, we may compare Zhu Xi's reading methods (*Dushufa*) with the Christian tradition of *lectio divina* (divine reading), which traces back to the fourth-century Desert Fathers.[15] *Lectio divina* consists of four steps: (1) *lectio* (slow reading), (2) *meditatio* (meditation), (3) *oratio* (praying), and (4) *contemplatio* (contemplation).[16] Generally speaking, if we say that *lectio* is wholeheartedly "listening to the word of God," *meditatio* is deeply "reflecting on the word of God," and *oration* is internally "responding to the word of God," then the final stage of *contemplatio* is transformative, that is, "embodying the word of God or becoming the word of God."

Comparing the *Lectio divina* with Zhu Xi's reading methods as a spiritual and bodily exercise it is easy to find similarities and resonances between them with perhaps the exception of praying. For example, when Zhu Xi says "Readers should bury themselves in the text. When walking, standing, sitting, and sleeping, one must continue the process of reading to achieve a thorough and comprehensive understanding. One must ignore anything external to this and be wholeheartedly devoted to the text. This is what we call being adept in the practice of reading" (*Yulei* 116). This immersive practice clearly has a strong resonance with *meditatio*.

There are still two additional similarities in terms of the nature and practical effect of reading. As I argued earlier, Zhu Xi differs from traditional Confucian interpreters of the Classics in the fact that he takes reading to be spiritual and bodily exercise for achieving sage-hood. Secular studies in Classics not only lack ultimate concern but can degenerate into a tool for gaining reputation and profit. The distinction between *lectio divina* and "Bible Studies" in Christianity is similar. Bible studies or even the "reading of scripture" can include religious devotion, but primarily involve study for knowledge. By contrast, *lectio divina* is not about knowledge, but is rather a way of ultimate transformation. If religion is essentially a way of ultimate transformation, then *lectio divina* is religious practice rather than philosophical speculation. It is exactly in this sense that we can say there is a similarity between Zhu Xi's reading methods and *lectio divina*. The therapeutic significance of Zhu Xi's reading as spiritual and bodily exercise is also similar to the effects that can be achieved through *lectio divina*. For instance, Mary C. Earle

published an account of her own experiences in which she overcame illness through the practice of *lectio divina* in daily life.[17]

Despite apparent similarities between Zhu Xi's reading methods and the Christian *lectio divina*, there are fundamental differences in the understanding of the natures of the scripture, the speakers of the scripture, and basic worldviews and cosmologies. For Zhu Xi and the practitioners of his reading methods, the Confucian Classics are records of the "words of the sages" while for Christianity the Bible is a record of the "Words of God." Both the "words of the sages" and "words of the God" are sacred in their respective contexts and are bridges between a person and ultimate reality. As such, it is exactly in this sense that the Confucian Classics are also scriptures. But for practitioners of Zhu Xi's reading methods and the adherents of the Christian *lectio divina* sages and God refer to totally different identities and the "words of the sages" and "words of the God" have distinctively different properties. For Zhu Xi and the whole Confucian tradition at large, sages are all in all "human beings." It is precisely for this reason that we are able to "practice learning and reach their level." The saying "every person can become a Yao or Shun" (*renjie keyi wei Yao Shun* 人皆可以為堯舜) [*Mencius* 6b2] is a universally accepted proposition in Confucianism. Ontologically, there is no difference between a common person and a sage although to become a sage is an existentially endless process.

In contrast, "God" and humankind are fundamentally different categories in Christianity. Even though Jesus was incarnated in human form, he is equally not human. Consequently, the idea that "every person can become a Jesus Christ" is impossible in the traditional Christian doctrine. We simply cannot become God. On the other hand, for practitioners of Zhu Xi's reading methods, not only can one listen to the words of the sages, but one can eventually become a sage. The ultimate purpose of reading as a spiritual and bodily exercise is precisely the achievement of sage-hood. However, for practitioners of *lectio divina*, one can become increasingly sublime by "listening to the words of the God" to "living in the sacred words" or "to be with the God." God can never be a being that one can ultimately become.

Moreover, by practicing Zhu Xi's reading methods, one will eventually realize that the words of the sage is a voice of one's own intrinsic heart-mind and the innate knowing of goodness. This is in contrast to the practicing of *lectio divina* where one will come to understand that God's voice is rooted in one's heart—this is a more outside transcendental feeling. Although one can wholeheartedly accept and devote

oneself to the words of the God, the words of the God are never one's own inner voice emerging from within. One must appeal to revelation. In short, there is an ultimate identity between "the words of humankind" and "the words of the sages" in a Confucian perspective while there is invariably an insurmountable gap between "words of humankind" and "words of the God" for the practitioners of Christian *lectio divina*.

Last, the practice of both Zhu Xi's reading methods and Christian *lectio divina* will eventually lead to an ultimate transformation of practitioners, but the understanding of the world and cosmos of both sides remains substantially different. For the Confucian part, the result is a one-body world and cosmos in which all things are connected. Forming one body with heaven, earth, and the myriad things has been a real experience for most Confucian masters. On the Christian part, however, the *lectio divina* leads to a worldview in sharp contrast between what the Confucian masters maintain and a cosmology of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Conclusion

Confucianism in China is usually studied in the Western disciplinary category of philosophy and perhaps Zhu Xi is the most rationalistic thinker in the Confucian tradition. If we take an account of the research on Zhu Xi up to the present, I am afraid that the vast majority of monographs and papers belong to the category of philosophy.[18] However, the Confucian tradition obviously has other dimensions, such as ethics, politics, religion, and more. On this point, Zhu Xi is no exception. For example, recently Yu Ying-shih reveals Zhu Xi's political dimension from the perspective of political culture, beyond philosophy.[19] This dimension has been neglected in previous research. Similarly, we should also notice the religious dimensions in Zhu Xi's thought. Whether we focus on Zhu Xi's thought or his practice, some of his content does not really fall within the scope of philosophy; rather it belongs to the field of religion. In fact, although they are few, some scholars have already taken notice of the religious elements in his thought and practice.[20]

I once pointed out that if we recognize that the Abrahamic tradition is now "many," but religiousness or religiosity is a "one," and that, if the essence of religion lies in "religiosity," and that its purpose lies in "transforming the materialized life-energy" so as to turn a person's existential reality into a kind of ultimate, creative self-transformation, then the Confucian tradition is no doubt a religious or spiritual tradi-

tion. The Confucian tradition takes "self-cultivation" as fundamental for "transforming the materialized life-energy" that culminates ultimately in becoming a "great person" (*daren* 大人), an "exemplary person" (*junzi* 君子), or a "sage." Such self-cultivation that provides a set of conceptual and practical methods (or "gongfu 工夫") clearly has a strong religiosity and a complete religious function. Compared with the Abrahamic monotheistic traditions, the Confucian attainments of becoming a "great person," an "exemplary person," or a "sage" are not heterogeneous leaps from the human to the divine; rather they are consummations of one's humanity (*renxing* 人性). Through the study of this essay we can see that Zhu Xi's reading methods and interpretations of the classics as spiritual and bodily exercises, reveal an exceptional, if not unique, religiosity unlike the Abrahamic tradition of Christianity.

Notes

1. Given the controversial translation of some keywords, this chapter has been translated and revised in direct consultation with and input from the author.

2. Yu Ying-shih 余英時, "Zenyang du zhonguo shu 怎樣讀中國書," in *Qian Mu yu zhongguo wenhua* 錢穆與中國文化, 310. This article also appears in *Zhongguo wenhua yu xiandai bianqian* 中國文化與現代變遷 (Taibei: San Min Book, 1992).

3. To date, research that uses Western hermeneutics as a reference for examining Zhu Xi's reading methods and interpretations of the Classics are: Zheng Zongyi 郑宗义, "Lun zhuzi dui jingdian jieshide kanfa 論朱子對經典解釋的看法"; Shao Dongfang 邵東方, "Zhuzi dushu jiejing zhi quanshixue fenxi—yu gadamoer zhi bijiao 朱子讀書解經之詮釋學分析—與伽達默爾之比較," both in *Zhuzi xuede kaizhan—xueshu pian* 朱子學的開展—學術篇, ed. Zhong Caijun; Mathew Arnold Levey, "Chu Hsi Reading the Classics: Reading to Taste the Tao-'This is a Pipe,' After All"; Jonathan R. Herman, "To Know the Sages Better than They Knew Themselves: Chu Hsi's Romantic Hermeneutics," both in *Classics and Interpretations: the Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*, ed. Ching-I Tu; Chen Lisheng 陳立勝, "Zhuzi dushufa: quanshi yu quanshi zhi wai 朱子讀書法：詮釋與詮釋之外" in *Rujia jingdian quanshi fangfa*, ed. Li Minghui; Wu Zhanliang 吳展良, "Shengren zhi shu yu tianli de pubianxing: Lun Zhuzi de jingdian quanshi zhi qianti jiashe 聖人之書與天理的普遍性：論朱子的經典詮釋之前提假設," *Taida lishi xuebao*, no. 33, June 2004.

4. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederic G. Lawrence, 82–112.

5. Zheng Zongyi 鄭宗義 in "Lun zhuzi dui jingdian jieshide kanfa 論朱子對經典解釋的看法" clearly points out that Zhu Xi's interpretation of the

Classics is not a purely cognitive activity, but tends toward spiritual transformation and practice. Earlier scholars such as such as Qian Mu already pointed out that Zhu Xi's reading methods are simultaneously a kind of "preservative nurturance" (*hanyang* 涵養) and "practical fulfillment" (*jianlu* 踐履). See *Zhuzi xue tigang* 朱子學提綱,166.

6. See Peng Guoxiang 彭國翔, *Rujia chuantong—zongjiao yu ren wen zhuyi zhijian* 儒家傳統—宗教與人文主義之間, "Introduction."

7. Translators' note: *ge* 格 can also mean "apprehending" in this case.

8. The meeting at Swan Lake occurred during the second year of the Chun Xi reign (1175) when Zhu Xi was 46 years old.

9. Translators' note: See 11/176:9, Gardner 1990, 5.4, 143–144.

10. Translators' note: See 10.6a; 10/167:2 in Gardner 1990, 4.29, 133–134.

11. Translators' note: See *Yulei*, I:179.

12. Yang Xiong 楊雄 has the saying "observe the heavens and earth then one sees the sages," but Cheng Yichuan 程伊川 disagrees. He thinks it should be reversed to say "observe the sages then one sees the heavens and earth." See Zhu Xi's *Er cheng wai shu* 二程外書 scroll 11, "Shishi ben shiyi 時氏本拾遺." Yichuan points out that the sages are the perfect embodiment of the *dao* of the heavens and earth. The abstract concept of the *dao* of the heavens and earth is difficult to grasp, and it must be examined through the concrete manifestations of the character of the sages.

13. *Shengjing* 聖經 occurs nine times in the *Yulei* nine and eleven times in the *Quanshu*. There is nothing special about Zhu Xi's use of *shengjing* to refer to the Confucian Classics because in ancient literature this was already popular. Prior to Zhu Xi, for example, Ouyang Xiu used *shengjing* in the *Xintangshu* to refer to the Confucian Classics. Contemporaneously with Zhu Xi, Zhang Shi in the *Nanxuanyishuo* uses *shengjing*, but this specifically refers to *Zhouyi*. Generally speaking, Zhu Xi's usage seems to make the use of this term popular. The frequent use of *shengjing* in the *Sikuquanshu zongmu* probably can be regarded as the influence of Zhu Xi.

14. Translators' note: See Gardner 1990, 4.1–4.3, 128.

15. See Burton-Christie, 1933. *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*.

16. On the history of the origin and development of *Lectio Divina*, especially the four basic steps of theoretical explanation, see the following three books: Thelma Hall, 1988. *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*; Mariano Magrassi, 1998. *Praying the Bible, An Introduction to Lectio Divina*; Enzo Bianchi, 1998. *Praying the Word*. 17. See Mary C. Earle, *Broken Body, Healing Spirit: lectio divina and Living with Illness*. 18. For a catalog of the latest research on Zhu Xi see *Zhuzi yanjiu shumu xinbian* 1900–2002 朱子研究書目新編 1900–2002. ed. Wu Zhanliang 吳展良. 19. See Yu Ying-shih 余英時, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie—Song dai shi daifu zhengzhi wenhua yanjiu* 朱熹的歷史世界—宋代士大夫政治文化的研究. 20. For example, see the following research: Chen Rongjie 陳榮捷, "Zhuzi zhi zongjiao shijian 朱子之宗教實踐," in *Zhu xue lun ji*

朱學論集, 181–204; Tian Hao 田浩 (Hoyt C. Tillman), 2002. "Zhu Xi guishen guan yu daotong guan 朱熹的鬼神觀與道統觀," *Zhuzi xue de kaizhan—xueshu pian* 朱子學的開展—學術篇, ed. Zhong Caijun, 247–261; Ching, Julia 秦家懿. *The Religious Thought of Chu His*.

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