

CHAPTER 16

WANG YANGMING IN CHUZHOU AND NANJING, 1513-1516

“I have only two words to say: ‘Be truthful!’”



George L. Israel

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Given the volume of scholarship on Wang Yangming (1472-1529), students of Chinese history are likely familiar with the basic outlines of his life and central tenets of his Neo-Confucian philosophy. They may know, for instance, that in 1506, for criticizing the Zhengde emperor's eunuch favorite, Liu Jin, Wang Yangming was beaten, imprisoned, and then dispatched to a lowly post in distant Guizhou Province; and, furthermore, that while living there he experienced a kind of enlightenment, formulated his theories of the identity of mind and moral principle (*xin ji li*) and “the unity of knowledge and action (*zhi xing he yi*),” and then began to teach these tenets to students and colleagues in nearby academies. In addition, they may be familiar with his principal doctrine late in life, “extending the innate knowledge of the good (*zhi liangzhi*),” which was put forward in 1520 after he had suppressed a rebellion led by a Ming prince. In sum, the Ming philosopher, statesman, and military commander is known for confronting extraordinary challenges throughout his life, becoming frustrated with emperors and the immorality among governing elites, and choosing to stand up to it all by reformulating the theoretical and practical basis for moral self-cultivation and fostering an intellectual movement.

Yet, the history behind Wang Yangming's intellectual development and the emergence of his student following is perhaps less understood. Scholars publishing in East Asia, for example, recognize a middle period in Wang's life when he taught other tenets, such as “making a decision [to pursue sagehood] (*li zhi*)” and “willing with integrity (*cheng yi*).”¹ This period has been defined as commencing when he returned to Beijing in 1510 to assume office and continuing until 1521, when he retired from a provincial assignment in Jiangxi. It is also the decade during which he accrued a substantial following of students, many of whom would go on to become important advocates of his thought.

The intellectual world of these students, almost all of whom were literati moving through the examination system or early on in their political careers, was shaped most fundamentally by a set of ideas and philosophical worldview that took shape during the Song Dynasty and then evolved into a kind of orthodoxy when the Yuan

and Ming imperial courts prescribed it as the basis for education and examination.² This school of thought is known as the Cheng-Zhu Learning of Principle or the Learning of the Way. As both an orthodoxy and comprehensive philosophy, it held a substantial attraction for literati. However, the Learning of the Way or elements of it were also frequently questioned. In Wang Yangming's time, for instance, literati who were intellectually dissatisfied with Cheng-Zhu philosophy might seek answers or alternatives in the rich philosophical worlds of Buddhism or Daoism.³ Alternatively, they could further their understanding of Confucian texts by seeking instruction from a Confucian master, becoming a "student of his gate." That is what many of Wang's students were doing during this "middle period."

But even this decade was replete with developments. First, Wang Yangming served as an official and taught informally in Beijing from 1510 to 1512, then in Chuzhou and Nanjing from 1513 to 1516, and finally in Jiangxi Province from 1517 to 1520. The characteristics of his teaching and student following evolved throughout this time. Here, we consider developments in Chuzhou and Nanjing, the second area where Wang Yangming taught a consequential group of followers. As the stories of Lu Cheng and the Lin brothers show, many young men found his ideas compelling and advocated for them after leaving Nanjing, making these years critical to the development of his following. However, as the case of Wang Dao demonstrates, others rejected them because Wang Yangming and his ideas had become controversial. Nevertheless, his disappointment over this only served to confirm the validity of his principal teaching while in Nanjing: "be truthful."

FROM BEIJING TO NANJING

Late in 1509, Wang Yangming departed Guizhou to assume an assignment as a magistrate in Jiangxi, but he only served six months before being summoned to the capital for reassignment. This likely owed to the fallout from Liu Jin's execution in 1510, which initiated a turnover in officialdom. But Wang only remained in Beijing for two years. He found that even with Liu out of the picture, little had changed. Disgusted by what he saw as the outrageous conduct of the emperor, eunuch interference, and sycophantic high officials, and disheartened by his impotence to serve with the Way in the succession of three mid-level central government offices he held, Wang wanted out of Beijing almost from the moment he arrived.⁴ But his wish was only granted on December 27, 1512, when he was promoted to vice minister of the Nanjing Court of the Imperial Stud. That assignment required him to relocate to Chuzhou, a town located to the northwest of the southern capital.

In the meantime, Wang taught a substantial number of colleagues and students who came and went, kept his company, and held philosophical discussions. Making the Way known by developing friendships and close ties to students offered some relief from his political predicament. Based on what can be gathered from the *Chronological Biography* and his letters alone, at least thirty scholars sought his instruction.⁵ About half were of roughly equal status, as scholar-officials who both held the highest degree and had established a record of service to the Ming court. The other half comprised younger men who had just entered or were about to enter the ranks of the national elite by accruing such credentials. About twenty

of these men, for a time, took Wang's thought seriously and went on to advocate for it to some degree, and they can therefore be considered as students of his gate (*men ren*).⁶

Wang arrived in Chuzhou on November 18, 1513, remaining there for six months. His principal biographer, Qian Dehong, summarizes how he spent his time:

The scenery in Chu is surpassingly beautiful. Master [Wang] was to oversee horse administration. The area is a backwater and his position entailed no real work. Each day he toured the area between Langya and Rangchuan with his students. At dusk, people sitting in a circle around Dragon Pond numbered one hundred, and the sound of singing shook the mountains and valleys. Students would request his advice on the spot, and sing, dance, and leap with joy.

As Qian saw it, so substantial was the crowd around Wang Yangming that the phenomenon of "large numbers of followers accompanying him began in Chu."⁷ This judgment would seem to be verified by an inscription Wang left on a rock face in the Langya Mountains. After describing sights they saw during an excursion, Wang wrote that twenty-eight students "brought wine flasks along, so we headed down and drank by the spring. By nightfall we were drunk, and everyone was altogether gratified by the experience."⁸ As for Nanjing, after Wang was appointed chief minister of the Court of State Ceremonial on May 15, 1514, he went there promptly and remained for twenty-nine months, until fall 1516. Here too, his duties were not demanding, and he could spend most of his time hanging out with friends and students, taking excursions, and composing poetry. In the *Chronological Biography*, Qian even lists twenty-four students who, as he characterized it, "came together at the gate of their master, and sought moral improvement [lit., filing away the stains], day and night without rest."⁹

By reviewing Wang's *Collected Works* and other evidence, about fifty individuals can be identified as having studied under him when he was in Chuzhou and Nanjing.

Table 16.1 Individuals who studied under Wang Yangming in Chuzhou or Nanjing.

<i>Surname and given name</i>	<i>Vital dates</i>	<i>Jinshi awarded (or juren)</i>	<i>Provincial home and status.</i>
Bai Yue	1498-1551	1532	Nanjing Metropolitan Area. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. ¹¹
Cai Zongyan	N/A	1517	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school. ¹²
Chen Jie	N/A	1508	Fujian. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
He Ao	1497-1559	1517	Zhejiang. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Huang Zongming	d. 1536	1514	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Ji Ben	1485-1563	1517	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school.

Ji Yuanheng	1482-1521	1514	Huguang. Chu (Huguang) Wang school.
Jiang Xin	1483-	1532	Huguang. Chu (Huguang) Wang school. ¹³
Lin Da	N/A	1514	Fujian. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Lin Yuanlun	N/A	N/A	Zhejiang. (discussed below)
Lin Yuanxu	N/A	1510 <i>juren</i>	Zhejiang. (discussed below)
Liu Xiao	N/A	<i>juren</i>	Jiangxi. Jiangyou (Jiangxi) Wang School.
Liu Yizhong	N/A	N/A	Huguang. Chu (Huguang) Wang school. ¹⁴
Lu Cheng	N/A	1517	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school.
Ma Mingheng	N/A	1517	Fujian. Min (Fujian) Wang School.
Meng Jin	N/A	1543	Nanjing Metropolitan Area (Chuzhou). Student in Chuzhou and later advocate of Wang's thought. ¹⁵
Meng Yuan	N/A	N/A	Nanjing Metropolitan Area (Chuzhou). Student in Chuzhou.
Qi Xian	1492-1553	1526	Southern Metropolitan Area (Chuzhou). Student in Chuzhou.
Tang Yuxian	N/A	1526	Huguang. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Wang Jiaxiu	N/A	N/A	Huguang. (discussed below)
Xu Ai	1487-1517	1508	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang School.
Xu Xiangqing	1479-1557	1517	Zhejiang. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Xue Kan	1486-1545	1517	Guangdong. Yue (Guangdong) Wang School.
Zhang Huan	1486-1561	1521	Nanjing Metropolitan Area. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Zhu Cheng	1477-1543	1517	Zhejiang. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Zhu Chi	1493-1546	1520	Zhejiang. Studied at his "master's gate" in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Zhou Ji	1483-1565	1510 <i>juren</i>	Zhejiang. Enthusiastically sought Wang's instruction in Nanjing. ¹⁶
Zhu Jie	N/A	1514	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang School.
Zou Shouyi	1491-1562	1511	Jiangxi. Jiangyou (Jiangxi) Wang School.

Most of these men were young or middle-aged scholars under age forty who obtained their *jinshi* degrees after 1511. Hence, although the documentable numbers were not much greater than the Beijing years, this was a group that, on average, was slightly younger and at an earlier point in their scholar-official careers. It was also more

consequential—about half of these students went on to advocate his ideas during the Zhengde and Jiajing reigns. Some of these more consequential students are listed in Table 16.1, as well as students for whom there is solid evidence of pedagogical exchange during this time, although it should be noted that several had pledged discipleship before 1513. Unless otherwise indicated, basic information will be found in the *Academica Sinica Ming-Qing biographical database* or Huang Zongxi's *The Records of Ming Schools (Ming ru xue an)*.¹⁰ The following four case studies illustrate developments in Nanjing.

LU CHENG

When the first volume (*juan*) of Wang Yangming's *A Record for Practice (Chuan xi lu)* was printed by his student Xue Kan in 1518, it included fourteen records from Xu Ai, seventy-four from Lu Cheng, as well as Xue's, for a total of 128 entries. This volume subsequently became one of the most important documents for seeing what Wang was teaching while in Beijing from 1510 to 1512 (Xu's records), Nanjing from 1514 to 1516 (Lu's records) and, finally, southern Jiangxi in 1517 and 1518. Regarding Lu Cheng's records alone, Huang Zongxi claimed that "When friends saw these, many consequently understood [Wang]. These many records all contain pertinent questioning; had it not been for Sir [Lu] no one would have been willing to ask the right questions in this way. What is more, in addition to asking the right questions, no one would have been capable of such sophistication, thoroughness, and exhaustiveness."¹⁷

Lu Cheng (style name Qingbo) met Xu Ai and Wang Yangming in Nanjing in 1514 or 1515 when Xu was serving as deputy bureau director at the southern capital's Ministry of War and Wang was serving as chief minister of the Nanjing Court of State Ceremonial. Xu recollected what had transpired when Lu was preparing to go to the capital for the 1517 metropolitan examination. Before Lu had even arrived in Nanjing, a guest called upon Xu, informing him of Lu's disciplined preparation for the examination: he arose early and studied late into the night, becoming so consumed by it that he would forget to taste things when eating and to sleep when resting. Indeed, Lu went beyond merely studying Song Dynasty commentaries on the classics and practicing crafting essays to seeking the profound meaning of the ancient classics; he thoroughly researched them and unabashedly sought instruction from others of his own generation. All of this demonstrated his focus and humility.¹⁸

"A pity!" Xu nevertheless remarked: "why not put this same kind of effort into seeking the Way?" The answer was obvious to the guest: "This will benefit him. As for those who speak of the Way nowadays, there are none like Master Yangming, but people are now loudly scorning and criticizing him; hence, should someone show admiration [for Wang], others will fear and avoid him. How is that of any benefit?" Xu disagreed. He explained that the source of the Way is defined by emptiness, while the operation of the Way is oneness. To arrive at the source, a person must overcome their self-centered propensities. Practicing humility will sprout a starting point. In other words, by being humble, a person can empty themselves out. Likewise, achieving oneness requires concentrating the spirit. Focusing gradually leads to single-minded concentration on the Way. "This is the crux of the matter," Xu stated, "therefore, Qingbo will come."¹⁹

Indeed, a few days later, Lu Cheng came to Nanjing, “to knock on the gate of Master Yangming,” ritually presenting a gift and declaring his studentship. As Xu had predicted, the virtues he evidenced in examination preparation had led him to the Way and, therefore, to Wang, who received him enthusiastically. Following, his teacher, “first calmed him with [his precept] of making a decision [to become a sage], then nurtured him with irrigating and watering [the sprouts] and, [once Lu] saw it, [Wang] conveyed in detail the practice of maintaining and cultivating, reflecting upon and observing.” Xu recounted that “From the transformations of Heaven and earth to similarities and differences in the varying opinions of the crowd, while there was nothing that wasn’t discussed, he was also ‘perpetually changed by instruction without words’.”²⁰

Apparently, the impact of his spoken teaching and silent influence was substantial: “were it not for the master (Wang), I would nearly have lost my life,” Lu told Xu. Wang’s instruction had completely changed Lu’s understanding of the path to sagehood: “The Way really is with me—why engage in pursuing externals? Learning does indeed come in solitude; why engage in encyclopedic study?”²¹ He now understood that the correct approach to learning brings a chain of consequences. When a person knows how to learn correctly, he will gain a full understanding of what higher moral principle (*tianli*) means. Once higher moral principle is grasped, he will have the capacity to fully actualize his human nature. With this ability, he will be able to assist others in doing the same. Then, he will be able to stand between heaven and earth and assist in nature’s creative process.

Having understood all this, Lu Cheng found that the *Doctrine of the Mean* made sense where it states: “Only the most perfectly genuine man in all the world can thread together all the great constant norms of the world, plant the great roots of the world, and understand the nurturing transformations of heaven and earth.”²² Hence, Lu concluded that “From here on out I will know that the learning of Master [Wang] uniquely draws from what is true and real in human nature and sentiments, and that nothing about it isn’t enormously effective in this way.”²³ That is why he found his disparaging critics to be so misguided.

Wang Yangming also composed a piece for Lu upon the occasion of his departure, recalling his student’s journey. The day before they visited their master, Lu and two other students had gotten together to discuss what Lu had learned. One observed that “Qingbo has made progress in his studies each day. When I first met Qingbo, his ego was puffed up like clouds in the sky, and his words poured forth like flowing rapids. Now, however, with each passing day he becomes more reserved, contented, balanced, and happy to do the right thing, altogether unlike what was the case before.”²⁴

His friends felt that this change in his personality was proof of progress. One highlighted how Lu’s enthusiasm for his teacher had grown:

When Qingbo first met Master [Wang], he would visit him once a month. Later, he would go see him every ten days; after that he would visit once every five or six days and then once every three or four days. Thereafter, he moved next to Master [Wang], subsequently asking him for permission to sweep his room below the storehouse, serving him day and night.²⁵

As a result, Lu's friend explained, he obtained a close understanding of Wang's Way, adding that "In the matter of virtue, nothing is more excellent than respecting the worthy; in the matter of learning, nothing brings quicker [results] than being close to one's master." His friend found that Lu's admirable conduct notably differed from that of those who sought men of high status so as to rise in power or who wandered the marketplaces so as to enrich themselves.

Apparently, Lu did not believe in himself in the way his friends did. Of his intensely personal struggle with his teacher's ideas, he informed them that, contrary to what they believed, he was in reality regressing every day. When he first heard these ideas he had mixed feelings, alternating from feeling skeptical and alarmed to being pleased by them. He explained that at points he didn't know what direction to take and felt dispirited about it all. The confusion and darkness would intensify, but then suddenly he would catch a glimpse and see some progress. Burdensome selfish preoccupations would cease and then pop back up. A mass of delusion would attack and become even more entrenched. It was like pulling a boat stuck on a sandbar as hard as possible while getting nowhere.²⁶

Wang also recounted how he praised their efforts while also counseling a measured approach. On the one hand, it was a good thing for Lu to be so critical of himself because that would motivate him to persevere in trying to become a better person. Likewise, his friends' encouraging words should have the same result. Nevertheless, Wang warned, excessive self-criticism could become counterproductive and lead to backsliding, as might excessive praise, in which case a person would feel ashamed at failing to live up to others' expectations.²⁷ Wang did not want his students to become dispirited and give up on the sagely project of self-betterment.

Lu's questions for Wang Yangming, as recorded in the *Record for Practice*, suggest a sharp, intellectually curious mind, well-versed in but unsure of the meaning of his master's teachings, both in terms of how they applied to his own self-development and how they fit with what he had learned in his studies over the years. Most pertained to Confucian discourse, especially as it had been shaped by Learning of the Way (*dao xue*) schools formed during the Song Dynasty. He did pose many questions of a historical nature, such as those concerning the conduct of or statements made by King Wen and King Wu of the early Zhou Dynasty, Confucius, and the Han Dynasty philosopher Wang Tong. For example, "Lu raised the issue: Confucius said that King Wu was not altogether good. I'm afraid that he was not completely satisfied with him."²⁸ He also asked numerous questions about the meaning of much-discussed language in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning*. For example, "When the mind has become quieted and stilled through contemplation is that 'the mean before feelings arise', or not?"²⁹

Furthermore, he posed several questions about Mencius including about the chapter [in *Mengzi*] stating, "Grasped then preserved; abandoned then lost."³⁰ He cited terminology employed by the Song masters Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi, and Lu Jiuyuan concerning matters of the mind and learning: "Cheng asked about Lu Xiangshan's doctrine that people should devote their efforts to relationships with others and what's going on out there in the world."³¹ A few questions more directly targeted Wang's primary doctrines as of that point in time. As he noted, "[Lu] asked about getting serious about one's purpose in life (*li zhi*)."³²

Some records offer glimpses into the personal significance of these dialogues for Lu:

While I was residing temporarily at the Court of State Ceremony, a letter unexpectedly arrived from home stating that my son was seriously ill. I was so sick at heart that I could hardly stand it. The Teacher said, "This is the time for you to exert effort. If you let it all go at this moment, what use is philosophical discussion when nothing much is happening? People should steel themselves at just such a time as this. A father's love for his son is of course the noblest feeling. Nevertheless, higher moral principle by nature has a place where it is centered and harmonious. Exceeding that is self-centered. On such an occasion most people feel that according to higher moral principle they should be upset. So they never stop feeling sick at heart. They do not realize that their emotions are imbalanced because they are suffering."³³

Wang also explained that the problem with most people is not that they lack emotion but rather that they are overly emotional. As he saw it, excessive emotion is not true to the nature of the mind, the essence of which flows naturally through sentiment. Hence, Wang stressed that the original state of higher moral principle has natural bounds that should not be overstepped. A person should discern the mind's essence, for nothing can be added to or taken away from it.³⁴

Lu also informed Wang Yangming that although he felt fine when alone and sitting quietly in meditation, that was not the case when he had to deal with things. Thus, he raised a perplexing problem that many other students had encountered and one about which Wang often spoke while in Chuzhou and Nanjing: although cultivating a still mind in a quiet setting might be relatively easy, it is difficult to maintain that equanimity when agitated by the exigencies of an active life. Thus, only practicing meditation is insufficient. When active, one must also "exert effort to master oneself." "One must be steeled in the actual affairs of life," he explained and, tapping the authoritative Song master, Cheng Hao, he added, "only then can one stand firm and only then is one able to remain still whether active or tranquil."³⁵ In other words, a quieted and undisturbed mind can be maintained no matter what a person might be doing, but only as long as he engages in the correct method of self-cultivation. Moral self-mastery is the route to equanimity.

About a year after he had departed Nanjing, Wang wrote Lu in reply to a letter, chastising him for allowing ingrained thinking regarding the meaning of "wide-ranging studies" to hinder his progress.³⁶ When a person isn't calculating the benefits of taking a particular course of action, but rather seeking to accord with higher moral principle, everything that happens is in fact the place for learning. Consequently, a person can talk all day about morality, philosophy, and literature, but if such talk is only in the service of advancing self-interest and accruing prestige and profit, nothing good will come of it. The goal must be to shift away from a life driven by self-centered desires to striving to become a moral person.

Nevertheless, although Lu showed his lack of self-confidence in 1515, and Wang chastised him in 1516, he would remain one of Wang's most cherished students and support his teacher in various ways during the Jiajing emperor's reign. In that same letter, his master had much praise: "The conscientious inquiries about learning in your letter, [which stem from] your fear of failure, are sufficient for me to recognize no letup in your determination to make progress in self-cultivation. I am also very pleased! Without you, upon whom could I rely to effectuate this Way, so that those who come are moved to join in?"³⁷

LIN YUANXU AND LIN YUANLUN

Lin Yuanxu (style name Dianqing) and his younger brother Yuanlun were two of Wang Yangming's students when he was living in Nanjing. They were from Linhai, a county located on the east coast of Zhejiang Province.³⁸ Yuanxu obtained his provincial examination degree in 1510, and may have met Wang (who was then serving as an examiner) when taking the triennial examination. After spending perhaps a few months at the southern capital, they dropped by some time in 1515 to bid their master farewell and request any last-minute advice he might have. Wang sent them off with an essay concerning one of his principal tenets at this time, "be genuine (*li cheng*)."

In his parting words, Wang indicated that Yuanxu and Yuanlun had been studying the *Great Learning* and also that he had been educating them about this tenet. Surprisingly, when Yuanxu "requested the benefit of his instruction," Wang simply reiterated, "Be genuine." But such a simplistic reply didn't sit well: "Does learning amount only to this?" Yuanxu then listed several categories of objects in the natural and social worlds and stressed how inexhaustible these were. He pointed out that scholars in ancient times would tire themselves out thinking these things through day after day, even for years, but never arrive at the starting point for it all or get to the bottom of the mystery. "And yet," he asked, "[you] say 'be genuine'. Does being genuine fully explain all of this?"³⁹

Wang insisted that was the case: "Being genuine fully covers it." The genuine, he explained, is true principle (*shi li*). It is one and undivided. Nothing can be added to it, for if something could then it would be false. The most genuine is also never-ending, and all phenomena in the universe, as described by Yuanxu, have the attributes they have as a consequence of the genuine.⁴⁰ In brief, the genuine is the real, one, and constant; it is, in fact, the ontological foundation of reality.

Li cheng might be translated in other ways, such as "stand upon integrity," "establish sincerity," or "be truthful." All denote actualizing the virtue of honesty but indicate that doing so opens the individual to something that defines reality intrinsically. But Yuanxu didn't quite understand the revelatory nature of Wang's approach: "Is that all there is to learning? Heaven and earth are vast, and the stars adorn it, the sun and moon illuminate it, and the four seasons cycle through it. If we were to draw out similar categories of things to speak about, they would be inexhaustible." Wang Yangming, however, didn't reply to him on his conceptually dualistic terms, rather seeking to induce a conceptual shift, much like the Chan master does with a public case (*gong'an*): "The genuine is actual principle. In Heaven and earth, [the genuine] is what adorns it, brightens it, and cycles through it, and the boundless categories of analogous things that can be spoken of are also all the genuine."⁴¹ That is the reason why scholars in ancient times could never arrive at the starting point and get to the bottom of the mystery. For Wang, standing upon integrity ultimately opens the individual to the real.

Yuanxu found Wang's explanation enlightening. Standing and bowing, he exclaimed, "Today, I finally see just how it is that master's teaching gets to the crux of the matter. Please permit me to follow this for the rest of my life. I wouldn't dare question it ever again!" Wang concluded by encouraging the Lin brothers to get the message out to friends living in Zhejiang whom he believed may also be getting together to discuss such matters, and the brothers appeared to have done just that.⁴²

About a year later, in 1516, when Wang boarded a vessel moored on the Yangzi River in preparation for moving on to an assignment in southern China, he dispatched a letter to the Lins, further explaining methods of self-cultivation that aid a person in becoming genuine.⁴³ Their master praised them for convening meetings of seekers on a regular basis for the purpose of mutual encouragement, also proposing that they abide by a few basic rules:

When not discussing and debating knotty issues, don't turn to gossip, criticizing other people's merits and shortcomings and successes and failures or doing anything else that is of no benefit. Just put yourself in the right frame of mind and sit in silence, guarding against wickedness and keeping truthfulness in mind. This is the way to rectify the foundations and clarify the wellspring, and of utmost importance when you are trying to grow in knowledge. If you faithfully carry this out and foster it to maturity, then each person should, according to their own ability, make some progress. When meeting, only eat simple meals and vegetable soup; don't eat a lot of meat dishes and waste money on wine and food. These are also ways that burdening the mind and harming the will begins, and are not to be dismissed as trivial matters and consequently neglected.⁴⁴

Although they never obtained *jinshi* degrees, during the Jiajing emperor's reign Yuanxu and Yuanlun received appointments as magistrates and established solid records as problem solvers. Both also remained committed to spreading the Way. After convicting a monk belonging to the Guangci Temple of murder, Yuanxu converted the temple to an academy. He would bring students together there to discuss principles and the Way. As for Yuanlun, he passed through a series of prefectural assignments, eventually ending up as prefect of Chuzhou, where Wang Yangming had once taught. Having been deeply influenced by him, Yuanlun chose to name the academy he built there after him. At the Yangming Academy, he spent time with Chu scholars interpreting his teachings.⁴⁵

WANG JIAXIU

Several of Wang Yangming's students were individuals whom he had taught before and who made the journey to Chuzhou or Nanjing specifically to see him and learn more about his ideas. Some travelled quite far, like Wang Jiaxiu (style name Shifu), who trekked all the way from distant Chenzhou Prefecture (roughly today's Yuanling County, Hunan) to study under him. In 1510, Wang had been reassigned from his punitive assignment in Guizhou to the magistracy of Luling, Jiangxi. On the way, he passed through Chenzhou, staying over at a temple located on Hu Xi Mountain, where he gathered together with students and taught doctrines he had been formulating. That is where Wang Jiaxiu first met him. "After that," according to the Yuanling Gazetteer, "he followed him everywhere."⁴⁶

Like Wang Yangming at one time in his life, Jiaxiu was intensely interested in Daoist and Buddhist thought, believing that from a spiritual angle these traditions had more to offer than the kinds of conventional Confucian learning he saw dominating literati education and scholarship. One conversation he held with Wang is recorded in the *Record of Practice*. Here, Jiaxiu states his position on the three traditions.

He proposes that the Buddhist guides people towards the Way with the promise of transcending life and death, and the Daoist guides people towards the Way with the promise of longevity. In both cases, they really do lead people in the right direction. In fact, investigation into where these paths finally go reveals that even if they are not orthodox from a Confucian perspective, the end point is similar to the Confucian sage's higher realm. "The ultimate reach of Daoism and Buddhism is roughly similar to the Confucian's," stated Jiaxiu, "it is just that although they possess the higher realm, they leave the lower realm behind."⁴⁷ Hence, he concluded, what they achieve doesn't fully resemble the kind of perfection attained by the sage.

Nevertheless, Jiaxiu further reasoned, insofar as these traditions similarly possess the higher component, they should not be denigrated. On the contrary, because Confucians in later ages have only understood something of the lower component, they have broken up and distorted the sage's Way. Instead, they have unavoidably gone down a wrong path, gravitating towards memorizing and reciting literary texts, engaging in literary composition, pursuing fame and profit, and engaging in textual exegesis, all of which are of no benefit to a person. In fact, these Confucians have not matched the attainments of practitioners of these other traditions. Seeking to purify the mind and curtail their desires, these practitioners are able to transcend the bondages of the conventional world. Thus, scholars cannot simply reject these traditions out of hand. Rather, they should meaningfully direct their aspirations towards the learning of the sages. Only then will these other traditions lose their appeal, and simply die out.

Wang generally agreed: "what you have stated is largely the case."⁴⁸ Indeed, Jiaxiu's position was very close to one Wang had taken in discussions he held with his close friend Zhan Ruoshui (1466–1560) in 1512, so much so that one suspects Jiaxiu already knew of this and was telling his teacher what he might be pleased to hear. Both Zhan and Wang had the overwhelming sense that scholars were overly oriented to exteriors and bereft of interior knowing. Hence, Wang forcefully pointed out to his friend how ironic it was that these scholars, while claiming the orthodox traditions taught by Confucius and Mencius, poured self-righteous scorn on Buddhism and Daoism: "Are they capable of anything like Daoist tranquility, purity, and preserving nature, or the Buddhist's inquiry into mind, nature, and destiny?"⁴⁹ In fact, because scholars in their day had become so distant from the original Confucian meaning of humaneness and righteousness, and nature and destiny, Wang considered them far worse off than those they disdained. Although the Daoist and Buddhist paths differed from that of the Confucian sage, they each directed the individual towards some level of spiritual realization. Ultimately, that was what defined the Way of the sages.⁵⁰

For this reason, prior to and during his time in Chuzhou, Wang Yangming did encourage students to sit in meditation, just as he often did, because this practice was conducive to drawing them away from their preoccupation with conceptual clarification and scholastic debates. Likewise, he was concerned with the crudeness and depravity of literati conduct, and therefore sought to guide his followers along a high-minded, enlightened path.⁵¹ But the results weren't always what he sought. In Chuzhou, he noted that over time, "they gradually developed the defect of fondness for tranquility and disgust with activity and degenerated into lifelessness like dry wood."⁵² Clearly, practitioners were enamored with the states that these practices

generated, here described as “emptiness and the void”. That is why some students were deliberately “advocating abstruse and subtle theories.”⁵³ Unhappy with such glibly spiritual talk, Wang Yangming changed tactics. While in Nanjing, he rather directed his followers to hold in mind higher moral principle and rid desire (*cun tianli qu renyu*), engage in self-reflection and examination (*xing cha*), and exercise self-discipline (*ke ji*).⁵⁴

In Chuzhou, he also explained to Jiaxiu his personal reasons for having decisively embraced the Confucian Way:

Wang Jiaxiu and Xiao Hui liked to talk about Daoism and Buddhism. Our master once warned them, stating: “When I was young I sought in the philosophy of the sages without getting anything out of it. I also once earnestly applied myself to Daoism and Buddhism. Later, I lived among natives for three years, and for the first time saw the general outlines of the learning of the sages, and regretted having mistakenly applied my efforts for twenty years. As for the philosophies of Buddhism and Daoism, there is only the slightest difference between what is most excellent about them and the [Way of the] sages.”⁵⁵

Noting that these Ways were “not so easy to distinguish” because the distinctions were quite subtle, Wang insisted that the only way to understand this was through real commitment to the philosophy of the sages. Speculation alone would not cut it.

Wang Yangming’s own commitment yielded insights he conveyed in a piece written for a volume Jiaxiu had composed. In this, his Confucian learning, and what is distinctive about it as he understood it and would have wanted his students to understand it, shines through. Citing Confucius and Cheng Hao, he reiterated the fundamental themes of selfless humanity and empathy that he found to be central to the Confucian tradition:

The man of humanity sees heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things as one body; there is nothing that is not one’s self. Therefore, [Confucius] said, “[the man of humanity], wishing to establish himself establishes others, and desiring his own success leads others to success.”⁵⁶

He then explained more concretely how the humane individual’s sentiments and conduct differ from those lacking in virtue:

The reason why the ancients were capable of seeing another’s goodness as if it was their own and, upon seeing what is not good in another, felt bad for them, as if they themselves had pushed that person into a ditch, is also their humaneness, and that’s it. Nowadays, [when folks] see what is good in others they become jealous over being surpassed, and [when they] see what is not good they stare at them angrily and view them with disdain, never again calculating comparisons. Is this not a matter of sinking into extreme inhumanity without even being aware of it?⁵⁷

Finally, he linked these virtues to his tradition, thereby distinguishing it from Daoism and Buddhism:

The learning of the gentleman is learning for oneself. Because it is learning for oneself, the self must be conquered. When the self is conquered then [you are] without self. A person without self is without “me.” I have seen many instances where learners in our time hold to their egocentricity and self-interest, rather believing this to be learning for oneself; [or] lost in the boundlessness, they enter a self-defeating annihilation, and are of the opinion they are without self. Goodness! Without even being aware of it, they thought they were aspiring to the learning of the sages, and yet degenerated into the aberrant ideas of Buddhism and Daoism. This is also to be deplored! “Is there a single word which will serve as a guide to conduct throughout one’s life?” [The Master said], ‘It is perhaps *‘shu*’ [sympathetic understanding].”⁵⁸ “Nothing will bring one closer to benevolence than to force oneself to act out of sympathetic understanding.”⁵⁹ This one word, “sympathetic understanding,” is of critical importance to students. And for my dear friend, because it remains a most excellent prescription with which to confront the malady, being diligent about taking it regularly is the right thing to do!⁶⁰

The malady ascribed to Jiaxiu was surely his enthusiasm for the “higher reaches” he viewed as the most merit worthy dimension of Buddhism and Daoism. Wang Yangming thus prescribed a Confucian ideal rooted in what he considered to be the original condition of moral awareness: the oneness of all creation, a oneness only fully apprehended through the selflessness of which all are capable but also, to an extent, in all acts of empathy. It is by acting out of empathy that the most fundamental knowledge of what it means to be human is realized.

When Wang Jiaxiu and Xiao Hui were preparing to depart Chuzhou and return home, Wang sent them off with a poem, emphasizing the simplicity of his Way:

Scholar Wang also practices nourishing longevity, and scholar Xiao really admires Chan.

From a thousand *li* afar, they came before the mountains of Chu to acknowledge me as their master.

My Way is not the Buddha’s [Way], and my method of growing in knowledge is not the Daoist immortals’ [Way].

Open and level, following it is simple and easy; neither unfathomable nor mysterious, you can use in whatever you do each day.

Upon hearing of this, they wavered between doubt and belief, but then their minds awakened.

Compare this to a mirror buried in dirt, though enveloped in darkness the light within is complete.

One has only to remove the darkening covering, and the bright mirror will reflect beauty and ugliness.

Conventional learning is like cutting colored silk, with things like decorating and adorning spreading in all directions.

Branches and leaves meander all about, but the living growth nevertheless remains without a source.

The way a gentleman grows in knowledge is by spreading seeds and cultivating the roots.

The sprouts gradually come up, and abundant growth comes from heaven.
The fall breeze led them [Wang and Xiao] to think of returning home, together
beating the drums on a Xiang River boat.
Xiang [Huguang] has a wealth of outstanding scholars, many of whom frequently came to my gate.
Before we went down our diverging paths I composed these words, borrowing them to express my true feelings.

For Wang Jiaxiu, then, Wang Yangming had tried to define a “simple and easy” path neither too conventional nor too otherworldly. But whether his student returned home with this message, as his master wanted, is difficult to say, because Jiaxiu also accompanied Wang in Nanjing. Although Huang Zongxi and Xu Ai record eight other scholars who came all the way from Huguang (Chenzhou and Changde) to study under Wang Yangming there, nothing is said about Jiaxiu.⁶¹ While some of these men would go on to teach his ideas back home, what became of Jiaxiu is unknown.

WANG DAO

In 1515, Wang Yangming sent a letter to his close friend, Huang Wan, confiding in him about how troubled he was by the turn that his relationship with Wang Dao (style name Chunfu) had taken. In fact, he wasn't quite sure what had gone wrong. It was only after Dao had left for a new position at the Ministry of Personnel in Beijing that Wang began to feel Dao was distancing himself. While both worked in Nanjing, Dao lived close by and they would see one another somewhat infrequently, about once a month. “There was cordiality,” Wang explained to Huang, “all of which derived from sincere kindness and heartfelt affection.”⁶² If Dao had an issue with him, Wang didn't realize it.

For some time, Dao had been one of his finest students and a close friend. When Wang was serving in Beijing in 1511, Dao came to the capital, took the highest examination, obtained his *jinshi*, and entered the Hanlin Academy. He was also attending Wang's philosophical discussions and seeking his advice on various matters. After Dao departed for a new post at the Nanjing Directorate of Education late that year, the two men occasionally corresponded, and once Wang Yangming arrived in Nanjing they saw each other again. So Dao's estrangement did bother him: “after that, I beat myself up over this, wondering how it could be possible, in my relations with others, to have such ill-feeling, even stumbling into the pit of such pedestrian disputes.”⁶³

Indeed, intellectual disagreements and unpleasantness transpiring between students following different masters appear to have been the source of the discord. Wang also told Huang Wan about a mutual acquaintance who had come down from the capital and spoken in detail about how Dao and others were gossiping about Wang behind his back. Yet, refusing to think badly of his friend, he told Huang, “my personal suspicion was that dishonest and petty students, hoping to create a divide among our coterie, by meddling and sowing discord, had fabricated things.” Hence, he chose to believe that “this didn't necessarily all come from the mouth of Chunfu.”⁶⁴

Clearly, Wang had become controversial among some literati circles, and that may have made a young man of twenty-eight just beginning his political career leery

about further association with him. Yet, although social pressure was likely critical, that is obscured by emerging philosophical differences between a teacher and a self-assured student. Indeed, already in 1513, when Wang was staying in Chuzhou and Dao in Nanjing, Dao sent Wang a letter inquiring about a number of different ideas in a tone that struck his teacher as highly opinionated and dogmatic.⁶⁵ So Wang told Dao it seemed pointless to reply, and that his first solution was to wait until he was in Nanjing, where they could address these matters in person. Nevertheless, knowing that the vicissitudes of life might prevent their ever meeting, and assuring himself that Dao's smug confidence might actually reflect insecurity, Wang told him he just couldn't drop the matter.⁶⁶

In his letter, Wang reiterated what Dao had affirmed ("it is true that learning is for illuminating the good and becoming a truthful person") as well as the many questions he raised: What is referred to as the good? Where is it originally to be found? Where is it now? What practice is required to illuminate it? How is one to begin? Is there an order one must follow in the process of becoming a truthful person? What is made truthful?⁶⁷ For Wang, these questions were a sign of progress. On the one hand, Dao had observed some form of contemplative practice, for Wang pointed out to him that he had at one time only understood "observing the mind" and had therefore succumbed to a kind of quietism. Indeed, just a few months later Wang reminded Dao that "merely sitting motionlessly, keeping watch over this muddled, ignorant, disorderly, agitated mind is just Chan quiet-sitting to become calmed, not what is referred to as 'one must always be doing something (*bi you shi yan*).'"⁶⁸ Wang suggested that because he had failed to practice self-transcendence, Dao hadn't united stillness with action. That is why he felt confused in dealing with matters. Fortunately, such poignant questioning provided an important corrective.

On the other hand, Wang found that Dao had, "without realizing it, also been misled by confused [ideas] and gone in pursuit of unrelated things."⁶⁹ Hence, he was making the same error as scholars who adhered to a conventional understanding of Zhu Xi's teachings and what it meant in terms of moral self-improvement. As he would shortly tell Dao, "this is not the kind of learning that builds a foundation and reaches the source. Each sentence is correct, each character fits, and yet in the end you won't be able to enter the Way of Yao and Shun."⁷⁰

Wang therefore launched into a lengthy discussion on the meaning of "illuminating the good and becoming a truthful person," answering each of Dao's questions. Regarding the good and its origin, he explained,

The mind presides over the body, human nature is within mind, and the good originates from human nature. This is what Mengzi meant when he spoke of the goodness of human nature. Goodness is my nature. It has no particular form that can be denoted, nor location that can be determined. As such, how can it be an object, one that can be gotten from some place?⁷¹

Dao was clearly on the wrong track—a result, his teacher told him, of failing "to examine the actual learning of the school of the sages" and of being constrained by the exegetical interpretations of later times, according to which "each thing and object has its own good, and so to see the supreme good, one must begin with things and objects."⁷² Wang Yangming knew that Dao was holding Zhu Xi's ideas in front

of him and accusing him of mystical theories about the nature of mind. Whereas Dao saw morality in terms of rules and abstract principles—the particular constellation of which depended on circumstances that must be examined—Wang had been teaching about the origins of goodness in human nature, and how human nature is beyond form or any particular construct. For Wang, mind is identical with higher moral principle:

What is referred to as a [moral] principle (*li*) pertaining to an object, righteousness in our handling of this object, and the good in human nature are differently named depending on what is being denoted, but in reality all are my mind. There is no object, matter, principle, justice, or good external to the mind. The good means that in handling some matter, my mind is pure in principle and uncontaminated by human artificiality. It is not the case that it can be found out there somewhere in a fixed location in affairs and things. If a matter is handled justly I will know it is right in my mind and heart. What is right can't be obtained out there somewhere by seizing and taking it. To "investigate" means to investigate this and to "extend [knowledge]" means to extend this. Insisting that the highest good is to be found in each matter and thing is to divide the two. . . . Human nature is without this and that. Principle is without this and that. The good is without this and that.⁷³

Wang drove home the point that moral knowledge is made possible by a self-transcending mind, a mind free of falsity, that unifies the moral subject and the object of moral knowledge, making for the possibility of a seamless moral life, whereby the person is so intimately involved in it that they perceive no division between what is going on out there and what is going on inside oneself. As for the question of how one becomes a truthful person, Wang denied that there were special steps or necessary effort, and rather made the case that knowing the good and becoming truthful are not separate matters. By removing falsehood, a person comes to understand the good and, in so doing, becomes truthful. All the conceptual processes learned scholars consider so important—wide-ranging learning, careful inquiry, prudent reflection, and clear discrimination—were to be directed towards this end.

Dao's perplexity over Wang's formulas about mind and morality wasn't his alone; many other students had been at a loss to understand him, constantly expressing doubt. But, more important, students to other masters appear to have egged on Dao's skepticism. Indeed, correspondence by Wang's friend, Huang Wan, indicates why Dao had parted ways intellectually. In 1514, Huang wrote a letter to Shao Rui (*js.* 1508), who was then serving in the Nanjing Ministry of Rites, and another to a former acquaintance, Li Xun'an.⁷⁴ Huang was clearly concerned. He had been receiving word of heated debates taking place between Wang Yangming's students and students of Wei Xiao (1483–1545, style name Zicai). So he was hoping to gather more information from Shao and Li, especially about Wei's philosophy. Furthermore, he sought to defend Wang Yangming by explaining Wang's position and also by advancing his own ecumenical vision in the hopes that the two parties might realize that they shared the same goals. Lastly, he hoped that Shao and Li would intervene to reduce what he saw as needless friction between imperious students.

The information Huang Wan had gathered led him to conclude that “those who see Bo’an [Wang Yangming] as right believe [Wei] Zicai is mistaken, while those who see Zicai as right see Bo’an as wrong.”⁷⁵ For him, that was unacceptable because, as he told Shao, “Within our country there couldn’t be more than a handful of men with aspirations [to sagehood] like our own. Yet, even with so few, they still fracture like this, unwilling to come together to earnestly discuss matters and seriously search for what’s right, rather acting pompously and ridiculing one another, just like boorish society.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, as he informed both men, what little he had learned of Wei Xiao suggested that he was a learned man who conducted himself with integrity. For that reason, Huang believed that a mutual acquaintance could reason with him and defuse the situation.

Unsure as to Wei’s precise views, Huang had learned enough to know that the debate was an iteration of the famous one that had transpired between the Song philosopher Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan (Xiangshan) over the relative priority of “learned inquiry into the Way” versus “revering one’s virtuous nature.” That is, this was a debate over the best method for becoming a moral person. As he understood it, while Zhu Xi emphasized conscientious and wide-ranging study, Lu Jiuyuan placed more importance on obtaining contemplative insight into human nature. Now, Wang Yangming was, in a pejorative sense, being categorized as belonging to the Lu camp, which also made him susceptible to being labeled a Chan Buddhist. “These days,” Huang opined, “scholars all claim that Lu [Jiuyuan’s] learning focuses on revering the virtuous nature and doesn’t touch upon learned inquiry into the Way, and therefore suspect him of being a Chan Buddhist, so they just cast aside what he’s actually said.”⁷⁷

In speaking of this debate to his friends, Huang Wan was really addressing the current one in the only way he could absent more information about Wei Xiao’s ideas. He stressed that Zhu and Lu held mutual respect for one another. He insisted that as opposed to exploding in acrimony over trivial matters like people were currently doing, Song masters studied one another’s work and benefited from it. Finally, he highlighted the shared goal of sagehood and emphasized that the ideas of both Zhu and Lu were beneficial to achieving it. In fact, with both Shao and Li, he forcefully argued that this debate was not about choosing sides. Rather, it was about what it would take to change and mature as an individual, and to acquire insight and find self-fulfillment. He insisted that the measure of the worth of an idea was not the status of the person who put it forward but rather the extent to which it served these goals. By that standard, Huang stressed, there might be something of value in both Zhu Xi’s and Lu Jiuyuan’s ideas.

While Huang Wan was corresponding with these friends, he was also corresponding with Wang Dao, who had been spending time with Wei Xiao and was soliciting Huang’s thoughts about where Wang Yangming stood on the matter of the Zhu-Lu controversy. Here again, Huang warned him that there was no place in the learning of the sages for smug sectarian rivalry, also speaking of his philosophy of mind, because his ideas as of this point in his life were so close to those of his friend Wang Yangming, and he likely sought to draw Dao back into their orbit. He told Dao that a person who wished to study what made a sage a sage must only seek within his mind. To do so, he must first overcome and rid the camouflaging caused by the false, self-centered self. Once he does that, the essence of mind becomes transparent and the foundation of all under Heaven is established.

Huang insisted that Zhu and Lu both aimed to bring forward this realization but that each had differing attainments and biases; hence, neither was altogether complete. Nevertheless, Huang positioned himself more closely to Lu because he believed that scholars erred in emphasizing on becoming more knowledgeable, in a factual sense, instead of engaging in practices that rid selfishness and revealed this moral mind. Unfortunately, he felt that they were merely seeking with a dualistic mind, a method that only deepened the camouflaging.⁷⁸

Neither Wang Yangming's nor Huang Wan's letters, all of which come across as both defensive and combative in view of the dominance of the Zhu Xi's philosophy, persuaded Wang Dao to be open-minded about their views on the nature of mind and its foundational significance. In fact, later in life, Dao wrote numerous essays that were highly critical of nearly every major doctrine that Wang had proposed.⁷⁹ He also respectfully corresponded with Wang Yangming and some of his students. Although the earliest extant correspondence dates to several years after the events in Nanjing, I think it still accurately captures where Dao was headed philosophically in 1514. In a letter to Wang Yangming's longtime close friend and student Zhu Jie, Dao was adamant in his opinion that Wang's theory of "extending knowledge" and seeking within the mind oversimplified intellectual inquiry:

[he] wishes to maintain that this completely covers the method for engaging in learning. As to the category of things of a similar nature to these—what is referred to in the *Book of Changes* as "[the gentleman] studies in order to gather knowledge, inquires in order to distinguish"; in the *Doctrine of the Mean* as "study [broadly], inquire [probingly], contemplate [carefully], distinguish [clearly]"; in the *Analects* as "[the gentleman] enlarges his learning through literature and restrains himself with ritual" and "[I am simply a man] who loves the past and who is diligent in investigating it" and "[I withdrew and] studied the ritual, [I withdrew and] studied the Odes"—he throws all of it out and states that the Way to engage in learning is solely to focus on the mind and that's it.⁸⁰

Clearly, Dao had veered away from and eventually rejected Wang Yangming's philosophy because he believed his one-time teacher had reduced complex matters to contemplative insight into the nature of mind.

The issues Wang Yangming faced with Wang Dao became the occasion for serious philosophical reflection. First, in his letter to Huang Wan about this matter, he bemoaned the bad times they were living through, taking as a sign of this how close friends with whom one enjoys much mutual love and respect will change their positions to please others and conform to social pressure. Yet he didn't wish to believe that such might transpire between friends in his circle: "I had told myself that even should the few individuals belonging to our coterie be dispersed over and residing in enemy countries or feuding families, it couldn't possibly come to this!" But Wang's choice—and what he counseled—under such circumstances was self-reflection. Even in the case of Wang Dao, he concluded that their affection for one another ran deep, transcending worldly matters, so while Dao was treating him badly, he didn't really mean it. In the end, Wang Yangming insisted that the most important lesson was the need for individuals to be sincere: "Under these circumstances the right thing to do is to look at and scold oneself, and that's it! Mengzi has said: 'If one loves others and they are not affectionate, one should

examine one's own benevolence. If in one's actions one does not succeed, one should always seek for it in oneself.' Unless one experiences this personally, they can't understand the sincere intention and lasting flavor of these words."⁸¹

Second, he explained to Huang Wan that this whole affair only further solidified his belief in the correctness of one of his major tenets as of the Nanjing years:

Recently when discussing acquiring knowledge with my friends, I have only two words to say: be truthful! To kill someone the knife must be placed on the throat. When we engage in learning we apply our efforts to entering the subtle place in the marrow of our hearts, the natural honesty and radiance. Even should self-centered desires sprout, that is truly a case of a speck of snow touching a giant furnace: the great foundation of all under Heaven is established. As for trivial things, embellishment, and comparisons, and everything nowadays considered studying, inquiring, contemplating, and distinguishing—it's all more than enough for people to develop the traits of arrogance and to willingly go along with lies. People believe they are getting wiser and brilliant without even realizing they've sunk to being vicious, out to harm others, and jealous. This is really a shame!⁸²

So as a personal matter, but also with regard to what he wanted his followers to know about his evolving pedagogy, this whole incident served to confirm to Wang the importance of being truthful. He even told Huang Wan that "this is pretty much the true transmission of the sages which, unfortunately, has sunken so low and been drowned out and buried for so long." He felt that people no longer knew how to be honest with themselves and others and thus overcome the selfishness in their own hearts and reveal their natural goodness. That, he believed, was the virtue on which people must truly stand, and it is what he wanted his students to know, even as, during the Nanjing years, he faced animosity and found himself losing such important followers as Wang Dao.

CONCLUSION

In 1516, Wang Yangming received the commission of grand coordinator of southern Gan, for the purpose of quelling widespread banditry in southern China. This was his first truly significant appointment as measured by the level of responsibilities entailed. But even while leading campaigns for nearly two years, he remained actively engaged in philosophical discussions with yet another substantial following of students. Some of these students had first encountered him in Nanjing or elsewhere, while many were new. Importantly, the ideas he had been teaching and corresponding about while in Nanjing, such as "be truthful" and "make a decision", among others, were first committed to print in the form of compilations of material from his discussions in prior years or commentaries on classical texts. In 1518, for example, Xue Kan printed the first volume of *A Record for Practice*. Wang Yangming's most familiar and discussed precept—"the extension of the innate knowledge of the good"—evolved directly out of this precept from the middle period in his thought and pedagogy, but was only put forward in 1520, after he rapidly suppressed a rebellion by a Ming prince. The Nanjing years were indeed formative for both his philosophy and the following that would go on to become part of the Wang Yangming School of the mid-Ming Dynasty. While some students, like Wang Dao, did indeed become

critics, others, like Lin Yuanlun, were directly involved in the dynamic efforts to renovate and build academies and promote open philosophical discussions (*jiangxue*) in sixteenth-century China.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Okada Takehiko, *Ō Yōmei taiden*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Meitoku Shuppansha, 2005); and Yang Zhengxian, *Jue shi zhi dao: Wang Yangming liangzhi shuo de xingcheng* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2015), 55–87.
- 2 Cf. Willard Peterson, “Confucian Learning in Late Ming Thought,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644*, Part 2, ed. Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 709.
- 3 Cf. Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 54–83.
- 4 Yang, *Jue shi zhi dao*, 56.
- 5 Wang Yangming, *Wang Yangming quanji* (jianti ban) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), vol. 3, 33: 1012.
- 6 George L. Israel, “Wang Yangming in Beijing, 1510–1512: ‘If I do not awaken others, who will do so’,” *Journal of Chinese History* vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 2017), 70–71.
- 7 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 3, 33: 1013.
- 8 Shu Jingnan, *Wang Yangming yi wen ji kao bian nian* (zeng ding ben), vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015), 402.
- 9 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, 33: 1013.
- 10 Cf. Huang Zongxi, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), and http://archive.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ttsweb/html_name/search.php.
- 11 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 3, 33: 1013. He is one among the group of twenty-four men listed by Qian Dehong in the *Chronological Biography* as having gathered together with others on a regular basis at the “gate of the master.” Here, only those for whom some identifying information was available have been listed.
- 12 Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 11: 223.
- 13 Cf. Qian Ming, ed., Xu Ai, *Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007), 76. Xu Ai names eight students who had travelled all the way from Chuzhou, including Jiang Xin.
- 14 Cf. Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 28: 626. He is listed as Liu Guanshi.
- 15 For Meng Yuan and his brother Meng Jin, see Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 482–3.
- 16 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 7: 199–200.
- 17 Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 40: 295.
- 18 Qian, ed., Xu Ai, *Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji*, 76.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid. “Instruction without words” is a Daoist allusion found in the *Dao de jing* and *Zhuangzi*.
- 21 Ibid., 76–7.
- 22 For translation, Robert Eno, *The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean*, <http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Daxue-Zhongyong.pdf>, 39.
- 23 Qian, ed., Xu Ai, *Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji*, 77.
- 24 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 7: 199.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Deng Aimin, *Chuan xi lu zhu shu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 45.
- 29 Ibid., 31. Lu is citing the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong Yong*).
- 30 Ibid., 43. Lu is citing *Mengzi* 6A: 8. For this translation, see Bryan Van Norden, *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 152.
- 31 Deng Aimin, *Chuan xi lu*, 36.
- 32 Ibid., 24.

- 33 Ibid., 40-41. Wang is citing the *Great Learning*.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., 28.
- 36 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 4: 143.
- 37 Ibid., 4: 142.
- 38 Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 482-3.
- 39 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 4: 198.
- 40 Ibid., 4: 198-9.
- 41 Ibid., 4: 198.
- 42 Ibid., 4: 199.
- 43 Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 481.
- 44 Ibid..
- 45 Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 482-3.
- 46 Xu Guangshu and Zhong Shou, eds., *Tongzhi Yuanling xian zhi* (Beijing: Ai ru sheng shuzi hui jishu yanjiu zhongxin, 2009), *juan* 30, "Wang Jiaxiu."
- 47 Deng, *Chuan xi lu*, 44.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 7: 195.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., 8: 230.
- 52 Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 217.
- 53 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 3, 33: 1014.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 8: 229. Wang is citing *Analects*, 6: 30.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 *Analects* 15: 24. For translation, see D.C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000), 135.
- 59 Mencius 7A: 4. For translation, see Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 72.
- 60 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 8: 229-30.
- 61 Cf. Qian, ed., *Xu Ai, Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji*, 66; Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 28: 626.
- 62 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 4: 131.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid., 4: 134. For translation, see Ching, *Philosophical Letters*, 29-30.
- 66 Ibid., 4: 131.
- 67 Ibid., 4: 134.
- 68 Ibid., 4: 135.
- 69 Ibid., 4: 134.
- 70 Ibid., 4: 135.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid., 4: 134-5.
- 74 Zhang Hongmin, *Huang Wan shengping xueshu bian nian* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2013), 72.
- 75 Huang Wan, *Huang Wan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), 18: 334.
- 76 Ibid., 18: 333.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid., 18: 335-7.
- 79 Wang Dao, *Shunqu xiansheng wenlu* (Tokyo: Ikutoku zaidan, 1932), vol. 3, *juan* 6, "Da Zhu Shouzhong shiyu."
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Wang, *Wang Yangming quan ji*, vol. 1, 4: 131.
- 82 Ibid., 4: 131-2.