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# A Study of Cheng Yi's Quiet-Sitting Meditation and Other Contemplative Practices in the Confucian Context

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Keywords: *Quiet-sitting, Pattern-principle, Reverence, Righteousness, Centrality*

*Abstract: This study delves into Cheng Yi's (程頤, 1033–1107) Ruist (Confucian) contemplative practices, addressing a gap in contemplative studies from a Ruist perspective. As a seminal thinker in the Cheng-Zhu lineage, Cheng Yi developed various practices, including quiet-sitting meditation, beholding, calligraphy, restful sleep, and others. These practices incorporate techniques such as sitting postures, breathing, and calming the mind and emerged during political and social crises, amid diverse interpretations of Ruist classics and the influences of Buddhism and Daoism. Cheng Yi's contemplative approach emphasizes the integration of the virtues of "reverence" and "righteousness," focusing on the ontological and empirical dimensions of the human heartmind. His metaphysics highlights the nontemporality of the pattern-principle's regulatory role, enhancing the pan-contemplative nature of the Ruist lifestyle. Cheng Yi's approach provides valuable comparative insights for contemporary contemplative studies and guidance for practitioners seeking to balance intellectualism, contemplation, and ethical action. The study offers original translations and comprehensive scholarly analysis of Cheng Yi's Ruist contemplative practices.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the field of contemplative studies, the Ruist (Confucian)<sup>1</sup> perspective is notably absent. Louis Komjathy highlights that the field has largely focused on contemplative practices from major world religions but "relatively little consideration has been given to Confucian, Jain, Jewish, and Sikh practices."<sup>2</sup> Komjathy's anthology of contemplative literature,<sup>3</sup> meant as a textbook for courses, does not include a chapter on Ruism either. While some English scholarship<sup>4</sup> has explored the topic of Ruist quiet-sitting meditation (静坐), it is not comprehensive and does not reflect the significance and prevalence of contemplative practices in the Ru tradition. Evidently, both Western and East Asian scholarship lack robust research on this topic, although the latter is much stronger. Scholars who primarily publish in Chinese<sup>5</sup> have not yet extensively participated in the global conversation on contemplative studies. Importantly, crucial figures in the Ruist contemplative tradition, such as Cheng Yi (程頤, 1033–1107 CE), have not been studied in depth.

I have selected Cheng Yi as a case study to bring a Ruist voice to the field of contemplative studies for the following reasons. First, Cheng Yi and his elder brother Cheng Hao (程顥, 1032–1085 CE) are considered the foundational and defining Ruist thinkers in the Cheng-Zhu lineage of pattern-principle learning (程朱理學), which was widely recognized as the orthodox form of Ruism by imperial courts in East Asia (such as China, Korea, and Vietnam) from the second

*Published by the Journal of Contemplative Studies*

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September 18, 2023, pp. 1-46.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57010/NCGZ4591>

Website: <https://contemplativejournal.org/>



**Journal of  
Contemplative  
Studies**

millennium to the early 20th century. Second, Cheng Yi's philosophy and practice of Ruist contemplation, as demonstrated in his extensive writings on quiet-sitting, established a distinctive tone for subsequent practitioners, distinguishing him from his Ruist predecessors. Given his preeminent status in the Cheng-Zhu lineage, Cheng Yi's approach to contemplation is a crucial aspect of the Ru tradition.

I will examine the following aspects of Cheng Yi's contemplative practice in this paper: its social context, testimony, technique, moral psychology, and metaphysics. The conclusion of this paper will also analyze the generic nature of Ru contemplation using terminology established by the field of contemplative studies. Other related issues to Cheng Yi's contemplative lifestyle, such as distinctions among Daoist, Buddhist, and Ruist contemplation, will be succinctly addressed in my analysis of Cheng Yi. However, I view the primary contribution of this paper as presenting original translations and weaving these translations—through interpretive commentary—into a coherent depiction of Cheng Yi's contemplative practices in their own terms. This approach seeks to bridge the existing gap in global contemplative studies previously discussed. Therefore, a thorough exploration of these other worthy issues will be reserved for future research.

Before the investigation, two clarifications must be made: in line with terminology in contemplative studies, “meditation” in this study refers to the physically still practice of quiet-sitting, while “contemplation” encompasses both meditation and other related practices that require a certain discipline of attention and aim for certain insights.<sup>6</sup> As shown later, since Cheng Yi saw quiet-sitting as one of many contemplative practices grounded in the discipline of “reverence” (敬), the distinction between “meditation” and “contemplation” is appropriate for his case.

I will focus solely on Cheng Yi's Ru contemplative practices as opposed to his brother Cheng Hao's. There are two reasons for this. First, Cheng Hao's writings on meditation are less extensive than Cheng Yi's, making it more difficult to fully understand the elder brother's contemplative practices. Second, Cheng Hao's philosophy has subtle but important differences from Cheng Yi's, which may have contributed to Cheng Hao's lesser influence in the formation of the Cheng-Zhu lineage of Ru learning.<sup>7</sup> To highlight my focus on Cheng Yi, mentions of Cheng Hao's contemplative practices will be included where necessary to further support my presentation of Cheng Yi's similar practices. For the Cheng brothers' historical writings without a clear author attribution, I will make my own identification based on later historians' identifications and my own discretion.

## 1. SOCIAL CONTEXT

The Cheng brothers, following the footsteps of their father Cheng Xiang (程珦, 1006–1090 CE), belonged to the elite class of “high scholar-officials” (士大夫) during the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE). Both attained the highest title of “advanced scholar” (進士) through the civil examination system and served in various local and central government offices. Cheng Yi, however, spent comparatively less time in officialdom and dedicated more time to scholarship and teaching. Their major scholarly endeavors took place in Luoyang, their city of residence, leading to their teachings to be referred to as *Luo Learning* (洛學).<sup>8</sup>

The social context in which Cheng Yi's Ru contemplative practice emerged is characterized by three key factors: First, the Song dynasty faced political and social crises, triggered by aggression from northern ethnic minorities. Ru literati aimed to resolve these crises and revive the ancient ideal of humane governance while reinterpreting the Ru classics in innovative ways. Second, Ru literati developed into various schools of learning, such as the *Luo Learning* of the Cheng brothers, Wang Anshi's (1021–1089 CE) *New Learning* (新學), Su Shi's (1037–1101 CE) *Shu Learning* (蜀學), and Zhang Zai's (1022–1077 CE) *Guan Learning* (關學), due to diverse interpretations of classics and differing responses to the crisis. Cheng Yi held the belief that Ru learning should encompass not just literary and administrative skills but also a deeper inquiry into the fundamental nature of humanity rooted in the Dao, the self-transformation of Ru learners, and the realization of the cosmic Dao in society. This movement, known as *Daoxue* (道學, the learning of Dao), initiated various lineages including the *Guan* and *Luo Learning*, and ultimately gave rise to the dominant intellectual trend in imperial China during the second millennium, referred to as “Neo-Confucianism” in English.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, the influence of Buddhism and Daoism led Ru thinkers to create a new form of Ruism that could guide individuals comprehensively.

In a word, the genre of quiet-sitting meditation and other contemplative practices, exemplified by Cheng Yi, was embraced by scholars and government officials for the purpose of advancing social and political activism. Philosophically, Cheng Yi also aimed to differentiate his practices from those of Buddhism, Daoism, and other lineages of Ru learning.

## 2. TESTIMONY

### 2.1 *Quiet-Sitting Meditation*

In the *Collected Works of the Cheng Brothers*,<sup>10</sup> there are numerous accounts of the Chengs and their father's practice of quiet-sitting meditation. Some of these accounts were given by students, while others were self-reported or shared among family members.

Cheng Yi wrote about his father Cheng Xiang, “After retiring, my father often engaged in silent-sitting (默坐). When asked if he felt bored from quiet-sitting (靜坐) for extended periods, he smiled and replied, ‘I am not bored.’” Cheng Xiang also advised his sons that “the joy of mountain sightseeing pales in comparison to what I felt in quiet-sitting.”<sup>11</sup>

Cheng Hao regularly engaged in quiet-sitting meditation and encouraged his students to do the same as evidenced by the following instances:

Cheng Hao appears like a molded statue when seated yet exudes an amiable warmth in his interactions with others.<sup>12</sup>

When serving in an administrative role, Cheng Hao had the phrase “Treat the people carefully as if they were injured” (視民如傷) displayed in all the places where he sat (凡坐處). He often said, “I, Hao, am constantly ashamed of these words.”<sup>13</sup>

One day, Cheng Hao told a student seeking to learn from him, “You've come here to learn my words and phrases, but your heart and speech do not align. Why don't you try doing

something about it?” When the student asked what to do, Cheng Hao replied, “Just sit in quiet” (且靜坐).<sup>14</sup>

In comparison, the evidence of Cheng Yi’s practice of quiet-sitting meditation is even more plentiful:

When You Zuo and Yang Shi first met Cheng Yi, Cheng Yi sat with his eyes closed (瞑目而坐), and the two young men stood by his side. When Cheng Yi became aware of their presence, he turned to them and asked, “Are you gentlemen still here? It’s getting late, let’s rest for now.” As they left, they discovered that the snow outside the door had accumulated to a depth of one foot.<sup>15</sup>

Whenever Cheng Yi saw someone sitting in quiet (靜坐), he would sigh and praise their dedication to learning.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Cheng Yi would also engage in quiet-sitting with his students, providing instructions based on the meditative practice:

On a day of leisure, Cheng Yi sat in quiet, with He Jing, Meng Dunfu, and Zhang Sishu in attendance. Pointing to a basin of water in front of him, Cheng Yi remarked, “To what is pure and tranquil (清淨), nothing can infiltrate. Once something infiltrates, it will be disturbed.”<sup>17</sup>

Someone asked, “During leisure time, if one’s body appears lazy and slack but their heartmind (心)<sup>18</sup> is not insolent, is this acceptable?” Cheng Yi answered, “How can one sit on the floor with legs stretched out (箕踞) and not be insolent in heartmind? Once, Lv Dalin (呂大臨, 1044–1091 CE) visited Ms. Gou in the middle of June. During his leisure time, whenever I looked in, he sat upright (危坐) with great solemnity, demonstrating his dedication to learning. However, scholars must remain deferential and reverent (恭敬), without feeling constrained as such constraints make it difficult to sustain one’s learning.”<sup>19</sup>

[While commenting Mengzi’s (372–289 BCE) words “what is primordial is based upon what happens beneficially” (故者以利為本) (4B26.2),<sup>20</sup>] Cheng Yi says, “If a person does not have any benefits, they cannot survive. How can one not seek benefits? For instance, sitting on a chair (椅子) can provide calmness (坐此便安), which is a benefit. However, if someone continues to pursue comfort by demanding more blankets for warmth and even goes so far as to take them away from their ruler or father, this is the harm that comes from chasing benefits. People always need benefits, but they pursue them in different ways.”<sup>21</sup>

After a lifetime devoted to quiet-sitting meditation and self-cultivation, Cheng Yi attained a high spiritual state in his old age as demonstrated by the following event that occurred when he was 64 years old:<sup>22</sup>

Cheng Yi was demoted to Fu Zhou, and while crossing the Han River, the boat nearly capsized in the middle of the stream. The people on board cried out in terror, but Cheng Yi sat calmly with his collar properly arranged as usual (正襟安坐如常). Upon reaching the shore, an old man on the boat asked him why he was able to sit right (正坐) and remain composed during the perilous situation. Cheng Yi replied, "I simply maintained a sincere and reverent heart" (心存誠敬).<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the ample evidence of Cheng Yi's favorable attitude toward quiet-sitting, not all his views about the practice were positive as demonstrated in the following example:

Sitting quietly alone (靜坐獨處) is not difficult, but living in the broad dwelling of the whole world and dealing with all things under heaven is a challenge.<sup>24</sup>

Feng Li, who called himself Donggao Jushi (居士, a title for a lay Buddhist), said, "I've been attending to your teachings for twenty years, and now I've experienced a peculiar event." Cheng Yi asked, "What happened?" Li said, "While sitting at ease (宴坐) at night, there was a light in the room." Cheng Yi said, "I too have had a peculiar experience." Li asked to hear about it, and Cheng Yi said, "I always eat until I am not hungry."<sup>25</sup>

The term "sitting at ease" (宴坐) is used in Chinese Buddhist texts<sup>26</sup> to refer specifically to the Buddhist style of cross-legged sitting meditation. These two quotations suggest that Cheng Yi had reservations to this style for two reasons: first, it encourages Buddhist practitioners to talk about miraculous but impractical deeds and events, and second, it detaches meditators from their everyday human affairs. Cheng Yi aimed to distinguish his contemplative practices from Buddhism and Daoism, and we will further analyze how he succeeded in doing so below.

## ***2.2 Beholding the Vitality of the Myriad Things (觀萬物生意)***

The Cheng brothers carried their psychosomatic state of being from quiet-sitting to other contemplative practices. One of these practices, "beholding the vitality of the myriad things," is among the most emblematic of Ru contemplation. Here are some examples from Cheng Hao's beholding practice:

In front of Cheng Hao's window, the lush grass covered the pavement. Some people advised him to cut it, but he refused, saying that he wanted to witness the vitality of the creative universe (見造化生意). He also kept a small pond and raised a few small fish, which he beheld (觀) from time to time. When asked why, he said he wanted to behold how all things remain content in themselves (觀萬物自得意).<sup>27</sup>

[Let's] behold the baby chicks.<sup>28</sup>

If you behold things in quiet, you will find a sense of spring.<sup>29</sup>

The vitality of the myriad things is the worthiest of beholding. This is what the *Classic of Change* refers to as “the highest good of initiation”<sup>30</sup> and is also known as humaneness (仁). Humans are an integral part to the same universe as heaven and earth, yet why do they view themselves as insignificant?<sup>31</sup>

The best way to understand the humaneness is to examine one’s pulse (切脈).<sup>32</sup>

Cheng Hao viewed the vitality of things in the universe as the foundation for the cardinal virtue of humaneness. Through beholding this vitality, humans cultivate a profound ontological bond with the creative universe, which motivates them to pursue humane behavior.

Following Cheng Hao’s example, Cheng Yi also sought to behold the vitality of nature: “To behold water skillfully, one must pay attention to its waves. When the waves break and become turbulent, one can witness the boundless power of the water’s source.”<sup>33</sup> Cheng Yi, however, emphasizes that the source of vitality in nature is the pattern-principle<sup>34</sup> of the universe, or *Tianli* (天理). This principle elucidates the manner in which different cosmic and human phenomena arise and coalesce in a dynamic and coherent manner and thus pervades all phenomena in the universe, including the human realm. Unlike Cheng Hao’s practice of contemplative beholding, which tends to focus on intuitive perceptions of the vitality of concrete things, Cheng Yi’s practice extends to anything that reflects the regulative power of *Tianli*. As such, it encompasses a more complex process of investigation and reflection:

Someone asked, “When beholding things and examining oneself (觀物察己), should it be the case that whenever looking at things, one reflects back on oneself?” Cheng Yi answers, “It is unnecessary to put it that way. There is a common pattern-principle to both things and oneself (物我一理). When one understands the former, one will know the latter. This is the unity of the inner and outer Way (道). To speak broadly, one should understand the heights and depths of heaven and earth. To speak narrowly, one should understand why each thing comes to be so (所以然). Scholars should comprehend all of this.” The person asked further, “When seeking to attain knowledge, should one start from investigating the four incipient sprouts of moral feelings (四端)?”<sup>35</sup> Cheng Yi answered, “While examining one’s nature and feelings is a way to pursue knowledge by delving into oneself, every blade of grass and every tree has its own pattern-principle, and one must examine them as well.”<sup>36</sup>

By beholding pattern-principles in things, one can examine oneself. Once able to illuminate pattern-principles, there is nothing that cannot be understood. All things in the world can be illuminated by pattern-principles; if there is something, there must be a norm, and every single thing must have a pattern-principle.<sup>37</sup>

For Cheng Yi, beholding extended to all things and all pattern-principles in the universe, imbuing all human activities with a contemplative dimension. This pan-contemplative nature of Ru learning is particularly highlighted in the discussion of Cheng Yi’s crucial technique of contemplative practice, namely “reverence” (敬), which I will explain further below.

### 2.3 Calligraphy

Building on the distinction between literary learning and Dao learning discussed earlier, the Cheng brothers also viewed calligraphy as a contemplative practice but were mindful of its potential risks:

When I write, I do so with great reverence, not because I seek to produce beautiful characters but solely for the sake of learning.<sup>38</sup>

The hobbies and amusements of young people can easily distract them from their will and ambition. Even activities such as writing characters and letters, which are so integral to the life of a Ru scholar, can become an obsession and lead to a loss of focus. . . . Have you ever known someone who is skilled in calligraphy but does not lack knowledge of the Way? Such a person not only wastes their time but also risks hindering their progress on the path to the Way. This illustrates the damaging effects of losing one's will and purpose.<sup>39</sup>

According to the Cheng brothers, the true focus of calligraphy should not be on producing well-crafted characters but on cultivating an attitude of reverence within oneself. This practice can help to advance one's self-cultivation and bring one closer to embodying the cosmic Dao.

### 2.4 Sleep

Cheng Yi viewed “good sleep” as a contemplative practice, and his approach to achieving it reflects his broader method of contemplation: maintaining reverence for the underlying pattern-principles of all things in the world. As he explained,

Just as the sky has day and night, humans also experience alternating periods of wakefulness and sleep. The natural ebb and flow of yin and yang, motion and stillness, reflects the pattern-principle of the transformative universe (開闢之理). To sleep well, one must follow this natural rhythm.<sup>40</sup>

By focusing the mind on the cosmic pattern-principle of yin/yang transformation, one can avoid being disturbed by random thoughts before falling asleep, making it a crucial method for achieving restful sleep. Cheng Yi elaborated on this method as follows:

The human mind is fickle, like a turning cart, constantly shifting and never resting, capable of sensing myriad things. It is also like a mirror hanging in the air, taking in everything without distinction and lacking any fixed form. . . . Zhang Tianqi once said, “For several years, once I got into bed, I would stop thinking about everything.” However, after ceasing to think, one must forcibly bind and constrain the mind to a specific image, which is not natural. Junshi claimed, “I have mastered a technique. I just focus on contemplating a single character, 中 (centrality).” However, this is also a form of binding oneself to that character. Furthermore, what kind of image does this character of 中 represent? If a foolish person does not think and is blindly ignorant, then there is a difference between doing too much or too little. . . . It is crucial to hold onto one's will (持其志) and prevent one's vital-

energy (氣, Qi) from becoming chaotic, and this can be achieved. Thus, the sages and worthies do not suffer from mental illnesses, and if they have any physical ailments, it is because they have not focused on nourishing their bodies.<sup>41</sup>

Junshi once suffered from a mind that was disordered and restless, causing him great discomfort, especially when it plagued him in the middle of the night and kept him awake until dawn. How much blood and vital-energy do people have to withstand such a constant assault? He later said that he had recently discovered a method, focusing his mind on the character 中 (centrality). However, this only caused more chaos in his mind. What does 中 look like? How can it be properly contemplated? It is simply a matter of selecting a good word from among many. Rather than adding to the disorder in the mind, Junshi would have been better off counting beads, but he declined to use them. Junshi did not realize that 中 does not help to calm the mind and that counting beads may be more effective. To fall asleep at night, one should simply lie down and close one's eyes, without getting caught up in any particular thought. If one does not make their mind a master (與心為主), they will be easily awakened by the slightest stimulus during the middle of the night.<sup>42</sup>

In his observations, Cheng Yi noted that forcing oneself not to think of anything, as well as being bound to a specific thought, are not effective methods for achieving restful sleep. Counting beads may be a more effective method because it keeps the mind in motion and prevents it from getting caught up in any particular thought. However, the ultimate method for achieving good sleep is to harmonize one's sleep and wakefulness with the pattern-principle of yin/yang alternation and the creativity of the universe, namely the *Tianli*. By continuously contemplating this unifying principle, one can strengthen his or her will and make his or her mind the master. Once this state is achieved, one can simply lie down and close his or her eyes, and good sleep will follow.

### 2.5 Dream

Strengthening one's will and mastering one's mind before sleep can influence the quality of one's dreams. Cheng Yi regarded "reflection on dreams" as an important contemplative practice for evaluating the results of one's self-cultivation as demonstrated in the following two dialogues:

Someone asked, "Why do the things we don't want to do during the day often appear in our dreams at night?" Cheng Yi replied, "It is simply because the heartmind is not settled (心不定). The things that people dream of are not limited to what they experienced during the day; they can be things that happened decades ago. The reason why these things appear in dreams is because they were already in the mind, and they were triggered by something that happened during the day or by something that affected the mind. Therefore, things that one dislikes during the day can also appear in dreams. It is like how the wind creates waves on the water; even after the wind stops, the waves continue to surge. If one has been well-preserved and nourished for a long time, one will not have such dreams. Sages and worthies do not have such dreams. For them, only omens and signs appear in dreams. Some people have clear vital-energy and no dreams, while others have muddled vital-energy and no dreams. A sage has no dreams because their energy is clear. If a person is extremely tired,

they may not dream, but it is because their mind is clouded and blocked by muddled vital-energy. When Confucius dreamt about Duke Zhou,<sup>43</sup> it was different from an ordinary person's dream. Therefore, people can evaluate the depth of their learning by reflecting on their dreams and quality of sleep. If they feel confused or disoriented about their dreams, it may indicate that their heartmind has not yet been settled, and their efforts to preserve and nourish themselves have not yet been solidified.”<sup>44</sup>

Someone asked, “The things that are tied to the heartmind will appear in dreams at night. If good things are tied to it, will they all be harmful when they appear in dreams at night?” Cheng Yi replied, “Even if it is a good thing, the heartmind can still be in agitation (心亦是動). When omens and signs enter the dream, they have no harmful effects, whereas everything else is just a result of delusional agitation.” Someone asked, “What about Confucius dreaming of Duke Zhou?” Cheng Yi replied, “This is a manifestation of a sage's authenticity (誠). As a sage who sought to follow the Way of Duke Zhou, even during sleep, he did not forget about Duke Zhou. As he aged, he realized that the Way could not be realized, and he no longer dreamed of Duke Zhou. However, dreaming of Duke Zhou is not about delusionally conversing with him every night. The heartmind needs to be settled so that when one thinks, one thinks properly. Nowadays, people are driven by their hearts.” Someone then asked, “Who controls the heart?” Cheng Yi replied, “One can use their heartmind to control their heartmind. If one sets it free, the heartmind will roam aimlessly.”<sup>45</sup>

Cheng Yi distinguishes three types of dreams: First, dreams of omens and signs do not bring harm. Second, dreams of sages, such as Confucius, have no discrepancy from their true character in the daytime and hence demonstrate the authenticity of their personality, with no harm involved. Third, all other dreams, even those involving good things, are harmful. This is because the heartmind cannot control what happens in these dreams, and the occurrences often significantly differ from one's waking state. Even if one dreams of good things, he or she cannot control their manifestation in the dream, making it an unreliable evaluation of his or her heartmind's state. The first two types of dreams demonstrate the settledness of one's heartmind and provide a proper evaluation of the state of the heartmind.

Cheng Yi's belief that dreams of omens and signs indicate a settled state of the heartmind is particularly intriguing. He maintained that a heartmind that is in an authentic state allows for the ability of “psychological resonance” (感通), which can account for an individual's ability to know things in an unusual, perhaps even psychic, manner. Cheng Yi explained,

Yang Ding's belief in ghosts and gods boils down to the concept of psychological resonance. For instance, a person who has never learned to read in their entire life may fall ill one day and recite a whole poem by Du Fu (712–770 CE). This is made possible by the existence of pattern-principle. Everything in the world is either present or absent; what exists, exists, and what does not, does not. For example, Du Fu's poetry truly exists in the world, so when someone's heartmind reaches a state of concentration and unity (精一),

they can resonate with the truth and gain knowledge of it. This is also why someone's heartmind can visit the dream of another person in a different place; it is all due to the existence of pattern-principle that leads to psychological resonance of the heartmind. The dead can also appear in dreams for the same reason.<sup>46</sup>

What is psychologically resonated by the heartmind is nothing but the pattern-principle. The affairs of the world exist as they do, or they do not exist at all. This is true regardless of their occurrence in the past, present, or future. Dreams during sleep lack physical forms, but they are made possible by the existence of the pattern-principle. Shape and sound pertain to vital-energy. When things are born, vital-energy gathers, and when they die, it disperses and returns to nothingness. Sound requires the mouth, and touch requires the body. Once the material base (質) is destroyed, how can sound and touch exist? Therefore, without the pattern-principle, dreams cannot be trusted.<sup>47</sup>

According to Cheng Yi, the human ability of psychological resonance allows omens and signs to enter one's dreams. The occurrence of such resonance depends on three factors: things must truly exist in the world, whether in the past, present, or future; the resonating person's heartmind must be concentrated and unified and thus "settled"; and even if the material and Qi aspect of things disappears, the pattern-principle that explains their existence and coexistence with other things in the world still persists.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is the existence of pattern-principles and their broad interconnection that is resonated by a pure heartmind, leading to the manifestation of omens and signs in dreams.

In his further analysis, Cheng Yi proposed that a pure heartmind, necessary for experiencing dreams of omens and signs, could be achieved through quiet-sitting meditation and other related contemplative practices. However, he cautioned against the pursuit of knowledge about future events as the primary goal of these practices as it contradicts the Ru commitment to moral self-cultivation and a rational lifestyle. While such knowledge may arise as an uncontrollable yet understandable result of contemplative practices, it should not be sought after for its own sake. The conversation that follows is prompted by a question about whether a Buddhist monk could really know in advance when a visitor is coming. Cheng Yi's answer exemplifies this caution:

Someone asked, "Can a person living in seclusion know in advance when someone is coming to visit them?" Cheng Yi answered, "Yes, there are such people. For example, Dong Wu Jing of Songshan has this ability." When asked how this was possible, Cheng Yi replied, "It is only through a quiet heartmind (心靜). A heartmind that has become quiet can reflect [like a mirror]." When asked whether a sage would be willing to do this, Cheng Yi answered, "Why do we need to involve sages and worthies in this? Even Buddhist monks who come close to understanding would not engage in such practices, let alone sages."<sup>49</sup>

## 2.6 Divination

As a tranquil and settled mind could allow omens and signs to enter one's dreams, it is important to mention another contemplative practice of Cheng Yi: divination. Cheng Yi's major academic

contribution to the Ru tradition was the composition of a commentary on the *Classic of Change* (程氏易傳), which is still considered a must-read today for those studying the *Classic* in a Ruist style. Before the addition of the *Ten Wings*, a series of Ru commentaries, the *Classic of Change* (易經, *Yijing*) was a book used for divination in the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE). To construe the *Yijing* philosophy, Cheng Yi had to be familiar with the basic operational method of divination, which involves using yarrow stalks, turtle shells, or other objects to generate images and numbers of hexagrams. Accordingly, Cheng Yi explains why the use of *Yijing* hexagrams in divination can generate accurate prognostications as follows:

Although yarrow stalks and turtle shells used for divination are inanimate (無情) objects, they are used to create hexagrams, which can indicate good or bad fortune based on pattern-principles. Because there is the pattern-principle behind the process, when asking questions using divination, the response can be as accurate as an echo. However, if one asks with a selfish heartmind or uses incorrect hexagrams and images, the response will not be accurate, because they lack the pattern-principle. The pattern-principle that guides divination today is the same as the pattern-principle preestablished in the past. Therefore, divination can provide accurate responses.<sup>50</sup>

It is evident that Cheng Yi uses similar factors to explain accurate prognostication as he does for dreams of omens and signs. Specifically, there are pattern-principles and their mutual interconnections established in the world. Hexagrams represent these pattern-principles. An unselfish, pure heartmind resonates with these pattern-principles.

Interestingly, Cheng Yi opposes taking the acquisition of psychic knowledge about the future as the goal of contemplative practices such as quiet-sitting and reflection on one's dreams, and he holds a similar attitude toward *Yijing* divination. In the tradition of *Yijing* studies, some people exclusively focused on studying the images and numbers of *Yijing* symbols, making broad connections of these symbols to cosmic events and human affairs and applying *Yijing* divination in areas such as astrology, alchemy, and geomancy. Cheng Yi deemed these people as “occultists” (術士) and stressed that their *Yijing* study cannot belong to the learning of Ru, which focuses on investigating the pattern-principles of things and applying these principles to moral self-cultivation and civilizational building. In other words, while knowing the operational method of *Yijing* divination is necessary to studying *Yijing* philosophy, and accurate prognostication can be an understandable result of *Yijing* studies, a Ru should not take prognostication as the goal of such studies. Divination as a contemplative practice shares the same underlying ethical structure as other practices. The following saying of Cheng Yi further illustrates his Ru attitude toward *Yijing* divination:

It is not the case that the meaning of the *Yijing* arises from numbers. First, there is the pattern-principle, and then there is image. From the image comes a number. The *Yijing* uses images to clarify pattern-principles, and from the image, one can know the number. Once the meaning is obtained, the image and number are found within it. If one wishes to explore the hidden subtleties of the image and exhaust the smallest details of the number,

this would be pursuing the insignificant and following a path of no end. This is what the occultists value, but it is not what the Ru scholars pursue.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. TECHNIQUE

#### 3.1 Posture of Quiet-Sitting

In the above section 2.1, we find from the testimonies on quiet-sitting meditation that Cheng Yi opposed the Buddhist practice of “sitting at ease” (宴坐) and the insolent posture of “sitting with legs stretched out” (箕踞). He instead advocated for “sitting calmly” (安坐), “sitting right” (正坐), or “sitting upright” (危坐). Cheng Yi even indicated that sitting on a chair could help one calm down.

Zhu Xi (1130–1200 CE), who lived around the same period of Chinese history as Cheng Yi, was renowned for his expertise in the study of ancient rituals. Zhu Xi corroborated in his work *A Discourse on Kneeling, Sitting, and Bowing* (跪坐拜說) that in ancient times, “sitting” (坐) meant “people sat with both knees on the ground and put the soles of their feet upward (反其蹠), sitting on top of their heels.”<sup>52</sup> Zhu further clarified that this posture of sitting with knees down required a mat on the ground and could be either “sitting upright” (危坐) or “sitting calmly” (安坐). Sitting upright required both knees to be on the ground with the waist and thighs straightened, resulting in an upright and tall posture. Sitting calmly required both knees to be on the ground with the buttocks resting on the soles (以尻著蹠), resulting in a posture that feels more relaxed.<sup>53</sup>

The widespread use of chairs and other furniture during Zhu Xi’s era eliminated the need to kneel in the traditional way of sitting, which necessitated Zhu’s study of the ancient sitting postures.<sup>54</sup> This shift is further corroborated by Cheng Yi’s previously cited observation that sitting on a chair can often bring a sense of calm.

After analyzing all the previous evidence, it is highly probable that Cheng Yi’s quiet-sitting posture involved sitting on a chair or similar furniture with neither legs stretched out nor crossed and with his back upright and unsupported by the chair.<sup>55</sup> Although there is no record of how Cheng Yi placed his hands during this practice, his advocacy for “not feeling constraint” suggests that the hands were likely placed on the knees or thighs, with the palms facing down.

Even if we can surmise Cheng Yi’s most probable quiet-sitting posture as such, the following statement of Cheng Yi sheds further light on the significance of sitting posture:

The concept of “embryonic breathing” (胎息) is acceptable if it is practiced for the purpose of curing one’s illness (愈疾). However, if it is used to enter the Way, it is not considered to be part of the teachings of the sages, who have never spoken of it.

If one claims that when the spirit resides, so does the breath (神住則氣住), and they practice it as a technique for deep meditation, it is a method used in Buddhism. In regards to this Buddhist technique, some argue that cultivating one’s vital-energy (養氣) is a secondary matter and that the focus should be on the heartmind. Buddhism aims to achieve compassion, kindness, and peace (慈惠安靜) of the heartmind, and therefore it can be

helpful in following the Way. However, I do not agree with this view. Mengzi's idea of "oceanic vital-energy" (浩然之氣) is not the same as this.

Now, if one says that preserving the heartmind and cultivating vital-energy is solely for the sake of vital-energy, then the focus is too narrow. . . . For those who claim that Buddhist meditation can aid in following the Way, it is because their heartmind cannot be settled, and they need to attain silence and tranquility (寂湛). However, this is not the same as the method of concentrating one's mind in Buddhism.

If one's learning is like this, then it is a jumbled mess (大段雜). Nurturing one's heartmind does not necessarily require only closing one's eyes and practicing quiet-sitting. As stated in the *Record of Rites*, "As for sitting, one should sit like a representative of the deceased (坐如尸), and as for standing, one should stand like during a period of abstinence (立如齊)." This means that one should focus on nurturing one's will (養其志), not just on cultivating vital-energy.<sup>56</sup>

In this passage, Cheng Yi discusses the quiet-sitting posture in an interreligious/interspiritual<sup>57</sup> context. He argues that while the Daoist practice of "embryonic breathing"<sup>58</sup> addresses the need for "preserving the heartmind and cultivating vital-energy," it places too much emphasis on the latter, prioritizing the cultivation of vital-energy over all other purposes. As a result, a Ru scholar can only endorse this practice to the extent that it promotes physical health and cures illness. However, with regard to the higher purpose of nurturing the heartmind and entering the ethical and metaphysical Ru way of life, the Daoist practice falls short.

In regard to the Buddhist practice of guiding one's breath through the concentration of the mind, Cheng Yi acknowledges that, compared to Daoism, Buddhism appears to place more emphasis on the heartmind. However, due to the significant differences in ethical and metaphysical worldviews between Buddhism and Ruism, a Ru scholar cannot approve of this method for nurturing the heartmind. Even if one believes that practicing Buddhist meditation can help to settle the mind and attain a state of psychological calm, Cheng Yi does not believe that this can aid in the Ruist learning. This is because the goals of the Buddhist method are much more comprehensive than merely achieving a restful psychological state. Even if one's initial intention in practicing Buddhist meditation was to attain this state, he or she may be led to the higher and distinct goals of Buddhism, which could interfere with his or her Ruist learning.

Similar to Buddhism, Ru meditation prioritizes the nurturing of the heartmind over the cultivation of vital-energy. However, Ruism employs a unique set of meditative techniques and ethical and metaphysical principles for this purpose. Notably, Cheng Yi suggests that "closing one's eyes and practicing quiet-sitting" is not necessary for nurturing the heartmind in the Ruist tradition. Instead, any human activity conducted in accordance with the instructions for sitting and standing in the *Record of Rites* contributes to the contemplative Ru way of life.

According to this instruction, the term 尸 referred to a person representing a deceased ancestor during a sacrificial ritual, while 齊 referred to various practices performed before the official start of a sacrificial ritual, such as fasting, bathing, sexual restraint, and abstaining from other everyday

activities.<sup>59</sup> Scholars' archaeological research has shown that the sitting posture of the ancestor representative during the compilation of the *Record of Rites* is exactly the same as the posture of "sitting calmly" (安坐) studied by Zhu Xi, which involves both knees on the ground with the buttocks resting on the soles.<sup>60</sup> However, Cheng Yi emphasizes that the most important aspect of this instruction in the *Record of Rites* is not strictly adhering to a particular posture but rather "nurturing one's will" and maintaining an attitude of reverence and deference toward the pattern-principles of all things and events within a properly ritualized human world.

Therefore, while we can infer that Cheng Yi's preferred posture for quiet-sitting meditation was likely to be sitting upright on a chair, as mentioned earlier, it is more likely that Cheng Yi viewed this posture as a suggestion rather than a strict rule. The fundamental technique underlying all Cheng Yi's contemplative practices is still the cultivation of "reverence," as I will explain in more detail later.

### 3.2 Breathing

After sitting upright on a chair, what would Cheng Yi do next to continue his practice of quiet-sitting meditation? Because there are many methods of beholding the vivacity of the myriad things, as discussed earlier, Cheng Yi seemed to have choices to answer this question. However, given the prevalence of contemplative breathing as a method to deepen meditation across various traditions, it is worth asking whether Cheng Yi used this method as well. The following three passages provide evidence that Cheng Yi did ascribe a certain significance to meditative breathing:

The genuine origin (真元) is where vital-energy is born and does not mix with external vital-energy (外氣), although it can be nourished (涵養) by it. This is similar to how fish live in water; their life is not created by the water but rather nourished and sustained by it. Humans also live in the midst of the vital-energies of heaven and earth, no different from how fish live in water. The nourishment we receive from food and drink also comes from external vital-energy. Breathing involves the closing and opening [of the transformative mechanism of the universe]. The air that is exhaled is not the same as the air that is inhaled. It is the genuine origin that generates the air, and when the cosmic mechanism opens, external air enters accordingly. The creativity of the genuine origin does not require assistance from these external vital-energies.<sup>61</sup>

By examining one's own body, all the pattern-principles of the universe can be discovered. The contraction and expansion [of the transformative mechanism of the universe] are evident in the intervals between breaths (鼻息之間). Contraction and expansion are merely derivatives of pattern-principle, and there is no need to turn exhaled, contracted air into inhaled, expanded air. The pattern-principle of constant creativity (生生之理) implies that contraction and expansion do not naturally cease.<sup>62</sup>

The phrase "One yin and one yang is called Dao"<sup>63</sup> refers to a pattern-principle that is deeply profound and cannot be fully expressed in words. Dao explains why there are yin and yang: whenever we speak of Qi (vital-energies), it always involves two forms. The opening and closing [of the transformative mechanism of the universe] already implies

mutual affection (感). Whenever there are two forms of Qi, mutual affection follows. Dao explains why there is the opening and closing mechanism, and what is opening and closing is the yin and yang Qi. It is not accurate for Laozi to say that the vacuum can generate Qi. There is no priority between the interplay of the opening yang and the closing yin, and it is impossible to say that there is yin today and yang tomorrow. This is like a person's shadow, which appears simultaneously with the person. It cannot be said that the person exists today and their shadow emerges tomorrow; they arise together.<sup>64</sup>

For Cheng Yi, the significance of meditative breathing consists in its role in absorbing external vital-energies to nourish, rather than generate, the genuine origin (真元) of human life. The genuine origin refers to the universal pattern-principle of constant creativity, or simply the Dao, which creates yin and yang vital-energies. The constant interplay of yin and yang comprises the generative and restorative mechanism of cosmic transformation, and this mechanism can be contemplated when one focuses on breathing.

While the term 真元 was present in Daoist texts,<sup>65</sup> Cheng Yi rejected the idea of a temporal sequence between yin and yang vital-energies, thus challenging Laozi's Daoist cosmology that posits a primeval stage of the vacuum (虛) or formless vital-energy (元氣) that eventually gives rise to concrete vital-energies.<sup>66</sup> Cheng Yi's cosmology, rooted in the Ruist commentarial tradition of the *Classic of Change*, has a distinct ontological orientation: the Dao, or supreme pattern-principle, which nontemporally creates yin, yang, and other forms of vital-energies. Once created, the interplay of yin and yang persists without temporal beginning or end.

In this Ruist metaphysics, when contemplating one's breath, the focus is not on the sequence of inhalation and exhalation. Instead, it is on the closing and opening of the transformative mechanism of the entire universe, which allows one to contemplate the supreme cosmic pattern-principle of constant creativity. While human life requires nourishment from breathed air, food, and drink, all these originate from the genuine origin of the entire universe. Meditative breathing serves as a reminder of the genuine origin of our life.

### 3.3 *Calming the Mind*

How to prevent the mind from being perturbed by random thoughts is a prevalent issue for meditation practitioners. As previously analyzed, Cheng Yi does not endorse "thinking of nothing" or "sticking to one singular thought" as the method for achieving restful sleep. Instead, Cheng Yi extends this approach to all contemplative moments and prescribes a general method for calming the mind when it is replete with fleeting and random thoughts.

On the one hand, Cheng Yi denies that there is a possibility of stopping thinking:

If one attempts to forcibly halt their thoughts, it will only lead to an endless stream of thoughts.<sup>67</sup>

Without deep thought, one cannot reach the Way. Those who attain without deep thought are likely to lose it easily. However, some scholars claim that they can attain something through the method of "no thought, no worry" (無思無慮). Why is this so? The answer is

that those who attain without thought or worry have actually attained through deep thought. Those who believe that “no thought, no worry” means to stop thinking and still claim to have attained are simply deluding themselves as such a thing has never happened.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, in order to calm one’s mind, one cannot forcefully focus his or her thoughts on a single object. Cheng Yi’s brother also recognized this characteristic of human thought:

Cheng Hao, in the past, was sitting leisurely in a warehouse in Chang’an, and later he saw the pillars in a corridor. He counted them in his mind, and at first, he was not doubtful. But when he counted them again and the result was different, he had to have people count them out loud one by one. It turned out that the result was no different from the first counting. From this experience, he realized that the more one clings to probing with their thought (著心把捉), the more uncertain it becomes.<sup>69</sup>

Cheng Yi’s general method of calming the mind is evidenced by the following passage:

The primary task of a scholar is to cultivate the will of the heartmind. Some may aim to shut out their thoughts and knowledge, pursuing the Daoist path of “abandoning sagehood and discarding wisdom” (絕聖棄智).<sup>70</sup> Others may seek to eliminate distracting thoughts and turn to Buddhist meditation for settling their mind. However, the heartmind, like a clear mirror reflecting all things, always interacts with the myriad things and cannot help but think. To be free from distractions and chaos in one’s heartmind, one must have mastery over the mind. How does one achieve this mastery? Through reverence. With mastery, the mind is empty of vices, and evil cannot enter. Without mastery, the mind is full, and things come to take it away.

A bottle filled with water cannot hold more, even if rivers and seas flow into it. How can it not be empty [of external things]? If the bottle is empty, even a small puddle of still water can fill it. How can it not be full? Similarly, the mind cannot be used for two things at once. If it is used for one thing, other things cannot enter. If one takes the occupied thing as the master, there will be no distracting thoughts. If one takes reverence as the master, how can this problem arise at all?

Reverence involves taking One as the master (主一之謂敬), and One means no vacillation (無適之謂一). By taking One as the master and cultivating it, distractions of two or three can be eliminated. The best way to understand reverence is through the words of the sages. As the *Classic of Changes* says, “One should straighten their inner self with reverence and align their outer conduct with righteousness” (敬以直內，義以方外).<sup>71</sup> Taking One as the master means being upright within. Refraining from deceit or belittlement and feeling no shame in a hidden corner of the house—these are all matters of reverence. By maintaining and cultivating reverence, the heavenly pattern-principle (*Tianli*) will naturally become clear over time.<sup>72</sup>

Cheng Yi, in a similar manner to his explanation of the importance of sitting posture, elaborates on his method of calming the mind by commenting on the approaches advocated by Daoism and Buddhism. He believes that to free the mind from distractions and chaos, both Daoist and Buddhist methods risk detaching the mind from the inevitability of thought. Instead, a Ru should focus on nurturing an attitude of reverence toward the supreme pattern-principle of the universe, which can lead to concentration and unity without wavering. Additionally, ethical pursuits aimed at doing things right, such as being honest, humble, and reflective, even in solitude, are crucial for cultivating the attitude of reverence. These pursuits assist in concentrating the mind and gradually grounding it in the *Tianli*.

In Cheng Yi's view, not all thoughts are detrimental to contemplation. If one's mind is focused on realizing ethical norms justified by the *Tianli*, thoughts can be beneficial to nurturing reverence and calming the mind. The following passage provides further instructions on this matter:

Yu Shu once experienced chaotic and distracting thoughts that were neither related to ethical principles nor pressing matters. In such a case, these thoughts were merely signs of an undisciplined mind. To remedy this disease, Yu Shu advises attaining a state of serene stillness (虛靜). However, if this pursuit goes to the extreme, one may desire to become like lifeless wood or ash, which is impossible.<sup>73</sup> Humans are living beings and naturally have thoughts and actions. Unless they are dead, they cannot become lifeless wood or ash.

Why is it that loyalty and trustworthiness can lead to the cultivation of virtues? The answer lies in the fact that authenticity (誠) is preserved when one refrains from indulging in vices (閑邪). And it is from this authenticity that loyalty and trustworthiness emerge. But how does one avoid vices? By refraining from looking, listening, speaking, or acting in ways that go against ritual propriety.

If the cultivation of virtue is as such, then how can one's body be like a withered tree and one's mind like dead ash? Even after eliminating the four thought habits of speculation, absolutization, stubbornness, and presumptuousness,<sup>74</sup> what else must one do? When can one become withered wood and dead ash? Reverence entails being upright within, with a ruler being a ruler and a subject being a subject. One should act in accordance with this principle in all matters, whether big or small.<sup>75</sup>

Cheng Yi's approach to achieving a state of reverence to calm the mind clearly involves discernment of ethical norms in all aspects of human life. In this regard, we will now delve more deeply into the attitude of reverence and its complex relationship with other Ru virtues.

### **3.4 Reverence**

Previous analyses indicate that "reverence" is a central technique in Cheng Yi's contemplative practice, with "technique" being broadly understood as an underlying and universal attitude. Cheng Yi's standard definition of "reverence" is "taking One as the master" (主一), and he provides varying expositions of this definition.

Some of these expositions are concerned with the psychological state of the heartmind that takes One as the master as well as the methods to achieve it:

Kuan asked, “What is meant by ‘taking One as the master,’ and can you kindly explain it?” Yin Hejing replied, “[According to the teaching of Cheng Yi,] ‘reverence’ has no visible form but simply involves gathering one’s mind and body in an orderly manner (收斂身心). For instance, when one pays respect at an ancestral shrine, their mind is gathered in reverence and not distracted by any slight thing. If this is not ‘taking One as the master,’ then what is it?”

In the past, there was a man named Zhao Chengyi who studied under Cheng Yi. Zhao was not particularly intelligent, and Cheng Yi had him focus on the character “reverence.” Zhao asked for further guidance, but Cheng Yi simply tidied his clothing and adjusted his appearance. Later, Zhao asked Yin Hejing about this encounter, and Yin explained that Cheng Yi intended for Zhao to cultivate awareness (醒覺) in his everyday life.<sup>76</sup>

Cheng Yi said that simply adjusting one’s appearance and gathering one’s thoughts will naturally give rise to reverence. Reverence is nothing but taking One as the master. Taking One as the master means neither leaning towards the East nor the West but remaining centered (中) and neither leaning towards this nor that but remaining inward (內). By doing so, the heavenly pattern-principle will naturally become clear over time.<sup>77</sup>

Cheng Yi said that “taking One as the master” is synonymous with “reverence.” The “One” refers to authenticity (誠), and “taking as the master” implies attentive intention (有意).<sup>78</sup>

Other expositions are specifically about what the One refers to:

Yin Hejing once asked Cheng Yi: “[The text of *Centrality and Commonality* says that] the hawks fly up to heaven; the fish leap in the deep. Could it be that there is one pattern-principle encompassing all beings above and below (上下一理)?” Cheng Yi replied, “At this point, all I can do is nod my head.”<sup>79</sup>

Cheng Yi said that the pattern-principle and the heartmind are one, yet people cannot unite them as one.<sup>80</sup>

The records indicate that the core traits of the psychological state of reverence include concentration, freedom from distractions, attentiveness, authenticity to oneself, and remaining centered and inward. To cultivate reverence, one begins with seemingly mundane tasks like tidying clothes and adjusting appearance, which can extend to all aspects of daily life. Ultimately, one experiences the unification of his or her heartmind with the supreme pattern-principle of the universe, known as *Tianli*, which continuously creates all things in the universe.

Therefore, the phrase “taking One as the master” can be understood as referring to three levels of self-cultivation. First, “One” refers to each of the concrete things and affairs in human life, such as tidying one’s clothes and paying respect to ancestral shrines. Taking One as the master in this

stage means focusing on these concrete things and conducting them properly. Second, “One” refers to the unifying and concentrated psychological state of the heartmind. Taking One as the master in this level means mastering the heartmind as an inclusive and attentive consciousness that pervades every detail of everyday life. Finally, “One” refers to the universal pattern-principle that creates and encompasses all beings in the universe. Taking One as the master in this stage implies the establishment of a cosmic consciousness that connects one’s attentive heartmind to the ultimate reality of the universe.

As the attitude of reverence seeks to sustain a constant state of awareness that transcends the need to pay attention to particular things, Cheng Yi also suggests a method of “consistent reverence” (素敬) to maintain this state continually:

Someone asked, “Confucius once said, ‘When one goes out, it should be as if one is meeting an important guest; when one leads the people, it should be as if one is conducting a great sacrifice.’<sup>81</sup> But what about before going out or before leading the people? What should one do?” Cheng Yi answered, “This is the time for ‘solemn reflection’ (儼若思).<sup>82</sup> When one goes out, their reverence should be as such, allowing for a glimpse into what their demeanor should have been like prior to departing. Moreover, what is manifest outside is an extension of what is inside. Leading the people or going out to meet them is a matter of business. It is not the business that makes one reverent, but rather one should possess a consistent reverence (素敬). It is like when one deals with things honestly, people will call them an honest person. They have always been honest, not just since dealing with things honestly. When one straightens their clothing and hat and looks up with a dignified expression, there is a place of reverence within. Even though one might say that there is no form, reverence can be manifest accordingly.”<sup>83</sup>

Considering reverence as an ongoing state of awareness that is rooted in one’s authentic self and connected with the universal pattern-principle, Cheng Yi employs it further to unify all practical approaches to self-cultivation in traditional Ruism. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that none of these approaches can fully encapsulate the comprehensive and prescriptive character of reverence. The following sayings of Cheng Yi provide additional examples in this regard.

First, regarding the effort of “refraining from vices” (閑邪), Cheng Yi states, “If one refrains from vices, it is certain that they are taking One as the master. However, if one has taken One as the master, there is no need to speak of refraining from vices anymore.”<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Confucius instructs to “overcome the ego and return to the ritual-propiety” (克己復禮).<sup>85</sup> Cheng Yi explains that “reverence implies [a return to] ritual-propiety, and once one is reverent, there is no ego to conquer.”<sup>86</sup> In other words, overcoming one’s improper desires of pursuing vices is just one of the many ways to cultivate reverence. By consistently taking One as the master and practicing reverence, there is no need to specifically focus on refraining from vices all the time.

Second, building on his earlier discussions on the Daoist approach of nurturing vital-energy (養氣) and the Buddhist approach of nurturing the heartmind (養心) in the context of explaining the significance of sitting posture in Ru meditation, Cheng Yi highlights that the attitude of reverence can integrate the Ru methods of cultivating vital-energy and nurturing the heartmind,

eliminating the need to compartmentalize these aspects of self-cultivation as evidenced in the following:

Someone said that nurturing vital-energy can assist in nurturing the heartmind. Cheng Yi replied, “Reverence is just reverence, and nothing can be added to the concept of reverence. It is like showing reverence to one’s father, does one need to seek assistance in showing reverence to one’s elder brother? . . . Similarly, after someone has been to the Eastern capital, the Western capital, and the city of Chang’an, if they focus on one place, the other places cannot be simultaneously present in their mind. The heartmind cannot hold onto two disparate destinations at once.”<sup>87</sup>

Third, Cheng Yi connects the state of quietude attained through the practice of quiet-sitting with reverence in the following manner:

Reverence implies a state of transparency and quietude (虛靜), but this state should not be equated with reverence itself. Living in a state of reverence leads to simplicity in action, but intentionally living in simplicity and acting simply is not true simplicity. Rather, it is merely a matter of living in simple conditions.<sup>88</sup>

Cheng Yi’s observation on the homophones “quietude” (靜, *jing*) and “reverence” (敬, *jing*) is particularly significant because it suggests that quiet-sitting—along with other practices such as “refraining from vices,” “returning to ritual propriety,” “nurturing vital-energy,” and “living in simplicity”—is just one of many ways to cultivate and nourish the central and universal attitude of the Ru contemplative way of life: reverence or taking One as the master. Without this fundamental attitude, all practices would lose their significance, but with it, all practices become legitimate in different contexts.

### ***3.5 Jointly Preserving Reverence and Righteousness***

Upon examination, the essential mindset of reverence strives to nurture a continuous state of awareness. This mindset, metaphysically underpinned by the all-embracing One pattern-principle in the universe, functions as an umbrella category that encompasses all contemplative practices. As specifically highlighted by the “consistent reverence” method, the practice of reverence leads to disengaging from tangible aspects of the world and attaining a transcendent cosmic consciousness. However, upon further reflection, Cheng Yi recognizes that practicing reverence in this manner may pose a risk of escapism, and it should be balanced with another practice, “righteousness” (義). The following conversation on how to cultivate the oceanic vital-energy provides an instruction:

Someone asked, “Mengzi says that in order to cultivate the oceanic vital-energy, one must maintain constant awareness of something present to pursue. Does this mean we need to use the method of reverence?” Cheng Yi replies, “Reverence is merely a means of nourishing oneself (涵養). Indeed, there must be something to pursue, which necessitates

the effort of 'accumulating righteousness' (集義).<sup>89</sup> Relying solely on reverence without accumulating righteousness ultimately results in accomplishing nothing."

Cheng Yi is asked again, "Isn't righteousness about adhering to pattern-principles?" He replies, "Adhering to pattern-principles involves dealing with matters, while righteousness resides in the heartmind. Without upholding righteousness, how can one develop the oceanic vital-energy? The pattern-principle simply externalizes what is internally present. For instance, in reverence, even before presenting a ceremonial gift, one should embody reverence. Though it is through the presentation of the gift and the display of solemn etiquette that reverence becomes visible, the heartmind must harbor such reverence for it to be seen. If one's heartmind is devoid of reverence, how can it be exhibited? The so-called virtue is acquired within oneself, and only then can it be considered virtue."

Cheng Yi is asked, "What is the difference between reverence and righteousness?" He replies, "Reverence is the way of maintaining oneself (持己), while righteousness involves discerning right from wrong. To act in accordance with pattern-principles is to exhibit righteousness. If one solely abides by reverence without accumulating righteousness, it amounts to doing nothing. For example, if one desires to be filial, can it be achieved by merely clinging to the character for filiality (孝)? One must understand the way why and how to be filial, such as how to serve and attend to one's parents in winter and summer, only then can the duties of filiality be fulfilled." Cheng Yi is asked again, "Is righteousness only applicable to external matters?" He replies, "Pattern-principles are consistent across both internal and external aspects. Why seek righteousness only in external matters?"<sup>90</sup>

As suggested, Cheng Yi's guidance on practicing righteousness bears significant similarities to his teachings on reverence: righteousness stems from the virtue of personhood and adheres to pattern-principles that unify the human heart and external matters. However, righteousness differs from reverence in that the pervasive attitude of reverence may not address any specific thing. Righteousness, on the other hand, necessitates an individual to discern right from wrong and, moreover, to act rightly in concrete situations.

In light of Cheng Yi's distinction between reverence and righteousness, we should add another stage to the three aspects of self-cultivation implied by "taking One as the master": first, handling each concrete matter appropriately; second, achieving a constant state of attentive awareness; third, anchoring one's transcendent cosmic consciousness upon the heavenly pattern-principle; and finally, returning to the immanent and mundane details of the human world, which is to examine and do the right thing in each situation. Comparatively, the first three stages relate to reverence and comprise a Ru version of negative theology, which aims to detach from the mundane world to reach a transcendent cosmic consciousness. The fourth stage relates to righteousness and is equivalent to a positive theology, which seeks to actualize and affirm the transcendent cosmic consciousness within the immanent human world. Cheng Yi's essential method of the Ru contemplative way of life combines both negative and positive aspects, or in his final words, one should "jointly preserve reverence and righteousness" (敬義夾持).<sup>91</sup>

I need to address two additional points to further clarify this fundamental method. As scholars have extensively explored these two points in the realms of metaphysics and epistemology, my subsequent discussion will concentrate on connecting them to Cheng Yi's contemplative practice.

First, I have previously discussed that the constancy of attentive awareness, achieved through the practice of reverence, is anchored in the all-embracing one pattern-principle of the universe. This means that the notion that “the pattern-principle is one” (理一) provides a metaphysical foundation for the cultivation method of reverence. Correspondingly, another important proposition, “the pattern-principle is one, and its manifestations are many” (理一分殊), offers metaphysical justification for the method of “jointly preserving reverence and righteousness.” Cheng Yi stated this proposition in the context of a discussion on Zhang Zai's *Western Inscription* (西銘):

The *Western Inscription* implies that the pattern-principle is one, yet its manifestations are many. In contrast, the Moists champion the unity of love without distinction. The defect of overemphasizing distinctions leads to selfishness and the loss of humaneness; the transgression of not making distinctions results in impartial love without righteousness. Promoting the Oneness of the pattern-principle while maintaining distinctions serves to counter the consequences of selfishness, and this is the approach for achieving humaneness. Becoming preoccupied with impartial love without distinctions, reaching the extreme of making no distinction between one's father and others, leads to the absence of righteousness.<sup>92</sup>

Just as universal humane love must be balanced by the virtue of righteousness, which acknowledges the unique distinctions of each living being, the all-encompassing attitude of reverence in one's contemplative practice must be complemented by the practice of righteousness, which calls for doing the right thing in the proper way. Ultimately, this is because the One pattern-principle of the universe's constant creativity manifests in various beings, and humans need to make efforts to realize this universal principle distinctively within the human world.

Second, as particularly emphasized by Cheng Yi's earlier guidance on how to be filial, the method of “jointly preserving reverence and righteousness” involves examining the ethical norms of human behavior as well as all factual knowledge that either justifies those norms or can be employed to actualize them. This connection integrates this core method of contemplative practice with Cheng Yi's well-known teachings on “investigating things” (格物), “thoroughly studying pattern-principles” (窮理), and “attaining knowledge” (致知) as partially hinted at in our previous discussion on Cheng Yi's beholding practice. Three points assist us in understanding the distinctiveness of Cheng Yi's contemplative practice when considered in this context.

First, the necessity of intellectual activity in studying pattern-principles of all things in the world, along with its accompanying social activism, underscores the distinction of Ruism, as exemplified by Cheng Yi's approach, from other contemplative traditions dedicated to monasticism and other-worldly oriented mysticism. These alternative traditions may downplay or dismiss the role of intellectual activities in contemplative practice, setting Ruism apart in its approach to contemplation.

Second, not only do intellectual activities contribute to a contemplative lifestyle, but the latter also enhances the former. Cheng Yi emphasizes the importance of the attitude of reverence, understood as a constant state of attentive awareness, in the process of investigating things and attaining knowledge. He states, “To be a human, nothing is more important than reverence, and without it, no one can attain knowledge. Nowadays, people’s minds are unsettled; they regard their own minds as enemies and bandits that cannot be controlled. In such cases, it is not the daily matters that burden their heartmind, but rather their heartmind that burdens the daily matters.”<sup>93</sup>

Third, since there is a deeply contemplative dimension to the activity of knowing, Cheng Yi contends that the process of “attaining knowledge” goes beyond merely acquiring “knowledge through hearing and seeing” (聞見之知). Instead, the kind of knowledge that a Ru contemplator seeks to obtain has a distinct aesthetic and moral dimension, which Cheng Yi refers to as “knowledge with moral nature” (德性之知).<sup>94</sup> Correspondingly, the means of acquiring such knowledge, enriched with moral nature, go beyond empirical methods of hearing and seeing that merely aim to provide concrete facts. As Cheng Yi states,

We should not regard “experiential understanding” (體會) as separate from the heartmind. Because of this misconception, some argue that the heartmind is small while nature is vast. The scope to which the heartmind extends is indeed no different from the heavens and the earth; it should not be belittled. We must not let the heartmind stagnate at the level of mere knowledge [acquired through hearing and seeing]; otherwise, we will inadvertently diminish its significance.<sup>95</sup>

In other words, the process of investigating things involves a whole-person experience with these things, and the knowledge that is subsequently acquired pertains to the intertwined facts and values of those things in the world.

#### 4. MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cheng Yi drew upon his extensive contemplative experiences to develop a systematic moral psychology, which significantly contributed to the formation of the *Daoxue* discourse within Song to Ming Ruism. This construction was grounded in reinterpreting traditional Ru classics in response to contemporary challenges posed by other traditions, such as the intricate system of moral psychology in Chinese Buddhism. Cheng Yi’s moral psychology addressed critical questions relating to the nature of the human heartmind (心性), including the structure of the heartmind and the role of humanity in the universe.

Among the traditional Ru Classics, the chapter of *Centrality and Commonality* (中庸, *Zhong Yong*) in the *Record of Rites* (禮記) holds particular significance for Cheng Yi’s constructive thoughts on the nature of the human heartmind. This is because the text itself is rich in contemplative insights and aims to present a coherent discourse of Ruist psychology, ethics, and metaphysics. The beginning verses of *Zhong Yong*, which continued to be a classic textual reference for Cheng Yi and later Ruist contemplative writings, are cited as follows:

What *Tian* (天, heaven or the universe) mandates us is called the [human] nature. To follow and manifest our nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called education. . . . Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness are aroused, the state of human nature is called centrality (中). When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain their due measure, the state of human nature is called harmony (和). Centrality is the great foundation of all under heaven and harmony their universal path. When centrality and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will be nurtured.<sup>96</sup>

*Zhong Yong* characterizes the psychological state of the human heartmind, before it is stirred by varying emotions in response to external stimuli, as “centrality.” It explains that such a state of centrality makes a harmonious society possible and originates from human nature endowed by the constantly creating universe. In the subsequent sections, I will examine two crucial conversations between Cheng Yi and his students, along with other writings by Cheng, to investigate how the Ruist doctrine of the human heartmind’s nature strengthens and philosophizes contemplative experiences. Additionally, I will create a diagram to illustrate Cheng Yi’s system of moral psychology.

#### ***4.1 Cheng Yi’s Discussion with Su Jiming on Centrality***

Cheng Yi engaged in an extensive dialogue with Su Jiming (蘇季明 or 蘇迨, 1070–1126 CE) on interpreting the verses of *Zhong Yong* in the context of the contemplative practice of quiet-sitting. This dialogue is documented in volume 18 of *The Posthumous Works of Cheng Family from Henan* (河南程氏遺書) and has become one of the most challenging texts for later interpreters of Cheng Yi’s thought.<sup>97</sup> As it is crucial for understanding the intellectual history of *Daoxue* Ruism, I will provide a translation of the entire dialogue accompanied by my own commentary. To improve the accessibility of the translation and my commentary, I have divided the original conversation into numbered sections, which did not exist in the original text:

1) Su Jiming asked, “Is the Dao of centrality (中之道) the same as the state before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise, which is also called centrality (中)?” Cheng Yi replied, “No, they are not the same. The state before happiness, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise refers to the state of ‘being within centrality’ (在中之義). It is just one character, centrality (中), but used in different contexts.”<sup>98</sup>

In general, three forces have shaped Cheng Yi’s words during his conversation with Su Jiming on centrality: his metaphysics, the semantics of the original text of *Zhong Yong*, and his experiences with quiet-sitting and other contemplative practices.

Regarding the metaphysical aspect, as particularly indicated by our previous discussions on Cheng Yi’s practice of beholding, reflecting on dreams, and nourishing the genuine origin, Cheng Yi’s general mindset in his investigation of things is to ask the question “why a thing comes to be so” and, furthermore, to clarify the “norm” of each thing. Rooted in the metaphysical tradition of the *Classic of Change*, while answering these two crucial questions, Cheng Yi has a distinctive

ontological tendency to delve into the synchronistic and essentially nontemporal generic traits of realities, which he termed as pattern-principle. Therefore, if one has felt “being centered” in the practice of quiet-sitting, there must be a corresponding pattern-principle or Dao of “centrality” that explains why such a feeling comes to be so. This ontological method was immediately manifest in his answer to Jiming’s question.

In Cheng Yi’s view, the psychological state of feeling centered during quiet-sitting (which takes place before the rising of any particular emotion) is different from the ontological and normative state of “centrality” that characterizes the fundamental nature of the human heartmind, which is rooted in the all-encompassing, constantly creative *Tian*. Consequently, to the extent that one feels centered in the practice of quiet-sitting, the actual state of one’s heartmind can be characterized as being under the normative regulation of the ontological state of centrality (viz., “being within centrality”). However, the feeling itself is still an empirical psychological state distinct from its ontological root.

2) Jiming asked again, “Can we seek centrality (求中) before happiness, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise?” Cheng Yi replied, “No, we cannot. If you think about seeking it before these emotions arise, it is still a thought (思). As soon as you think, the heartmind has already been aroused. Once it is aroused, its state is called harmony (和), not centrality (中).” Jiming asked again, “The scholar Lv Dalin once said, ‘We should seek it before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise.’ Although this statement may be true, I find it difficult to grasp. How can this be possible?” He replied, “Consider the context of this statement. If it means to preserve and nourish (存養) during the time before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise, then it is possible; if it means to seek centrality before these emotions arise, then it is not possible.” Jiming asked again, “When pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise, as scholars, we should certainly make an effort to restrain and regulate them. However, how should we strive before they arise?” He replied, “Before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise, how can you actively seek it? Simply nourish (涵養) it in your daily life. If you nourish it consistently over time, pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness will consequently arise within their appropriate bounds.”<sup>99</sup>

Similar to his remarks that breathing outside air results in nourishing rather than generating the genuine origin of human life, Cheng Yi emphasizes here that the practice of quiet-sitting during the time when no particular emotions arise aims to nourish rather than “seek” the original state of centrality that belongs to the ontological nature of the human heartmind. Because of its ontological priority over all concrete psychological states of heartmind, the original state of centrality is not exclusively manifested by and limited to any particular moment of psychological activities, even including the practice of quiet-sitting. The original state cannot be “sought” as a result.

Notably, Cheng Yi stresses that even when no particular emotions arise during the time of quiet-sitting, humans still “think” at this moment, and as long as one thinks, the corresponding psychological state already falls into the empirical and immanent aspect of heartmind and hence does not belong to the ontological and transcendent aspect that is integral to the *Tian*-endowed human nature.

Cheng Yi, therefore, suggests a more concrete method of self-cultivation regarding how to regulate one's emotions: when emotions arise, one shall adjust them to their due measures; when emotions do not arise, one shall practice quiet-sitting and nourish the original state of centrality so that one has a better chance of experiencing appropriate emotions when his or her heart starts to engage with outside things.

3) Jiming said, "Then, there is centrality before arousal (未發之中) and centrality after arousal" (既發之中). Cheng Yi replied, "No, that's not correct. When the emotions arise, the state of heartmind is harmony. If they arise and remain within their appropriate bounds, the heartmind is indeed achieving centrality (得中). However, since we differentiate centrality and harmony, it is harmony." Jiming asked, "You said that the state before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise refers to the state of 'being within centrality.' What does that mean?" He replied, "If there is no arising (不發) of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness at all, the state of the heartmind is centrality." Jiming asked, "Does this mean that centrality does not attach to any shaped body and is, therefore, just a linguistic term depicting the Dao?" He replied, "No, that's not correct. What shaped body does centrality have? Nevertheless, since it is called centrality, there must be some corresponding image." Jiming asked, "When in the state of centrality, do the ears not hear and the eyes not see?" He replied, "Even if the ears do not hear and the eyes do not see, the pattern-principle of hearing and seeing is still present."<sup>100</sup>

Here, we encounter the intense complexity of Cheng Yi's thoughts on centrality due to the joint impact of the three shaping forces discussed earlier. For Cheng Yi, on the empirical level, "centrality before arousal" refers to the concrete psychological state of feeling centered during quiet-sitting, and "harmony after arousal" refers to the appropriately arising emotions. Both of these empirical states manifest the ontologically original state of centrality, and hence Cheng Yi says that the harmonious state of appropriate emotions "achieves centrality."

However, since the empirical state of centrality during quiet-sitting is different from the original state of centrality, Cheng Yi has to invent another term, "no arising" (不發), different from "not arising yet" (未發), to refer to this original state. In other words, when the heartmind has not been aroused with emotions yet, it is in an empirical state of centrality that one can feel during quiet-sitting. However, because of its nonempirical and ontologically prior nature, the original state of centrality is different from any concrete psychological state, and hence we cannot even talk about either the "arising" or "not-arising-yet" of emotions here. Simply, the empirical language of the "arising or not" of emotions cannot fully depict the nature of the ontologically original centrality.

What is even more intriguing is that Cheng Yi does not consequently think that "centrality" in the verse of *Zhong Yong* has an exclusively ontological reference. Instead, Cheng Yi is loyal to the literal sense of the verse and thinks that, empirically, we can indeed feel centered when we practice quiet-sitting. However, what Cheng Yi stresses on top of this literal and empirical sense of centrality is that the empirical state of centrality is just an "image" of its ontological state. Hence, In Cheng Yi's view, what *Zhong Yong* really intends is to point to the ontological state of centrality using the image of the empirically felt state of centrality during the time of quiet-sitting.

Given this analysis, the last answer of Cheng Yi in this round of conversation also becomes understandable: even if one chooses not to particularly hear or see anything in his or her practice of quiet-sitting, the original state of centrality, which characterizes the pattern-principle of all psychological states, still functions. And one's practice of quiet-sitting can therefore nourish such an original state of centrality as the pattern-principle of hearing, seeing, and other concrete psychological activities.

4) Su Jiming asked, "Is the attainment of centrality subject to timing?" Cheng Yi replied, "When is it not attained? If we discuss specific events (事), then there are moments when centrality is achieved. However, when speaking of the Dao, when is centrality not attained?" Jiming inquired, "Indeed, all our actions should strive for centrality, but when observing the state before emotions arise, I perceive a unique atmosphere during moments of stillness. Yet when confronted with events, I feel different again. Why is that?" Cheng Yi responded, "An astute beholder would not experience this. Instead, they should behold their inner state just as pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness are about to arise. Can you, sir, elaborate on your experience during stillness?" Jiming said, "To call it a state of nothingness would be inaccurate, but one's perceptions do persist." Cheng Yi replied, "Since there is perception, the heartmind is active. How can you call it stillness? Regarding the saying 'one perceives the essence of heaven and earth through the hexagram of Fu (Restoration),'<sup>101</sup> many people believe that stillness allows one to see the essence of heaven and earth, but this is not true. In the Fu hexagram, the bottom line signifies activity. How can one consider it stillness? Throughout history, Ruists have claimed that stillness enables one to see the essence of heaven and earth, but I alone assert that it is through activity that one can perceive the essence of heaven and earth."

Jiming asked, "Is it about seeking quietude within activity?" Cheng Yi replied, "Indeed, but it is the most challenging. Buddhists often talk about 'being settled' (定), while sages discuss 'stopping' (止). For example, when something is good, one must acknowledge its goodness; when something is bad, one must recognize its badness. What do the inherent qualities of things have to do with my ego? If I claim to be only settled and have nothing else to do, the goodness or badness of things still exists in the world. Therefore, sages focus on stopping, as when a ruler stops at benevolence, or a minister stops at respect. The *Classic of Change*'s hexagram Gen refers to the meaning of stopping, stating, 'Gen means stopping. It implies stopping in one's due place.'<sup>102</sup> It suggests stopping where one should, but many people struggle to do so. After all, humans can handle various situations, and things distinguish themselves from one another based on the differing levels of significance perceived by the heartmind. When something is deemed more significant, it suddenly stands out. If we can address things as they truly are (物各付物), they would not stand out abruptly, allowing our heartmind to remain at ease and in its proper place."

Jiming asked, "Teacher, do you use the terms 'active' or 'still' to describe the state before the emergence of emotions?" Cheng Yi replied, "Referring to it as 'still' is appropriate, but

there must be something within stillness to be achieved. This is where the challenge lies. Scholars ought to first comprehend reverence. If they can practice reverence, they will naturally understand this.” Someone asked, “How can one cultivate reverence?” Cheng Yi responded, “There is no better approach than taking One as the master.”<sup>103</sup>

As mentioned above, Cheng Yi introduced the term “no-arising” (不發) to distinguish the empirical from the ontological state of centrality, building upon the concepts of “arising” (發) and “not-arising-yet” (未發). Since the human heartmind is consistently active across moments of “arising” and “not-arising-yet,” its actual operations can be characterized as “having already arisen” (已發), even during quiet-sitting practice. In this round of conversation, Cheng Yi also explained another important pair of concepts: “motion or activity” (動) and “stillness or quietude” (靜) within the context of contemplative practice.

When practicing quiet-sitting, an individual’s body remains still without particular emotions arising, yet his or her heartmind continues perceiving with no possibility of ceasing thought. In this sense, both physically still and moving moments of human life can be viewed as empirically active. However, ontologically, one can grasp the abstract pattern-principles of things in the world and their extensive interconnection as a singular, universal heavenly pattern-principle (*Tianli*) by contemplating how each activity contributes to an overall cosmic harmony through appropriate measures. Achieving this necessitates responding to things according to their genuine values, and once one treats things as they truly are, he or she will experience an inner sense of peace and quietude while actively pursuing duties and handling various situations. In an interreligious/interspiritual context, Cheng Yi characterizes the Buddhist method of meditation as aiming for a settled state without specific attitudes or judgments regarding the value of things in the world. In contrast, the Ru method of “stopping” seeks to proactively engage with the world while maintaining inner spiritual peace and quietude.

In summary, Cheng Yi identified three connotations of the term 靜 (*jing*) relevant to quiet-sitting practice: 1) physical stillness in contrast with physical motion, 2) the spiritual inner peace underlying both physically still and moving moments of everyday life, and 3) the ontological quietude characterizing the nontemporal and all-encompassing nature of the heavenly pattern-principle. According to Cheng Yi’s view, the goal of quiet-sitting practice is to experience inner peace during a physically still yet empirically active moment, and more importantly, to anchor that sense of inner peace in the ontologically fundamental and serene heavenly pattern-principle, which encompasses all empirically changing things in the world.

However, as our previous discussion on the relationship between reverence and quietude in 3.4 suggests, quiet-sitting is just one of many practices that can lead to inner spiritual peace and realization of the ontological quietude of *Tianli*. In other words, quiet-sitting is one of many paths to cultivate the attitude of reverence. Therefore, in his last reply in this conversation, Cheng Yi emphasizes that only when one consistently practices reverence in everyday life can he or she understand why he or she should aim for “something” deeper and broader during the physically still moments of quiet-sitting. According to our analysis, this “something” refers to *Tianli* and its broad manifestations in concrete human interactions with the world.

5) Jiming asked, "I once suffered from unsettled thoughts. When I was thinking about one thing, another thing would emerge, tangled like hemp. What can I do?" Cheng Yi replied, "This is not ideal. It's due to a lack of authenticity. You need to practice. When your mind becomes focused, the practice reaches its goal. Whether you are thinking or dealing with matters, you should always strive for taking One as the master."

Jiming asked, "When I practice quiet-sitting, should I see things that pass in front of me or not?" Cheng Yi replied, "It depends on the situation. If it's a significant event, like a sacrificial ritual, headdress streamers in front blur the view and silk tassels cover the ears, so you neither see nor hear any distracting things passing by. However, when there's no event, your eyes should see and your ears should hear." Jiming asked, "During times of reverence, even if we see and hear, should we not retain things in mind when they pass by" (莫過焉而不留否)? Cheng Yi replied, "Isn't it said that we should not look or listen to anything that is not in accordance with ritual propriety? The word 'not' is just a term of prohibition. However, [you should still see and hear things appropriately, and] it is not right to take 'not' as a general rule" (才說弗字便不得也).

Jiming asked, "Some people say that the heartmind of a newborn baby has already arisen (已發). Is that true?" Cheng Yi replied, "It arises, but it has not yet strayed far from the Dao." Jiming asked, "How can an exemplary person (大人) maintain the heartmind of a newborn baby?" Cheng Yi replied, "By preserving its pure Oneness and proximity to the Dao." Jiming asked, "What is the difference between the heartmind of a newborn baby and the heartmind of a sage?" Cheng Yi replied, "The heartmind of a sage is like a mirror, like still water."<sup>104</sup>

Since the conversation between Cheng Yi and Su Jiming had turned to the topic of reverence, Jiming began asking about concrete methods for maintaining reverence, taking quiet-sitting as an example. The opening paragraphs of this section remind us of Cheng Yi's method of "calming the mind." As discussed previously, one needs to focus on doing things properly to calm the mind and then nurture a consistent attitude of reverence toward all pattern-principles of things in the world. So, when significant events are at hand, one's reverence is demonstrated by his or her laser focus on them, not being distracted by any irrelevant sights or sounds. However, when one does not have urgent matters to attend to and practices quiet-sitting, he or she still needs to choose to hear, see, or use any of his or her senses to perceive things, such as contemplating one's breath to grasp the *Tianli* behind it.

Cheng Yi's answer to Jiming's question about whether to retain things when they pass by is distinctively Ruist in the sense that it teaches a way different from the Buddhist method of dealing with passing thoughts in one's mind or passing events in reality. The Buddhist method, as interpreted through Cheng Yi's thought that we have analyzed, does not advocate the cultivation of any specific attitude or judgment to engage with those transient thoughts or occurrences. However, Cheng Yi teaches that one cannot consider "no engagement" as a general rule, and

hence, in his view, focusing on the process of thinking and performing the right actions in the appropriate manner will consistently calm one's mind.

The final question regarding the heartmind of a newborn baby reaffirms the ontological mindset of Cheng Yi's contemplative practice. Just as he views the empirical state of centrality during quiet-sitting as an image of the ontological state of centrality, Cheng Yi believes that the pure and attentive psychological state of a newborn baby is distinct from the ontological state of quietude cultivated by a sage.

#### 4.2. *A Letter of Discussing Centrality with Lv Dalin (與呂大臨論中書)*

Another significant discussion of Cheng Yi on centrality is with his student Lv Dalin, as indicated by Su Jiming's mention of Lv's name in the above conversation. In the letter exchange with Lv Dalin, Cheng Yi explicitly presents, in relation to the text of *Zhong Yong* and his contemplative practice, that the human heartmind has two levels in its constitution: one is its fundamental state<sup>105</sup> (體, *ti*), and the other is its functions (用, *yong*). Since some of the major thoughts have been expressed by Cheng Yi in his discussion with Su Jiming, I will summarize the major disagreements between Cheng and Lv and focus on an analysis of the quotations that represent Cheng Yi's distinctive understanding of the nature of the human heartmind:

The first disagreement lies in how to interpret the meaning of each major term in the opening paragraph of *Zhong Yong*. Lv tended to merge every concept together, arguing that "centrality is equivalent to [human] nature" (中即性). However, Cheng Yi strictly adhered to the analytical structure of the text, asserting that "nature is embedded in humans. Following nature is called the Dao. Nature, Mandate (of *Tian*), and Dao, all these terms have their distinctive designations. The great foundation refers to the fundamental state (體), whereas the universal path refers to the function (用). The fundamental state is distinct from the function, and how can we not treat them as two different things?" Specifically, Cheng Yi emphasized that the basic literal meaning of centrality is "not unbalanced" (不偏). He states, "The view that 'centrality is equivalent to [human] nature' is incorrect. Centrality is by which to depict the nature as if it has a depictable imagery (狀性之體段)."<sup>106</sup>

Based on this exegetical analysis of *Zhong Yong*'s terms, the second point of disagreement between Cheng and Lv concerns the understanding of the ontological status of the human heartmind when no emotions arise. The translation of their conversation on this topic is as follows:

Dalin says, "Before pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness arise, the heartmind of a newborn child is present. In this not-yet-arisen moment, the heartmind is utterly void, without bias or leaning, and thus it is referred to as 'centrality.' With this heartmind, one responds to the myriad changes in the world, and in all situations, the heartmind remains centered."

Cheng Yi replies, "[*Zhong Yong* says,] when pleasure, anger, sorrow, and happiness have not yet arisen, it is called 'centrality.' The heartmind of a newborn child, having arisen, is not far from centrality. If we consider the heartmind of a newborn body as equivalent to

the original state of centrality, it indicates that we do not understand the great foundation.”<sup>107</sup>

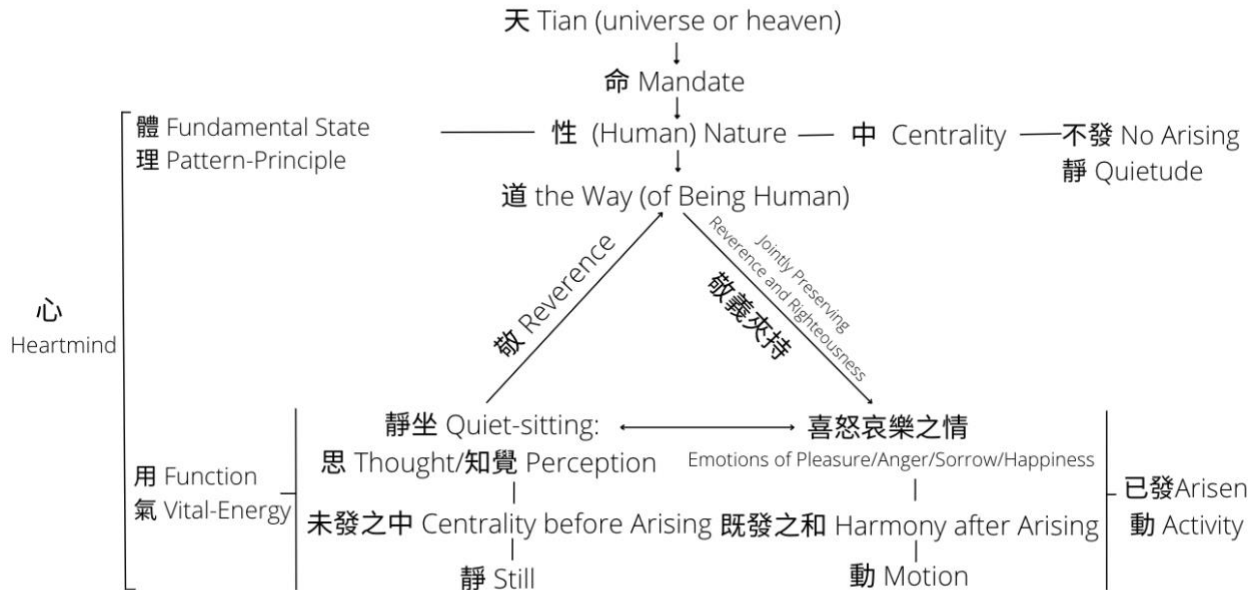
Cheng Yi's response to Dalin's view maintains remarkable consistency with his discussion with Su Jiming. In Cheng's view, the psychological state of the heartmind of a newborn child is similar to the one experienced during quiet-sitting. At the empirical level, both of these states pertain to a functioning heartmind, which has already arisen. Dalin, failing to distinguish between the empirical and ontological states of centrality, directly identified the psychological state of purity and balance in a newborn child's heartmind as what *Zhong Yong*'s term “centrality” refers to. When Cheng Yi referred to this state of a newborn as also “having arisen” (已發), Dalin felt greatly confused because he could not then identify a state of the heartmind that could be considered “not having arisen.” So, the conversation continues:

Dalin says: “Teacher, you claim that when we discuss the heartmind, we always refer to its arisen states. In that case, can we say there is no heartmind at all before arousal? I believe that even before arousal, the fundamental state of the heartmind (心體) is already present and clear. Once aroused, the heartmind begins to function.” Cheng Yi replies: “You previously misidentified the arisen states as unarisen; however, what you just said concerns exclusively those arisen states. The lack of clarity in the words is due to imprecision in their selection. It is certainly not appropriate to always refer to the heartmind as being in an arisen state. The heartmind is one, but there are those who discuss its fundamental state (which is silent and unmoving) and those who discuss its function (which is resonating and connected to all things in the world). It all depends on the perspective from which it is being viewed.”<sup>108</sup>

Just as Cheng Yi coined the term “no arising” (不發) to distinguish the ontological state of centrality from both the empirical states of the heartmind, which include the “not-arising-yet” (未發)<sup>109</sup> and “arising” (發) moments, he now employs the term “fundamental state” (體) to refer to the ontological state and “function” (用) to refer to the varying empirical states. Based on his previous discussions, Cheng Yi consistently situates the practice of quiet-sitting within the “not-arising-yet” moment of the empirical state of the heartmind. Only when guided by the unifying practice of reverence can quiet-sitting attain the “no arising” nature of the heartmind's fundamental state. By applying the terms Cheng discusses with Lv, we can further expound that quiet-sitting and all concrete contemplative practices aim to fulfill the “functions” of the heartmind while being grounded in its “fundamental state.” “Reverence,” along with the most refined method of “jointly preserving reverence and righteousness,” acts as a bridge between the two realms of the human heartmind: the ontological and the empirical.

We can then draw a diagram (Figure 1) to illustrate the system of moral psychology constructed by Cheng Yi according to his discussions on centrality with Su Jiming and Lv Dalin:

The Nature of Heartmind according to Cheng Yi  
 伊川心性圖



Designed by Bin Song  
<https://binsong.live>

Figure 1: The Nature of Heartmind according to Cheng Yi

After construing each major term in this diagram of “The Nature of Heartmind according to Cheng Yi” in my previous commentary of Cheng’s conversations with his students, I need to add a few words to explain its structural nature and the position of quiet-sitting and other contemplative practices within it.

Two levels of the human heartmind are manifest in the diagram: one is ontological, termed as “fundamental state” or “pattern-principle” by Cheng Yi, and the other is empirical, termed as “function” or “vital-energy.” The psychological state achieved by quiet-sitting (i.e., a specific kind of “thought” or “perception” described as remaining centered before emotions arise) is situated in the “not-arising-yet” or “before arising” moment of the empirical level of the heartmind. However, only under the guidance of the unifying contemplative method of reverence can the practice of quiet-sitting reach the ontologically quiet level of the heartmind’s fundamental state. Through another practice called “jointly preserving reverence and righteousness,” such an ontological state

of quietude and centrality is further realized in the mundane moments of human life, embodied by varying affective responses to things in the world, such as emotions of pleasure, anger, sorrow, happiness, and others. I connect “quiet-sitting” and “emotions” using a two-way arrow to indicate that the still and moving moments of human life alternate with each other in a continuum, like the ceaseless alternation and interaction of yin/yang vital-energies in the universe. The crucial method for grounding the empirical activities of the human heartmind in their ontological fundamental substance and, furthermore, fulfilling the mandate of *Tian* that endows humans with a unique nature is reverence as well as jointly preserving reverence and righteousness. These represent, as analyzed before, the transcendent and immanent aspects of Ru contemplative practice.

## 5. METAPHYSICS

As demonstrated by all our analyses above, there are significant metaphysical ideas guiding Cheng Yi's contemplative practices. For instance, “A common pattern-principle to both things and oneself” encompasses the comprehensiveness of the practice of contemplative beholding. The ontological priority of pattern-principle over vital-energy implies that in contemplative breathing, one should focus on the generic trait of constant creativity within the universe that breathing manifests, rather than any sequence of exhalation or inhalation. Furthermore, that “the pattern-principle is one and its manifestations are many” establishes the ultimate and final contemplative method of “jointly preserving reverence and righteousness.” Having utilized Figure 1 to demonstrate the role of contemplative practices within the comprehensive framework of Cheng Yi's metaphysical and moral psychology, we now move to summarize the key aspects of Cheng Yi's metaphysics as they relate to his contemplative practices.

As illustrated by Figure 1, Cheng Yi reinterpreted a series of traditional concepts to refer to the two distinct levels (i.e., one empirical and another ontological) of cosmic realities that constitute the basic structure of his metaphysical system: pattern-principle versus vital-energy, fundamental state versus function, which are alternatively phrased as pattern-principle versus thing or event (事), the Way (道) versus utensil-like things (器), and nature (性) versus emotions (情). Regarding the relationship between pattern-principle and vital-energy, which is fundamental to all the listed pairs of concepts, I will summarize the following points:

First, on a temporal basis, there is no priority between the pattern-principle and vital-energy. The endless alternation and interaction of yin and yang vital-energies occur throughout the universe. Each segment of this process is accompanied by a pattern-principle that explains the reason for its occurrence and the norm by which it proceeds.

Second, ontologically, the pattern-principle takes precedence over vital-energy. Vital-energy relies on the pattern-principle as its rationale and norm of existence. Due to its ontological priority, the existence of the pattern-principle is nontemporal and separable from the concrete proceedings of vital-energy.

Third, all pattern-principles merge into one. The nontemporal nature of the pattern-principle's existence allows for a mode of “synchronicity,” through which the function of a pattern-principle connects to all its merged functions across past, present, and future time frames.

Fourth, the pattern-principle is formless and invisible, while vital-energy takes shape within its two basic forms and always possesses a material aspect. Examining the modes of change in

vital-energies serves as a means to understand any pattern-principle. In this sense, each mode of vital-energy is a manifestation of the pattern-principle's generative and regulatory power.

Fifth, although there is a distinction between the pattern-principle and vital-energy, they coexist within the singular cosmic realm of being called *Tian*. No alternative worlds have been conceived beyond the one inhabited by humans, and the one most generic feature of this unique world is its constant change and creativity.

Based on these five fundamental traits, Cheng Yi presents another metaphysical proposition in his later years, which can be seen as a summarizing statement of his lifelong endeavor in metaphysics. While Cheng Yi prefaced his commentary on the *Classic of Change*, he states: "The pattern-principle is the subtlest. The image [of things] is the most manifest. The fundamental state and its function share a common origin, and the distinction between the subtle and the manifest is seamless (体用一源, 显微无间)."<sup>110</sup> Cheng also offers an alternative statement: "Nothing is more manifest than events, and nothing is more subtle than the pattern-principle. Yet, events and pattern-principles align with each other, and the subtle and the manifest share a common origin (事理一致, 微显一源)."<sup>111</sup>

As articulated by this conclusive metaphysical proposition of Cheng Yi, the ontological directs the empirical, the empirical manifests the ontological, and both the ontological and the empirical exist within the same cosmos. This concise formulation of the relationship between pattern-principle and vital-energy builds upon the proposition that the "pattern-principle is one, and its manifestations are many" and can thus be seen as the final metaphysical justification for the central contemplative method of Cheng Yi, "jointly preserving reverence and righteousness."

## 6. COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION

In this study on Cheng Yi's quiet-sitting and his other contemplative practices, I have presented testimonies, analyzed techniques, and critiqued their theoretical frameworks. Additionally, I will begin to compare Cheng Yi's Ru contemplative practice with others in the field of contemplative studies. However, it is important to note that the conclusions I will draw here are tentative and subject to change as further research is conducted. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Ru tradition remains largely unexplored in the context of global contemplative studies, and I look forward to seeing future advancements in scholarship on this topic.

### 6.1 Types of Contemplative Practice

We have presented various testimonies to Cheng Yi's contemplative practices, including quiet-sitting meditation, beholding the vivacity of the myriad things, calligraphy, restful sleep, reflection on dreams, and divination. However, since Cheng Yi viewed "reverence" as a foundational contemplative attitude that permeates all aspects of daily life, our list of testimonies would expand if we were to further study his lifestyle. Activities such as ritual and ceremonial performance, social etiquette, teaching and learning, intellectual inquiry, ethical studies, and public service could all be considered "contemplative" as a result.

Due to the all-encompassing nature of Cheng Yi's Ru lifestyle, numerous classifications<sup>112</sup> employed by scholars in contemplative studies can be applied to his case. For example, Ru contemplation, following Cheng Yi's model, can be characterized as "attentional," "communal,"

“concentrative,” “devotional” (considering the ritual practice of ancestor devotion as an example), “ecstatic” (given the transcendent aspect of “consistent reverence”), “enstatic” (considering the immanent quality of “jointly preserving reverence and righteousness”), “kataphatic,” “kinesthetic,” “mantic,” “mystical” (given the transcendent nature of the unifying and all-pervasive heavenly pattern-principle), “respiratory,” “solitary,” “therapeutic,” “unitive,” and “visual.”

Nonetheless, since Cheng Yi firmly upheld the importance of rationality, intellectual and ethical inquiry, ritual, language, and social engagement in his contemplation, the following categories may not be suitable for describing his contemplative practice. Ru contemplation, in line with Cheng Yi’s approach, cannot be described as “apophatic” (which suggests “skepticism regarding linguistic and intellectual categories”), “dualistic” (which stresses “an unbridgeable distinction between the practitioner and the world”), “mantric” (which employs “a sound, syllable, or phrase” deemed “sacred or efficacious”), “mediumistic” (which entails the possession of practitioners by a god or spirit), or “quietistic” (which is characterized by “nonconceptual, contentless awareness”).

Determining whether Cheng Yi’s contemplative practice can be classified as “religious” or “secular” is challenging, as the dichotomy between “religiosity” and “secularity” stems from a Western cultural context, and contemplative scholars have worked to show the insufficiency of these concepts for many Eastern religious traditions. While Cheng Yi’s contemplative practices are not based on dogmatic beliefs or deity worship, they are permeated by a fundamental attitude of reverence, which imparts a universal and unifying transcendent aspect to all human activities. Consequently, his practice could be considered both religious and secular or neither religious nor secular, depending on how we define these terms in different contexts.

It is equally challenging to classify Cheng Yi’s contemplative lifestyle as either “lay” or “monastic.” At first glance, the former seems more fitting, as Ru scholars throughout history never established monasteries as their institutional base, and Cheng Yi did not consider celibacy or voluntary poverty necessary for Ru contemplation. However, the dedicated, solemn, and self-transformative nature of Cheng Yi’s contemplative lifestyle evokes a similar atmosphere to that of monks and nuns in various monastic traditions. In contemporary United States, a lay movement called “new monasticism” has emerged, advocating for the integration of spiritual wisdom into everyday life, significantly blurring the boundary between “lay” and “monastic” pursuits. Considering this recent development in Western monasticism, we can tentatively describe Cheng Yi’s contemplative lifestyle as both lay and monastic.

In sections 3.3 and 3.4, I explained that Cheng Yi’s contemplative practice of “taking One as the master” consisted of four “stages.” Upon further analysis, all the aforementioned categories can be organized into different stages of the practice. For instance, “ecstatic,” “mystical,” “solitary,” “unitive,” “religious,” and “monastic” are more fitting to describe the second and third stages, which are characterized more by transcendence than immanence. Conversely, “communal,” “devotional,” “enstatic,” “kataphatic,” “therapeutic,” “respiratory,” “visual,” “secular,” and “lay” are more suitable for the first and fourth immanent stages. Meanwhile, “attentive” and “concentrative” are terms that describe the consistent traits present across all stages.

## 6.2 Characteristics of Contemplative Studies

The emerging field of contemplative studies aims to introduce a scholarly attitude of rationality to traditional and contemporary contemplative practices from diverse lineages and traditions. Historically, the Ru tradition has distinguished itself from other traditions in ancient China, such as Daoism and Buddhism, due to its strong emphasis on education, scholarship, and social and political activism. As a result, the contemplative tradition of Ruism does not lack the scholarly attitude of rationality, making the tradition itself strikingly similar to contemplative studies. Strong evidence for this resemblance can be found in the three key characteristics of contemplative studies as a field,<sup>113</sup> all of which are shared by the Ru tradition as exemplified by Cheng Yi: first, Cheng Yi was devoted to “contemplative practice,” encompassing various genres and techniques. Second, Cheng Yi was notable for his “critical subjectivity” or “critical first-person discourse,” which I will elaborate on shortly. And, third, the Ru contemplation for which Cheng Yi advocated aimed at the “character development” of individuals, with characters defined as “virtues” by the comprehensive and systematic Ru discourse on ethics, politics, and metaphysics.

From a comparative perspective with contemplative traditions of world religions, the Ru contemplation exemplified by Cheng Yi strongly emphasizes “critical subjectivity” and “critical first-person discourse.” As discussed in the first section of this paper, one social context of Cheng Yi’s contemplative practice is his intention to differentiate his practice from Daoism, Buddhism, and other lineages of *Daoxue* Ruism. This implies that critical engagement with ideas from these alternative traditions and lineages is integral to Cheng’s practice as our previous analyses have amply demonstrated. More importantly, Cheng himself continually refined his philosophical thought to construct a more coherent contemplative lifestyle. For example, his discussion with Lv Dalin on centrality led him to differentiate the “fundamental state” and “function” levels of heartmind, and his views on the metaphysical nature of pattern-principle continued to evolve throughout his lifetime. All these self-critiques and self-reflections hold guiding significance for his contemplative practice.

The characteristic of critical subjectivity in Cheng Yi’s Ru contemplative lifestyle is especially worth emphasizing because leading scholars in the field of contemplative studies rely on this characteristic to establish the academic legitimacy of their discipline. Discontent with the traditional binary thinking of uncritical first-person practice in religion versus critical third-person scholarship in academia, contemplative scholars stress that it is possible to be both “committed and open”<sup>114</sup> at the same time. Consequently, scholars can engage in tradition-based contemplation while maintaining mutual accountability between their first-person experience of practice and third-person scrutiny of scholarship.

Nonetheless, not all contemplative traditions and lineages align well with the intention of contemporary contemplative scholars to remain both “committed and open.” As Komjathy observed, “Historically speaking, contemplative practice has tended to have a close connection with asceticism, eremiticism, monasticism, mysticism, and similar undertakings.”<sup>115</sup> If such a connection leads a contemplative tradition to be inherently skeptical of the value of intellectual, discursive, and critical scholarship, as many traditions have been, it is difficult to envision how practitioners within such a tradition would be willing to subject their nonintellectual or even anti-intellectual experiences to objective scholarly scrutiny. In the academic field of contemplative studies, this creates ethical concerns of appropriation and colonialism.<sup>116</sup> This may also make it

more challenging for contemplative scholars rooted in such traditions to grapple with the aforementioned binary thinking and justify their contemplative scholarship since those traditions themselves may indeed imply or even advocate for that binary thinking.

Since the Ru tradition itself, as exemplified by Cheng Yi's approach, did not advocate binary thinking and never associated itself with monasticism that is skeptical of the value of intellectual activities, the connection between the contemplative Ru lifestyle and the contemporary field of contemplative studies seems seamless and, therefore, should be more intimate than it currently is. This implies that incorporating Ru contemplation into contemporary contemplative pedagogy in secondary and higher education institutions will likely be fruitful. For instance, concerning the issue of how to address the relationship between contemplative practice and analytical thinking,<sup>117</sup> Cheng Yi would emphasize that "investigation of things" and "thoroughly studying pattern-principles" are integral parts of contemplation. Additionally, contemplative courses that have strong ethical concerns with imminent social issues (such as the environmental crisis<sup>118</sup>) could be informed by Cheng Yi's view that "doing things right" calms one's mind, and hence "jointly preserving reverence and righteousness" is the ultimate technique of contemplative practice. In summary, the comparatively more harmonious relationship between Ru contemplation and contemporary contemplative studies suggests that Ruism could be among the prime candidates for case studies or pedagogical applications of contemplation in the modern academy.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An explanation of the history on the nomenclature of “Confucianism” vis-à-vis the “Ru” tradition can be found in Tony Swain, *Confucianism in China: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 3–22, and Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 45–76. In this paper, “Confucianism” will be written as “Ruism” or the “Ru tradition,” and “Confucian” or “Confucianist” will be written as “Ru” or “Ruist.” When used as a noun, the plural of “Ru” or “Ruist” is “Ru” or “Ruists.”

<sup>2</sup> Louis Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 138.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Komjathy, *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Notable English publications that provide a general overview of the topic include, but are not limited to, Rodney Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Masaya Mabuchi, “‘Quiet Sitting’ in Neo-Confucianism,” in *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, ed. Halvor Eifring (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), 11–12; Judson B Murray, “Confucian Mysticism,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, April 26, 2021, accessed April 3, 2023; Yanqin Peng and Ziyu Zhang, “Theory and Meditation of Confucian Mindfulness: Analysis Based on the Concept of Vigilance in Solitude in Chinese Confucianism,” *Journal of Religion and Health* (2022), accessed April 3, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Notable recent Chinese studies on Ru self-cultivation include but are not limited to, Chen Lisheng 陈立胜, *From “Self-Cultivation” to “Cultivating Effort”: The Development and Transformation of the Learning of “Inner Sagehood” in Ruism 从“修身”到“工夫”：儒家内圣学的开显与转折* (台北：台湾大學出版中心, 2021) ; Peng Guoxiang 彭国翔, *The Cultivation of Body and Heartmind: the Discourse of Cultivating Effort in the Ru Tradition 身心修炼：儒家传统的功夫论* (上海：三联书店, 2022); and Peimin Ni 倪培民, *The Ruist Philosophy of Cultivating Effort 儒家功夫哲学论* (北京：商务印书馆, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> These definitions are implied by the prevalent imagery of the “Tree of Contemplative Practices” attributed to The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, with concept and design by Maia Duerr and illustration by Carrie Bergman, accessed March 20, 2023, available at <https://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>. For a discussion on the formal definitions of these two terms, see Komjathy, *Contemplative Studies*, 53, 311–12.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction between Cheng Hao’s and Cheng Yi’s thought, in reference to their varying impacts on the later intellectual history of the *Daoxue* movement, remains an enduring question for the Ru tradition and contemporary scholars. See Pan Wangli 庞万里, *The Philosophical Systems of the Cheng Brothers 二程哲学体系* (北京：北京航空航天大学出版社, 1992), 341–414; Zhao Zhengtai 赵正泰, “The Similarity and Difference of the Cheng Brothers’ Thought in the Context of the Discussion on ‘Reverence’ ‘敬’论视域下二程子工夫论的思想异同,” *东岳论丛* 39, no. 11 (November 2018): 69–75.

<sup>8</sup> Non-English technical terms in this article will be highlighted in italics, except for well-known terms in the scholarship of Asian studies, such as Dao, Qi, and yin/yang.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the relationship between Cheng Yi and other lineages of Ru learning in his time, see Pan Wanli, *Philosophical Systems*, 31–52. Concerning the role of Cheng Yi in the *Daoxue* movement, refer to Peter K. Bol, *“This Culture of Ours”: Intellectual Transitions in T’ang and Sung China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 305–26. For the connection between the terms *Daoxue* and Neo-Confucianism, consult Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction* (Boston: Polity, 2017), 1–2. A general historical analysis of the rise of Neo-Confucianism can be found in Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Cheng Hao 程颢 and Cheng Yi 程颐, *The Collected Works of Cheng Brothers 二程集* (北京：中華書局, 1981). Unless otherwise specified, translations of the Cheng family’s sayings, deeds, and writings in this book are my own. I will directly indicate the page number of the book following the translations in the text.

<sup>11</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 652.

<sup>12</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 426.

<sup>13</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 429.

<sup>14</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 432.

- <sup>15</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 429. This story later evolved into a Chinese idiom, “程門立雪” (standing in the snow at Cheng’s gate).
- <sup>16</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 432.
- <sup>17</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 430.
- <sup>18</sup> 心 refers to the core of human consciousness, encompassing both cognitive and affective aspects. My standard translation of 心 is “heartmind,” although I occasionally render it as “heart” or “mind” depending on the context.
- <sup>19</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 191.
- <sup>20</sup> Bryan Van Norden, trans., *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2008), 110. I have adapted the translation to the context of Cheng Yi’s instruction.
- <sup>21</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 215–16.
- <sup>22</sup> According to Zhu Xi 朱熹, “Chronology of Master Yichuan 伊川先生年譜,” in *Collected Works of Zhu Xi 晦菴先生朱文公文集*, vol. 98 (四部叢刊本, 1922), accessed March 26, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=78460&page=50>, that Cheng Yi was demoted to Fu Zhou took place in the fourth year of Shao Shen (紹聖), namely 1097.
- <sup>23</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 423.
- <sup>24</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 96.
- <sup>25</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 414.
- <sup>26</sup> For instance, *The Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra* (瑜珈師地論, the Zhao Cheng Jin Zang version 趙城金藏本, 24:2) explains that “宴坐” (sitting at ease) refers to adopting a cross-legged sitting position (結加趺坐), accessed March 20, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=87923&page=17>.
- <sup>27</sup> Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 et al., *Learning Cased in Song and Yuan 宋元學案*, vol. 14 (the He Shaoji print, 道光丙午年 1648): 8, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=22359&page=86&remap=gb#%E5%B0%8F%E9%B1%BC>.
- <sup>28</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 59.
- <sup>29</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 1264.
- <sup>30</sup> The saying pertains to the commentary of *Decorating Words* (文言) found in the received *Classic of Change*.
- <sup>31</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 120.
- <sup>32</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 59.
- <sup>33</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 214.
- <sup>34</sup> The term 理 is well-known as among the most contested terms for translation in Ru studies. In the tradition of *Daoxue* Ruism, 理 can be generally interpreted as the way in which a set of cosmic or human realities dynamically and harmoniously fit together. This concept explains both why a thing comes to be and how a thing should be, with particularities and nuances in its usage varying among different thinkers. My standard translation for 理 is “pattern-principle,” although I occasionally render it as “principle” or “pattern” depending on the context. For more on the philosophy and translation of 理, see Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism*, 21–48.
- <sup>35</sup> This refers to the incipient moral feelings of commiseration, shame, deference, and approval discussed in *Mengzi* 2B.
- <sup>36</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 193.
- <sup>37</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 193.
- <sup>38</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 61.
- <sup>39</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 8.
- <sup>40</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 196.
- <sup>41</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 53.
- <sup>42</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 25.
- <sup>43</sup> *Analects* 7.5.
- <sup>44</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 202.
- <sup>45</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 202-3.
- <sup>46</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 46-47.
- <sup>47</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 56.

- <sup>48</sup> My explanation of these three factors are inspired by Chen Lisheng 陈立胜, “The Dual Implication of Cheng Yi on Dream 程颐说梦的双重意蕴,” *孔子研究*, no. 5 (2017): 80–89.
- <sup>49</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 194.
- <sup>50</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 51.
- <sup>51</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 271.
- <sup>52</sup> The text is in Zhu Xi, *Collected Works* 晦菴先生朱文公文集, vol. 68, accessed March 26, 2023, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&file=78447&page=2>.
- <sup>53</sup> This posture bears a resemblance to the Japanese *Seiza* commonly practiced today.
- <sup>54</sup> For the influence of newly developed furniture on sitting postures during Song dynasty, please consult Wang Shaohua 汪少华, “Ancient Sitting Postures and Orders 古人的坐姿与座次,” *南昌大学学报* 30, no. 3 (September 1999): 126–30.
- <sup>55</sup> My conclusion aligns with Japanese scholar 吾妻重二’s research on the prevalent quiet-sitting posture in the Song through Ming Ru tradition, though my study was conducted independently. See Teng Jing Lun Ming 藤井倫明, “A Summary of the Japanese Research on the Discourse of Cultivating Effort in the Pattern-Principle Learning 日本研究理學功夫論之概況,” in *Vital-Energy and Cultivating Efforts in Ruism 儒學的氣論與工夫論*, ed. Yang Rubin 楊儒賓 and Zhu Pingci 祝平次 (國立台灣大學出版中心, 2005): 312–13.
- <sup>56</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 49.
- <sup>57</sup> The term “interreligious” presumes interacting traditions are considered “religions.” However, the contentious nature of “religion” and “religions” in religious studies raises concerns regarding its suitability for non-Western traditions. Thus, I employ “interreligious/interspiritual” to express sensitivity to this issue when describing interactions among ancient Chinese traditions. For an insightful discussion on this matter, see John J. Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 129–35.
- <sup>58</sup> A detailed analysis of Daoist texts on the practice of “embryonic breathing” can be found in Stephen Eskildsen, *Daoism, Meditation, and the Wonders of Serenity: from the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220) to the Tang Dynasty (628–907)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 241–75.
- <sup>59</sup> “Summary of the Rules of Rites (曲禮),” in Zheng Xuan 郑玄 and Kong Yingda 孔颖达, *The Correct Meanings of The Record of Rites 礼记正义*, in *Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics 十三经注疏*, ed. Li Xueqin 李学勤 (北京: 北京大学出版社, 1999), 11–12.
- <sup>60</sup> Li Weixiang 李为香, “The Origin and Manner of Sitting Upright in the Periods of Shang and Zhou 商周时期正坐的起源及仪规,” *中南大学学报(社会科学版)* 19, no. 6 (December 2013): 224–29.
- <sup>61</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 165–66.
- <sup>62</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 167.
- <sup>63</sup> The quote originates from the *Appended Texts* of the *Classic of Change*.
- <sup>64</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 160.
- <sup>65</sup> For instance, Daoists compiled *A Summary of the Wondrous Way of Genuine Origin 真元妙道要略* during the interval between Tang and Song dynasties. See Siyuan Zheng 郑思远, *A Summary of the Wondrous Way of Genuine Origin 真元妙道要略*. 正統道藏本, accessed March 30, 2023 <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&res=84602>.
- <sup>66</sup> About the distinction of cosmologies in Laozi’s *Dao De Jing* and in the Ruist *Appended Texts* of the *Classic of Change* and their varying impacts upon ancient Chinese cosmological thought, please refer to Bin Song, “A Study of Comparative Philosophy of Religion on ‘Creatio Ex Nihilo’ and ‘Sheng Sheng’ (Birth Birth, 生生)” (PhD diss., Boston University, 2018), 219–315.
- <sup>67</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 145.
- <sup>68</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 324.
- <sup>69</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 46.
- <sup>70</sup> The phrase is from chapter 19 of the received version of the *Dao De Jing*.
- <sup>71</sup> The saying originates from the commentary of *Decorating Words* (文言) found in the received *Classic of Change*.
- <sup>72</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 169.

- <sup>73</sup> The terms 槁木 (lifeless wood) and 死灰 (ash) derive from the opening chapter of “Equalizing Assessments of Things” of the *Zhuangzi*.
- <sup>74</sup> The four thought habits refer to *Analects* 9.4.
- <sup>75</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 26.
- <sup>76</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 433.
- <sup>77</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 149.
- <sup>78</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 315.
- <sup>79</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 432.
- <sup>80</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 76.
- <sup>81</sup> *Analects* 12.2.
- <sup>82</sup> “Summary of the Rules of Rites,” in the *Record of Rites*.
- <sup>83</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 184–85.
- <sup>84</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 150.
- <sup>85</sup> *Analects* 12.1.
- <sup>86</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 143.
- <sup>87</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 27.
- <sup>88</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 157.
- <sup>89</sup> *Mengzi* 2A.
- <sup>90</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 206.
- <sup>91</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 78. One anonymous reviewer of this paper’s manuscript questioned whether the outlined four “stages” or “levels” of Cheng Yi’s contemplative practice should be undertaken simultaneously. In response, I wish to emphasize that this four-stage discourse is my interpretation of Cheng Yi’s contemplative method, founded on cited materials and evidence. My aim is to demonstrate that this interpretation aligns appropriately with the provided evidence. Cheng Yi explicitly differentiated “consistent reverence,” which doesn’t require a specific mental object to focus on, and extensively explored the distinction between “reverence” and “righteousness.” Consequently, I believe that in Cheng Yi’s view, practitioners must undergo different “stages” or phases in their day-to-day regimen of self-cultivation. However, once a practitioner reaches the final stage referred to as “jointly preserve reverence and righteousness”—a stage encompassing all requirements of the previous stages—practitioners can and indeed should treat these “stages” as varied “levels” or dimensions of Ru self-cultivation that occur concurrently. I appreciate this anonymous reviewer’s prompt to clarify this point.
- <sup>92</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 1202–3.
- <sup>93</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 66.
- <sup>94</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 317.
- <sup>95</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 22.
- <sup>96</sup> Chan Wing-Tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 97. I adapt the translation.
- <sup>97</sup> In addition to the secondary sources cited earlier, recent scholarship that has inspired my research on the dialogue includes, but is not limited to, Peng Rong 彭荣, “Differentiating Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi on ‘Non-Arising’ and ‘Arising’: 伊川、朱子已发未发辨异,” *Journal of Shangrao Normal University 上饶师范学院学报* 36, no. 1 (February 2016): 7–11; Zhang Simin 张斯珉, “A New Interpretation of Centrality and Harmony from the Perspective of the Pattern-Principle Learning: A Discussion on Cheng Yi’s Thought of Centrality and Harmony 理学视域下的‘中和’新解——论程颐的中和思想,” *Humanities Magazine 人文杂志* no. 12 (2020): 9–16; and Du Xiao 杜晓, “The Evolution and Implication of Cheng Yi’s Thought on the Nature of Heartmind: Focusing on the Differentiation of Ti and Yong within Heartmind 程颐心性论的演变与内涵——以心分’体用’为主,” *Yinshan Journal 阴山学刊* 26, no. 4 (August 2013): 5–9.
- <sup>98</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 200.
- <sup>99</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 200–201.
- <sup>100</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 201.

- <sup>101</sup> This saying refers to the *Commentary of Decision* (彖传) for Hexagram Fu (復 Restoration) in the received *Classic of Change*. Hexagram Fu consists of one yang line at the bottom, followed by five yin lines, symbolizing the initial moment of cosmic creativity.
- <sup>102</sup> This refers to the *Commentary of Decision* of Hexagram Gen in the received *Classic of Change*.
- <sup>103</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 201–202.
- <sup>104</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 202.
- <sup>105</sup> My translation of 體 as “fundamental state” is inspired by Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Oneness: East Asian Conceptions of Virtue, Happiness, and How We Are All Connected* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 119.
- <sup>106</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 606.
- <sup>107</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 607.
- <sup>108</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 608–609.
- <sup>109</sup> Although Cheng Yi’s ontological thought is generally clear, the term 不發 is not always used consistently and distinguished from 未發 in various conversations involving Cheng Yi. Therefore, readers must discern the ontological differences of each term in the context of each discussion.
- <sup>110</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 689.
- <sup>111</sup> Cheng and Cheng, *Collected Works*, 323.
- <sup>112</sup> A compilation of definitions for the following classification terms can be found in Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies*, 57–58, 69–70.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15. Also see Judith Simmer-Brown, “Training the Heart Responsibly: Ethical Considerations in Contemplative Teaching,” in *Meditation and the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies*, ed. Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 107–20.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.
- <sup>116</sup> See Harold D. Roth, “Against Cognitive Imperialism,” *Religion East and West* 8 (2008): 1–23; Mirabai Bush, “Mindfulness in Higher Education,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 12 (2011): 183–97.
- <sup>117</sup> See Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 84.
- <sup>118</sup> See Marie Eaton, Holly Hughes, and Jean MacGregor, eds., *Contemplative Approaches to Sustainability in Higher Education* (New York: Routledge 2014), 33.