MING CHINA (1368–1644), a time of political intrigue and financial upheaval, was also a time of astounding accomplishments in art and literature. In 1403, when Gutenberg was seven years old, the Ming encyclopedia, Yongle Dadian (Yung Lo Ta Tien) was begun. Completed five years later, it comprised 22,937 volumes! And around 1590, when Shakespeare finished Henry VI and Edmund Spenser published The Faerie Queen, a hundred years after Columbus “discovered” the New World, an accomplished scholar and philosopher, Hong Zicheng, retired from public life and settled down to write an informal book—a compilation of his thoughts on the essence of life, human nature, and heaven and earth. He wrote other books, now lost, but this one survived, thanks largely to its continuous popularity, first in China and later in Japan and Korea. His book, Caigentan (Vegetable Roots Discourse), has been studied and cherished for four hundred years.

A provocative and personal mix of Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian understanding, these 360 observations are direct and timely. Over his lifetime, Hong Zicheng continued the work accomplished across centuries in China—integrating Confucian ideals with Daoist and Buddhist thought. He leads us through paths as complex, absurd, and grotesque as life itself. “In the depth of your mind there is no storm; everywhere are green mountains and clear streams. In your innate realm there is change and growth; everywhere you see fish leaping and hawks soaring.” He rejects all things false, and instructs us in the art
VEGETABLE ROOTS DISCOURSE
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Zen Master Raven
Original Dwelling Place
The Dragon Who Never Sleeps
Encouraging Words
The Practice of Perfection
The Gateless Barrier
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I first encountered quotations from the Caigentan (pronounced tsaiguntan) in R. H. Blyth's Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics while interned in Kobe back in the spring of 1943. Later in a Tokyo bookshop I found Yaichiro Isobe's translation titled Musings of a Chinese Vegetarian, published in 1926. It became one of my favorite "little books." I have quoted from the Isobe translation here and there in my own writings, and a couple of years ago I sent a copy of the book along to my publisher and friend Jack Shoemaker with the suggestion that he republish it. He responded that he would be interested, but that the work needed retranslation. One thing led to another, and I found myself like Yu Kongjian, clearing my desk of books and papers, clearing my mind of extraneous thoughts, and doing the task myself.

I was a little over halfway through a first draft when I was felled by a Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA), colloquially termed a "mini-stroke," which my neurologist remarked is like speaking of a little cancer or a slight case of pregnancy. At least for a time I could barely read English, much less Chinese. I called my old friend Daniel
W. Y. Kwok, professor emeritus of history at the University of Hawai‘i, and asked him if he knew a graduate student who could help me. “I’ll do it myself,” said Dan promptly. The upshot is a collaboration that is far better than anything I could have done by myself in the best of health, not to mention a gratifyingly deeper friendship.

Besides correcting the clangers in my text, Dr. Kwok restored the original Chinese and composed an extended afterword—which deftly places the book in the context of Chinese cultural history.

In the process of our congenial collaboration I learned how the Chinese will use the first-person pronoun with the utmost modesty as a way of taking responsibility and softening an admonition in places where in English we would use the standoffish “you,” “we,” or the abstract “one.” “We don’t do that in those circumstances” becomes “I don’t do that....”

Another lesson was to drop my preoccupation with gender-free locution. Not one entry of the 360 total cases includes anything positive about women, or about sex. One entry extolling family harmony mentions mother, father, sister, and brother but doesn’t include wife. (I:21) The only entry to mention a happy marriage remarks that it will interfere with seclusion. (II:15) This is Chinese culture at its most chauvinistic, even worse than the Japanese. Well, Samuel Pepys, who also lived in the
seventeenth century, was a male chauvinist too, and so were most of his contemporaries. The *Caigentan* offers a fine view of Ming China, warts and all. Our warts are bigger, it seems to me.

In translating I tried to keep the Chinese idioms. If the original says, "Keep your bowels cool," that's the way I rendered it in English, not "keep a cool head," which would translate the figure of speech itself, and flatten it in the process.

Finally, we used Pinyin romanization throughout. After more than 60 years of working with Wade-Giles, this was a wrench. Po Chū-i becomes Bo Juyi, and the very book title, the *Ts'ai-ken T'an* (or *Saikontan*, as I knew it for decades in the Japanese) becomes the *Caigentan*. With a sigh I acknowledge that I am out of date. Never mind. The wisdom of presentation is enhanced by consistency. I am pleased to presume that we have the *Caigentan* for our new century.

Robert Aitken
Honolulu
Spring 2005

Pinyin is used through the work, but not for works and usages originally in other forms of romanization. The Chinese text is presented in the traditional form, *fanti*, for historical reasons. Original Simplified Chinese, *jianti*, usages are retained. A Pinyin/Wade-Giles and *jianti*/fanti glossary is provided for reference. —DK
null
VEGETABLE ROOTS
DISCOURSE

CAIGENTAN
逐客孤蹤，屏居蓬舍，樂與方以內人游，不樂與方以外人遊也。妾與千古聖賢置辨於五經同異之間，不妄與二三小子浪跡於雲山變幻之麓也。日與漁父田夫朗吟唱和於五湖之濱，緑野之埀，不日與兢兢刀錐，榮升斗者交臂抒情於冷熱之場，腥羶之窟也。間有習濂洛之說者牧之，習竺乾之業者闢之，為譚天雕龍之辯者遠之。此足以畢予山中伎倆矣。適有友人洪自誠者，持《菜根譚》示予，且丐予序。予始詫詫然視之耳，既而黤黤上陳編，屏胸中雜慮，手讀之，則覺其譚性命，直入玄微；道人情，曲盡岩險。俯仰天地，見胸次之夷猶；塵芥功名，知識趣之高遠。筆底陶鑄，無非綠樹青山；口吻化工，盡是鷺飛魚躍。此其自得何如，固未能深信，而據所摘詞，悉砭世醒人之喚急，非入耳出口之浮華也。譚以“菜根”名，固自清苦歷中來，亦自栽培灌溉裏得。其顛頓風波，備嘗險阻可想矣。洪子曰： “天勞我以形，吾逸吾心以補之；天扼我以遇，吾享吾道以通之。”其所自警自力者又可思矣。由是以數語弁之，俾公諸人人，知菜根中有真味也。

三峰主人于孔兼题
Declining to see guests and keeping my own company, I have retired to my thatched hut. I am happy to be in the company of those within the Dao, taking no delight in the company of those outside of the Dao. I exercise no restraint in arguing with ancient sages on points of similarity and difference in the Five Classics; but I stay in step in the company of two or three disciples tarrying at the foot of mountains with ever-changing clouds. Every day I sing and chant with fishermen and farmers on the banks of the Five Lakes¹ and in the groves of the fields. I rarely express myself or contend with those who vie for trifles as though they were treasures in the context of unpredictable passions and odorous carnage. Occasionally I nurture one or two persons studying Song learning, and try to enlighten those who follow Buddhism. I send on their way those who indulge in idle chatter. All these activities are commensurate with my skills when living in the mountains.

One day my friend Hong Zicheng showed me his
Caigentan and even asked me to write a preface. At first I only glanced at it half-heartedly. Then I cleared my desk of books and papers and cleared my mind of extraneous thoughts. I read the book at hand and I began to understand: When he discusses true life, I enter its essence directly. When he discusses human nature, I am able to probe its every meaning. When he discourses on heaven and earth, I see every pulsation of his breast. He sees fame and fortune as so much dust, and he imparts the loftiness of knowledge and humor. His brushwork is like green trees and blue mountains, and his words are like hawks in flight and leaping fish.

We do not know the depth of this person's enlightenment. Based on his own words, as they aim at warning the world and awakening people, they are not just florid sounds entering ears only to exit through the mouth. He has named these sayings "Roots of Vegetables," meaning that they are distilled from the tribulations of simple and humble circumstances. There is the meaning of watering and growing as well. One can imagine he has tumbled and fallen in the wind and waves and scaled dangerous cliffs and obstacles.

Master Hong says: "Heaven burdens me with toil, yet I calm my mind to supplement it. Heaven blocks me from smooth encounters in life, yet I persevere in the Dao to clear the obstacles." (1:90) From this one can also see his
self-admonition and means of self-strengthening. With these few words, then, I introduce this work so all will know there is true taste in vegetable roots.

Yu Kongjian, Master of Three Peaks
BOOK I

1. Those dwelling in the house of virtue may be lonely at times, but those who prosper by fawning upon the powerful are forlornly alone for ten thousand ages. The master looks to matters that are beyond matters, and muses on the body that is beyond the body. It is better to be lonely at times than to face ten thousand ages of forlornness.

2. Those who mind the world lightly are also lightly stained by it; those who enter deeply into worldly affairs are mired in its calculating ways. Thus noble persons would rather be naive than clever, relaxed rather than bent upon trifles.
The mind of the noble person is like the sun on a fine day, evident to everyone. The talents of a noble person should be like hidden treasures, not easily noticed.

One who does not draw near to power, wealth, and luxury is pure, but one who draws near to them and is not stained is even purer. One who does not engage in clever deception is honorable, but one who knows about clever deception and does not practice it is even more honorable.

If treacherous talk constantly assails your ears and hostility constantly troubles your heart, use this power as whetstones of moral cultivation. If every word fell pleasantly on your ears and every event gladdened your heart, then your entire life would be mired in venomous poison.
Birds are ill at ease in high winds and pelting rain; grasses and trees rejoice in sunshine and gentle breezes. Just as heaven-and-earth needs harmony every day, so every day the human heart needs happiness.

Rich wine, fatty meats, spicy and sweet foods don't have true flavor. True flavor is actually quite bland. The sage is not an exotic superhuman. The true sage is actually quite ordinary.

The universe seems silent and unmoving, yet its natural functions never cease. The sun and moon hurry along day and night, yet their brightness never diminishes. By the same token, the noble person is alert while at leisure, and makes time for tasteful pursuits when busy with duties.
9

When human sounds are hushed late in the night, I sit alone and examine my heart-mind. Delusions seem to lift and abruptly my true person appears. At such moments, a great opportunity seems to draw near. But with truth becoming manifest my delusions still persist after all, and I feel great shame.

10

Favor and patronage can lead to mischief. Thus in times of pleasant goodwill, it is important to be constantly on guard. The aftermath of failure can be the success. Thus when things go contrary, don't lose heart.

11

Those who subsist on shrubs and weeds are almost all pure and clear as jade; those who dress in finery and eat sumptuously have the complexion of fawning servitors. For true ambition is manifest in simplicity and purity, and integrity perishes in sweet fat.
12
When you are still plowing the fields ahead, make a point of being open-minded, and there will be no murmuring among others. After your life is over, its blessings will flow for a long time, giving contentment to people in their thoughts.

13
Where the road narrows, step aside to let others pass; when enjoying tasty food, leave three measures [out of ten] for others to taste. This is the most felicitous way to pass through the world.

14
One need not have achieved great undertakings to make a name for oneself, merely avoiding the vulgar would do it. One need not study highly or broadly to improve oneself on the way to sagehood, merely divesting oneself of worldly encumbrance would do it.
Making friends requires a few measures of gallantry; cultivating true character needs a bit of innocence.

Don't be ahead of others in accepting patronage. Don't lag behind others in virtuous endeavor. Don't accept favors beyond your share. Don't allow your practice of governing yourself to be weaker than your best efforts.

It is wise to yield a step going through life, for yielding a step is really fundamental to improvement. Toward others, a measure of broad-mindedness really brings fortune, for benefiting others is fundamental to benefiting oneself.
Splendid accomplishments that span the world mean nothing against the single word "arrogance." Crimes that extend to the heavens mean nothing against the single word "repentance."

You can't rightfully claim fine reputation and exemplary integrity just for yourself. Share them with others and you will pass your days free from harm. When disgraceful conduct has stained reputations, don't shirk from conceding your own responsibility. Keep your light under cover in this way, and nurture your virtue quietly.

In everything you do, practice a little moderation. In this way, heaven and earth cannot envy you and demons cannot harm you. Seeking total success in every endeavor and fullness in every honor may not only cause internal discord but will surely lead to external troubles.
The true Buddha is in the home. The true Dao is in everyday functions. If you maintain an honest heart, a harmonious manner, a pleasant countenance, and graceful words with your father, mother, brothers, and sisters, and flow with them, each in turn, in wholehearted accord of body and spirit, then isn’t this ten thousand times better than breath control and introspection?

If you love activity you are like lightning among the clouds or a lantern in the wind. If you are fond of quiet you are like dead ashes or a withered tree. Only with the spirit of a hawk soaring among tranquil clouds or a fish leaping from calm water can you personalize the Dao.
23

Don't be too severe when correcting another's wrongdoing; consider how well it might be taken. Don't be too lofty in demanding another's reform; consider whether or not it can be done.

24

Larvae are unappealing, yet they turn into cicadas that drink dew in the autumn wind. Withered grass is lusterless, yet it brings forth fireflies that glow beneath the summer moon. Thus grubbiness in the course of things can produce purity, and dimness in the course of things can produce light.

25

Lofty pride and self-important arrogance are artificial. When artifice is subdued and given up, righteous disposition can thrive. Desires and covetousness are wrongful. When the wrongful mind is expunged, the true mind appears.
Consider your feelings when you are satiated. You find that you no longer distinguish between rich and bland. In a similar way, after sexual relations, thoughts of men and women at sport dwindle away completely. Thus you can use the wisdom of hindsight to correct the fixations of the moment. You can frustrate the urge to indulge and keep your conduct steady.

Occupying an eminent office, hold in your heart the mountains and forests. Living amidst woods and streams, hold in your heart the halls of the Privy Council.

In public affairs, it is not necessary to always claim credit; not committing any error is your credit. From others one need not always expect recompense; not causing resentment is your recompense.
Sincere endeavor is fine virtue, but excessive stress is hard on your natural disposition. A serene state of mind is lofty, but excessive asceticism does not help and benefit others.

At a dilemma in your program, summon up your original intention. When you are enjoying the fullness of success, look carefully at the road ahead.

It is fitting that a wealthy and privileged family be generous and kind, but when the family turns out to be neglectful and stingy, they may enjoy wealth, but they practice meanness. How could that be very enjoyable? It is fitting for an astute person to be altogether modest and reserved, but when such a person turns out to be a glorified braggart, it is as though a disease of stupid foolishness had set in. How could that not be ruinous?
After living in poverty, you know how perilous it is to rise high. After dwelling in obscurity, you know how perilous it is to be exposed. After maintaining a tranquil life, you know how odious it is to toil immoderately. After cultivating silence, you know how strident verbosity can be.

When one drops the desire to gain fame and fortune, one rises above the vulgar; when one no longer sets one's mind on morality and righteousness, one enters sagehood.

Desire for gain is not necessarily a malicious objective. It is self-centered opinion that forms blister worms of malicious objective. Women and song are not necessarily a hindrance to the Dao. It is cleverness that forms bulwarks of hindrance to the Dao.
35

Human nature is inconsistent and contrary. The path of life is rough and rugged. Where the going is difficult it is necessary to know how to withdraw a step. Where the going is easier, be inclusive in yielding portions of credit for your work.

36

It is not hard to treat petty people sternly, but it is hard not to dislike them. It is not hard to treat noble people respectfully, but it is hard to do it with propriety.

37

Rather than holding forth on the trivial and sensational, it is better to protect your latent talent, cherishing a bit of upright spirit, and then returning it to heaven-and-earth. It is better to reject the glossy and ornamental and be content with the simple and plain, afterward leaving a pure name in the cosmos.
Subduing the devil is a matter first of yielding up your heart. When you surrender your heart, the gang of devils pays attention and goes away obediently. To manage your flank, first manage your spirit. When your spirit is peaceful, your flank can’t be assaulted.

Teaching students is like bringing up daughters. Be stern about their comings and goings, and demand a prudent choice of friends. Once they are allowed to bond with unwholesome people, it will be like planting a single bad seed in a well-kept field. In the end, an auspicious harvest will be difficult.
On a path of personal aspiration, don't follow the easy way and smudge your finger. Once you smudge a finger, you are engulfed to the depths of ten thousand fathoms. On an intellectual path, don't let yourself hesitate at difficulties and step back. One halted step is a separation of ten thousand mountains.

If you are an amiable person you treat yourself well, and you also treat others well. You are amiable about everything everywhere. If you are a casual person, you are indifferent about yourself, and you also treat others with indifference. You are casual about everything everywhere. It follows that, as a noble person, in daily life you are prudent, neither excessively and dazzlingly amiable nor excessively dry and indifferent.
Wealth is for them; virtue is for me. Peerage is for them; integrity is for me. The noble person is fundamentally indomitable, a master of destiny, who puts things in motion with single-minded purpose, free from the strictures of ministers of state and free even from the kilns and molds of heaven-and-earth.

If the stand you take for yourself and your inclinations are not elevated a little above the vulgar, it is as though you shake out your clothing in dust, or wash your feet in mud. How can you amount to anything? If you do not withdraw a step and take your place in the world, you will be like a moth hurling itself at a candle, or a ram challenging a fence. How can you find ease and comfort?
A scholar should gather up spirit and energy in single-mindedness. If your quest for virtue is for reasons of fame and fortune, you will never amount to anything. If in scholarly endeavors you indulge in fashionable verse and stylistic flourishes, you cannot attain depth and stability of mind.

Every one of us is endowed with great mercy and compassion. The sage Vimalakirti and the executioner are not of two natures. Every place has the potential for flavor and zest. The mansion and the thatched hut are both built on the ground. However, if greed obscures and blocks our sympathies, even though we come face-to-face with mercy and compassion for a moment, we are nonetheless off by a thousand miles.
In practicing virtue and pursuing the Dao, you will need to keep wood and stone as your models, for once you feel envious of another’s fortune, you become covetous. In managing affairs of state, you will need to conduct yourself with the sensibilities of a monk, for once you feel acquisitive, you fall into danger.

The righteous person carries on circumspectly and serenely whatever happens, and is undeviatingly harmonious even when asleep and dreaming. The malevolent person lapses into violent behavior instead of discussing things, and betrays anger even while speaking musically with laughing words.
With a liver ailment, vision fails. With a kidney ailment, hearing fails. Disease is contracted in a part of the body where it is invisible, and manifests where it is apparent to everyone. Thus the noble person will not wish to have wrongdoing out in the open, and will determine from the start never to transgress invisibly.

Nothing is more blessed than having little to vex over. Nothing is more miserable than excessive cares. No doubt those who worry about things know the blessing of having little to do. Those with tranquil minds are the ones who know the misery of excessive cares.
In peaceful times, conduct yourself in an upright manner. In turbulent times, conduct yourself flexibly. In decadent times, you should be especially careful to be modest and tactful. It is proper to be generous with the good, severe with the wicked, and, as appropriate, to maintain a generous or severe manner with people generally.

I should not bear in mind how kind I have been to another, but not fail to bear in mind how injudicious I have been. I should not forget the obligations I have to another, but not fail to forget all my grudges.
When you bestow a favor on someone and you do not reflect upon yourself within nor reflect upon the other without, then a dipper of millet is benevolence worth ten thousand measures. When you bestow a kindness on someone and you gauge your return or hint at compensation, even a gift of a hundred abundances will have hardly the value of a single coin.

Some people feel equitable about their circumstances, while others do not. Yet how can I feel thoroughly equitable alone? If I am reasonable sometimes and unreasonable at other times, how can others be thoroughly reasonable? Keep this in mind. Mutual, harmonious consideration is the one way to open the gate of the Dharma.
Those with minds as pure as heaven-and-earth are able to read books for their ancient meanings. However, those who are secretly selfish can’t be expected to do a single virtuous deed. They will quote virtuous words to make false points. It is as though they were providing weapons to forces of the enemy, or provisions as religious offerings to bandits.

For the extravagant, even wealth will not provide enough. How can they compare to the thrifty, for whom even poverty can provide more than necessary? For the talented, even diligent labors can garner resentment. How can they compare to the unskilled, for whom even leisure can be genuinely fulfilling?
Those who study without appreciating sagely wisdom are mere scribes. Those who serve in office and have no affection for the people are thieves in courtly garb. Those who teach and do not act upon their teachings are merely mouthing Chan [Zen]. Those who build careers without thinking of planting seeds of virtue are but flowery flourishes.

There is true literature in the mind of each of us, but it is entirely too scattered. Likewise there is true music, but seductive tunes and alluring dancing drown it out. Thus it is important for me to sweep away external things and search after the essential. Only in this way can I grasp my own authenticity.
58
In the midst of adversity, something gladdens my heart. In the midst of attaining my desires, sadness about my purpose springs up.

59
Wealth and honor, when attained ethically, are like flowers in the mountains, flourishing and luxuriating naturally; when attained artificially, they are like flowers in beds, having a time to flourish and a time to decay; when attained forcibly, they are like cut flowers in vases, rootless and certain to wither.
60

Spring comes; it is a genial season. Flowers spread forth in their pleasant colors, and birds sing their many melodies in sweet voices. Gentle folk of high society, if you do not remember to use kind words and carry out kind actions, you may dwell in this world a hundred years, but it will be as though you had scarcely lived a single day.

春至時和，
花尚香一段好色，
鳥且鳴幾句好音。
士君子幸列髷角，
行好事，雖是在世百年，
恰似未生一日。

61

As a scholar you must cultivate an enterprising will, but at the same time have elegant taste. Even a dash of conventional asceticism is the killing element of autumn. It is not the regenerative element of spring. How can you hope to extend nourishment to the ten thousand beings?

學者有段兢業的心思，
又要有一段清氡的趣味，
若一味斂束清苦，
是秋殺無春生，
何以發育萬物。
A person of true integrity is not known for it, because any such reputation is surely that of a schemer. Great skill is not developed with clever devices, precisely because it is the use of devices that is clumsy.

The qiqi water vessel tips over when it is full. The puman money-saving vessel is perfect when it is empty. The noble person abides with nothing rather than with something, and is content with lack rather than with completeness.
Even though you make light of thousand-carriage wealth, and are content with single-gourd living, if you have not yet uprooted fame, you sink to the level of the market. Even though you have brought blessings to the four seas and benefits to the ten thousand worlds, if you cannot comport yourself as a guest, you will have, after all, just put on a stale show.

If your heart is bright, then even in a dark chamber there is blue sky. If your thoughts are gloomy, then even in broad daylight cruel demons appear.
People know that name and position are enjoyable; they don’t know that no-name and no-position are truly most enjoyable. People know that hunger and cold are hardships; they don’t know that worrying about hardship and midwinter cold is far worse.

You may fear that people will know of your wrongdoing. That people might know is in fact conducive to good conduct. You may hope that people will know of your good conduct. Good conduct can thus be the root of wrongdoing.
The workings of heaven are inscrutable and fathomless, now liberating, now repressing, disconcerting heroes and upsetting great men. Yet the noble person comes forth steadily and turns as things come along, and is not complacent in times of peace. Even heaven cannot deal with such talent.

People with hot blazing tempers set fire to everything. Unsociable people with icy tempers invariably destroy everything. Stiff obstinate people are like stagnant water or decayed trees. With their vital faculties diminished in such ways, it is difficult to speak with such people about building achievements for widespread welfare.
Don't try to pray for happiness. Cultivate the mind of joy as the basis of happiness, and there you are. Don't try to evade misfortune. Avoid wanting to harm others and you'll keep misfortune at bay.

If you make ten pronouncements and hit the mark nine times, you certainly cannot yet expect praise. When one of your pronouncements does not hit the mark, you line up a row of errors. If you take up ten projects and nine of them are productive, this certainly is not cause for acknowledgment. With the one of your projects that is not productive, noisy unfavorable criticism breaks out and accumulates in intensity. As a noble person, you will be reticent rather than hasty, artless rather than clever.
72

When the nature of heaven-and-earth is warm, life flourishes. When it is cold, life is killed. Thus, with a cold attitude you will in turn be received coolly and indifferently. With a warm attitude your blessings will be ample and your benefits will be long lasting.

73

The way of heaven-and-earth is exceedingly broad. With just a whim to try it, your heart will feel expanded and brightened. The way of human greed is exceedingly narrow. Just setting foot there, you face muck and perilous thorns.

74

The course of alternating anguish and pleasure is the whetstone. It gives rise to pleasure, for the first time a pleasure that endures. The course of alternating doubt and faith is the ridgepole of understanding, for the first time an understanding of truth.
Your mind must not be anything but empty. When it is empty, justice comes to dwell. Your mind must not be anything but authentic. When it is authentic, worldly anxieties cannot enter.

Soil that is dirty grows the countless things. Water that is clear has no fish. Thus as a mature person you properly include and retain a measure of grime. You can't just go along enjoying your own private purity and restraint.
A lively horse that upsets the cart can be controlled and ridden at a gallop. Even metal spurting from the matrix can be returned to the mold. However, with one slip into lethargy your life will not recover. The hermit Baisha said, “Having frail health is hardly an embarrassment. If I were to go through my entire life without an illness I would feel profoundly worried.” A truth that is soundly reasonable.

With a single thought of selfish acquisition the heroically strong collapse and become spongy, the intelligent clog up and become muddled, the beneficent switch and become merciless. An entire life of human dignity, imbued with unpolluted integrity, is spoiled. For the ancients, freedom from the taint of corruption was held as a treasure, and thus they could transcend the ordinary world.
What we hear and see can be thieves outside; what we feel and desire can be thieves inside. If the venerable head of the household does not realize this but sits determinedly in the central hall, the thieves will have become his family members.

Planning for a merit not yet deserved is not as good as preserving an enterprise already achieved. Rather than repenting long-past errors, it is better to guard against making future mistakes.
Be lofty and broad in disposition, but not to the point of being distant and vague. Be discriminating and careful in thought, but not to the point of being petty and trivial. Be unpretentious and plain in tastes, but not to the point of being narrow-minded and dry. Be positive in resolve, but not to the point of being hurried and impetuous.

When the wind has passed through a grove of bamboo, the rattle of the stalks dies away. After the wild geese are gone their reflection in the deep pool disappears. In such a way, things come up for you as a noble person, and when they are gone your mind is empty once again.
83

Though pure, you can be tolerant; though benevolent, you can have good judgment; though discerning, you need not find fault; though upright, you are not overly reformist. These qualities are, so to speak, like candied dates that are not too sweet, or a delicacy from the sea that is not too salty. They are indeed admirable virtues.

84

The humble abode with its cleanly swept floors and the poor girl with her neatly combed hair present, if not luxuriant appearances, at least sensible elegance. So then, you honorable people, when encountering adversity, do you just then sink into self-pity and cease all efforts?
If you are not neglectful in your intervals of leisure, you will have gained facility for busy occasions. If you do not sink into blankness in your intervals of tranquility, you will have gained facility for confused occasions. If you do not practice deception in your intervals of murkiness, you will have gained facility for clear occasions.

When an idea springs to your mind and you realize that it tends to take you a little way along the road of self-indulgence, just bring yourself about accordingly to the path of integrity. The appearance of the thought is at once awareness of it, and at once the awareness itself diverts you from it. This is like the turning point of changing calamity into good fortune, or death into life. Don’t miss the opportunity. It is most assuredly not a trivial matter.
When you are serene and your ideas are clear and transparent, you see the true nature of your mind. When you are at ease and your spirits are at ease, you discern the true workings of your mind. When you are unpretentious and your thoughts soar, you find the true flavor of your mind. For discerning the mind and evincing the Dao, there is nothing better than these three conditions.

Serenity within serenity is not true serenity. In some small measure, serenity gained from work becomes a true reflection of your heavenly nature. Pleasure within pleasure is not true pleasure. In some small measure, pleasure gained within sorrow reveals the true workings of your human mind.
In sacrificing your self-interest, don't be indecisive, for personal aspiration dwells in that very place of indecision—a great shame! In granting a favor, don't hint at recompense, for that hint at recompense dwells in concert with the favor—your largess is nullified!

Heaven endows me with little fortune, yet I greet it by increasing my virtue. Heaven burdens me with toil, yet I calm my mind to supplement it. Heaven blocks me from smooth encounters in life, yet I persevere in the Dao to clear the obstacles. What else can heaven have in store for me?
The principled person does not look around for good fortune, and heaven follows along with that lack of concern and bestows contentment of mind. The crafty person is on guard to ward off calamity, and heaven follows along with that vigilance and prompts a dreadful surprise. How marvelous the workings of heaven! How futile human cleverness!

If a singing girl is virtuous later on in accord with her circumstances, her earlier life of rouge and flowers will not matter. The faithful wife with white hair who lets down her guard nullifies half a life of chaste endeavor. The proverb reads, "To judge a life, look just at the last half." A true saying indeed.
A commoner who is willing to cultivate virtue and dispense kindness is an untitled noble minister. A noble who covets power and wealth is a beggar with a title.

What are the blessings left to us by our ancestors? They are the lives we now enjoy, but we should bear in mind that they are the sum of difficulties when they were amassed. What are the blessings we leave our descendants? They are what our lives leave behind, but we should bear in mind how they can be waylaid and upended.

Noble persons feigning goodness are no different from petty persons openly doing evil. Noble persons veering off the moral path are not as good as petty persons reforming themselves.
Don't allow yourself to be violently angry and renounce a family member over a transgression. If it is a matter that is difficult to discuss, mention something else as a hint. If you can't reach an understanding at the time, wait for another day to take up your admonition. Let your harmonious spirit resolve the disorder like the spring thaw. It's like this in the ideal household.

If there were a general view that everything is flawless, then all beings in the world would naturally lack defects. If there were a general attitude of generosity and being fair, then all beings of the world would naturally lack malicious feelings.
Those who are dazzled by fine things invariably distrust people who are frugal and contented. For the most part, those who are self-indulgent dislike people who display restraint. The noble person does not deviate from a fundamental position of honor and does not show off too much.

In adverse situations, even though around you are needles and medicines that will help you through the trials, you are unaware of them. In favorable circumstances, all around you are swords and halberds which will whittle away your flesh and bones, you do not know about them.
Those who grow up in a setting of riches and honor are driven by greed like a raging fire. Their power and influence blaze furiously everywhere. If they cannot cultivate feelings that are a little cooler, they might not burn others, but surely they will end up incinerating themselves.

When one's heart is completely genuine, then frost appears out of season and the castle collapses. Metal and rock can be pierced. False and corrupt people may have shadows of the human form, but in vain, for true authority is missing. They are insufferable in the eyes of others, and in solitude they are ashamed even of their shadows.
An essay wrought to perfection is not so remarkable as it is simply just right. Human character brought to perfection is not so unusual as it is simply innate.

In the realm of illusion, there is no honor, reputation, wealth, or status, and indeed no arms, legs, body, or anything related to me. In the realm of the genuine, parents, sisters, brothers, and indeed the ten thousand beings are all one body with me. Only when I can see through the ways of the world and distinguish the real from the unreal, can I shoulder responsibility for worldly obligations, free of shackles and limitations.
Tasty foods can rot my bowels and decay my bones. In moderation, however, they are not very harmful. Taking pleasure in congenial activities can crush my reputation and destroy my virtue. In moderation, however, they are not cause for regret.

Don’t blame others for trifling transgressions; don’t disclose the secrets of others; don’t bear in mind the long-past misdeeds of others. Cultivate these three virtues and you will be remote from harm.

As a noble person I am not flighty in manner. Otherwise I will easily be moved by circumstances, and that’s not conducive to calm and settled judgments. At the same time, I am not too unyielding in my judgments, or my vitality would be disabled and my performance muddied.
107

Though heaven-and-earth is eternal, I won't come into being a second time. Even in a life of a hundred years, the days slip by very quickly. It is my good fortune to have been born in this interval. I must not miss the chance to appreciate my life of happiness, nor allow myself to dwell upon empty existence.

108

The response to benevolence may be enmity, so rather than obliging others to feel your generosity, act as if you have forgotten both benevolence and enmity. The reaction to patronage may be resentment, so rather than obliging others to feel your kindness, act as if patronage and grudges have fallen away together.
The ailments of old age are really those incurred in youthful times. Weakness in one's last years is really something wrought in the prime of life. Therefore, when life is at peak, the noble person endeavors exactingly to take full care in every way.

It is better to sustain equanimity than to market personal favors, better to warm up old friendships than to cultivate new relationships, better to exert moral influence quietly than to set up glory for one's name, better to behave in an ordinary manner than to consider exotic possibilities.

Don't violate a fair and just credo. With just one such violation your legacy is shame for ten thousand ages. Thresholds to power and private gain must not be crossed; once crossed, the whole life is stained.
112
It is better to practice honesty and be shunned than to swerve from principles to please others. It is better to incur unwarranted blame than to receive undeserved praise.

113
When there is discord in your family, be steady and composed. Don’t get unduly excited. When there is misunderstanding among friends, be appropriately severe in advice. Don’t be easygoing or indulgent.

114
Not to let small things leak and spread, not to let secret matters give rise to deception, not to squander and neglect the end of the journey—these are the authenticity of a hero.
It is hard to bind friends together for a moment of happiness, even with a thousand pieces of gold; yet just a single meal will earn responses for a lifetime. Usually extreme love rebounds as enmity, while the slightest kindness is met with joy.

Let ineptness sheathe your skills, and obscurity diffuse your light. Let the masses sully your purity, and submission be the means of your enhancement. Let longevity be your single objective in passing through the world. Cherish these three caves as your own.
The winds of reversal are prefigured in the fullness of prosperity. Burgeoning life lies silently in the deep freeze of winter. Thus, when feeling contented, it is appropriate for the noble person to be prudent, ready for calamity, and in times of adversity, to watch with hardened fortitude for ways to turn things around.

Those who are fascinated by the amazing and exotic cannot discern the grand and lofty. Those who undertake austerities alone cannot maintain their performance for long.
When fiery anger or flooding desire bursts forth, I am aware of my condition very clearly, and with that clarity I transgress anyway. Who is it that is aware? Who is it that transgresses anyway? If I take up my power of awareness resolutely and shift my intention, the wicked demon could become a truly exemplary master.

Don't place your faith in the one-sided and let yourself be cheated by scoundrels. Don't affect self-confidence and make a display of your fortitude. Don't use your strengths to expose the weaknesses of others. Don't rationalize your incompetence by disparaging the talents of others.
Somehow, find a way to let faults of others pass. If you resort to vehement denunciation, you will be assaulting shortcomings with shortcomings. If someone is stubborn, find a way to give considerate counseling. If you resort to angry shouting, you will be striking stubbornness back with stubbornness.

When you deal with a grave person of few words, don't convey your thoughts right away. When you encounter a quarrelsome and boastful person, it is time to keep your mouth shut.

When my thoughts flag, I must concentrate my awareness. When my thoughts are intense, I must practice relaxation. Otherwise, while I might rid myself of the illness of befuddlement, I'll incur the worries of unstable confusion.
Blue sky and fine weather can abruptly change to tremulous lightning and rolling thunder. Violent winds and angry rains can abruptly change to serene moonlight and a clear sky. Has the universe ever ceased its workings? Has the universe ever been impeded? Human nature is also like this.

Some say that without quick discernment, your vigor for mastering self-centered greed will not be readily available. Some say that even if your discernment can penetrate the problem, the fault can sneak back in. In the end, your discernment can be a single bright jewel to shed a little light on hobgoblins. Your vigor can be the single astute swing of a sword to cut down persistent demons. You cannot belittle the importance of either.
When you realize that someone has deceived you, don't formulate that in words. When you realize that someone has insulted you, don't change your facial expression. Herein lies inexhaustible meaning as well as inexhaustible usefulness.

Adversity and hardship are the furnace and anvil for forging heroes. Those who can take the trials enjoy benefits to their mind and body; those who cannot stand the forging, lose in both mind and body.

I am a miniature of heaven-and-earth. When I am not astray in joy or anger, and I regulate the pleasant and the harmful, I conform to universal law. Heaven and earth are the great father and mother. Rather than causing dissension among people or spreading the miasma of plagues, I can be a model of intimate kindliness.
Don’t hold malice in your heart for another, and don’t be without a wary mind. This cautions those lacking prudence. It is better to be cheated by others than to spend one’s time getting back at them. This admonishes those who turn upon their own good judgment. Side by side, these two sayings clarify the qualities of total genuineness.

Don’t let public doubts thwart your personal views. Don’t invest in your own ideas and disregard the words of others. Don’t pursue small favors and thus violate larger principles. Don’t enlist public opinion to justify your own comfortable circumstances.
If you can't make friends with a pleasant person right away, don't say flattering things prematurely just to ward off wicked slander. If you can't easily distance yourself from iniquitous people, don't declare yourself prematurely just to avoid malicious gossip.

The character that is like clear sky in broad daylight is generated in dark rooms under leaky roofs. The statesmanship that can right the course of the cosmos is born of probing profound depths and of treading on thin ice.
To the very last, the father's affection, the child's filial piety, the elder brother's friendliness, and the younger brother's respect are altogether fitting and appropriate and are not pretense. However, with the least thought of being benevolent or dutiful, or of receiving blessings or of winning someone over, you become a kind of passerby. Your interaction becomes a market transaction.

If there is beauty, then inevitably there is ugliness in opposition. If I take no pride in my beauty, who can call me ugly? Integrity is the opposite of corruption. If I do not covet integrity, who can call me corrupt?
Fickleness is a predilection of the wealthy much more than of the poor and lowly. Jealousy among relatives is more so than among strangers. If you do not consider these points with cool bowels, and govern yourself calmly, then you will be subject to vexation every day.

Merit and demerit must not in any way be confused. If they are, people will slack off. Kindness and grudges, on the other hand, should not be differentiated too much. If they are, then people will have second thoughts about you.
Your title and rank should not be excessively high. If they are, then watch out.
Your accomplishments should not be too perfect. If they are, then it's downhill from there. Your good conduct should not be too lofty. If it is, then destructive slander comes next.

Wrongdoing should not be covert (yin). Good should not be conspicuous (yang). That is, conspicuous wrongdoing is superficially malignant. When it is secret, it is deeply malignant. When good is conspicuous, its merit is small. When it is secret, its merit is great.

Nobility is the master of talent, and talent is the servant of nobility. Otherwise it's as though the family had no head but is ruled by menials. Before long, nasty goblins will be storming madly around.
In weeding out a scoundrel or in frustrating a favor-seeker, you'll need to leave a little opening. If you don't, it is like closing off a rat hole. The rat would have no way to escape and would turn to gnawing away at all your precious things and destroying them.

Share the errors of others, but don't seek to share their commendations, for that leads to resentment. Share the troubles of others, but don't seek to share their easy circumstances, for that leads to enmity.

As a noble person, you may be too poor to help others materially, but on dealing with someone foolish and deluded, you can offer a single word of redemption. If someone is in acute difficulty, you can offer a single word of release. These can be acts of inestimable benevolence.

锄奸杜幸，
要放他一條去路。
若使之一無所容，
譬如塞鼠穴者，
一切去路都塞盡，
則一切好物俱咬破矣。

當與人同過，不當與人同功，
同功則相忌；可與人共患難，
不可與人共安樂，
安樂則相仇。

士君子貧不能濟物者，
遇人癡迷處，
出一言提醒之，
遇人急難處，
出一言解救之，
亦是無量功德。
When hungry, they are dependent.
When full, they fly away. When your circumstances warm up, they hurry over.
When they freeze, they forsake you.
These are common failings of human nature.

As a noble person, keep a clear, cool eye.
Be prudent, and don't let your bowels be stirred by trifles.

Virtue advances with generosity.
Generosity evolves by way of judgment.
Thus if you wish to enhance your virtue, you can't do it without enlarging your generosity. If you wish to enhance your generosity, you can't do it without expanding your judgment.
When a single lamp flickers like a firefly and the many rustling sounds are hushed, it is time for my quiet repose. At dawn, I rouse from my dreams. Activities of the day have not yet begun, and it is time for me to come forth from primal chaos. When I use these moments and turn to reflection, then in the light of a single thought, I realize at last with ultimate clarity that the ear, eye, mouth, and nose are all of them fetters and manacles, and emotions, desires, and preferences are no more than instruments and mechanisms.

If the blame is on me, everything I encounter can be a remedy. If I blame others, each turn of my thought will be a weapon. One opens the way to a multitude of blessings. The other is the source of innumerable evils. They are as distant from each other as heaven is from earth.
Exploits and literary writings perish along with their creators, but the vital spirit is fresh through ten thousand ages. Achievement, reputation, wealth, and honors change in the course of generations, but for the upright mind, a thousand years is like a single day. Thus the noble person is steadfast and does not lightly take achieving for integrity.

The net is set for fish, and it catches a swan. The praying mantis awaits a meal, and a sparrow is following along behind. Within a contrivance, a contrivance is hidden. Beyond a calamity, a calamity develops. How can one rely on ingenuity for good effect!
As a human being, if you don’t have a touch of sincerity in mind, it will be as though you have a painted face. All your activities will be false. Passing through the world, your entire existence will be mechanical, and you will be like a wooden puppet. Everywhere there will be obstacles.

Water that is not agitated is naturally still. A mirror that is not filmed over is naturally clear. In the same way the mind need not be purified. When you take away what disturbs it, then its inherent purity is manifest. Happiness is not something to be sought. When you take away worries, then naturally you know happiness.
With a single thought, you can violate the precepts of gods and demons; with a single word, you can impair the harmony of heaven and earth; with a single act, you can give rise to misfortune for your descendants. Be fervently vigilant!

Matters sometimes are not clear even when it is urgent to understand them. Relax and they will become clear by themselves; don't invite frustration with impatience. There are people who will not comply when they are expected to comply. Let them be and they will fall in line; don't induce more stubbornness with your insistence.
Though you may be proud of your towering aspiration for justice, though your literary work is loftier than white clouds, if you have not achieved them by your moral nature, they are just hot-blooded self-esteem and ephemeral tricks of composition.

If you are considering retiring from office, the time to go is at the peak of your success. As to your station in life, the place to be is where you are the only one left.

Cultivating virtue is a matter of cultivating the most minute details. Bestowing kindness is a matter of bestowing on those who cannot repay you.
Mingling with people of the city is not as good as making friends with an old man in the mountains. An audience within vermilion gates is not as good as intimacy in a cottage. Giving attention to rumors of the town and discussions on the street is not as good as listening to songs of woodcutters and shepherds. Setting forth the virtues, faults, and conduct of your fellows is not as good as recounting the auspicious words and admirable doings of the ancients.

Virtue is the foundation of achievement. There has never been a solid and enduring house whose foundation was unstable.

Mind is the root of descendants to come. There have never been flourishing branches and luxuriant foliage whose roots were not well planted.
Someone of old said, "You renounce your vast treasury and line up, bowl in hand, like a beggar." Again someone said, "You spend your time like a beggar proclaiming your dream of wealth; give it a rest! What house has a stove that doesn't smoke?" One saying cautions against being foolish about possessions, the other advises against being boastful about them. These are admonitions about studies as well.

The Dao is a public kind of matter that relates to people individually as guidance. Learning is a common household sort of inquiry that relates to things at every turn.

If you trust someone who has not yet fully shown complete sincerity, then you are the one who is sincere. If you distrust someone who is not yet clearly a complete fraud, then you are the fraud.
A generous and trustworthy mind is like a spring breeze that warms and enlivens. The ten thousand beings encountering it thrive. An oblivious and stingy mind is like snows of the north that darken and freeze. The ten thousand beings encountering it die.

A good deed with no apparent benefit is like the melon in the grass, growing quietly unseen. A bad deed with no apparent injury is like the spring snow in the front yard, thawing away unnoticed.

When entertaining friends from old times, you will be all the more renewed in spirit. When dealing with private matters, your intentions will be all the more manifestly open. When meeting people well past their prime, you will be all the more generously kind and courteous.
166
For a diligent person, diligence is a matter of integrity, but for worldly people, it is an expedient to avoid poverty. For a thrifty person, thrift is a matter of living simply, but for worldly people, it is a cover to embellish stinginess. Thus talismans upheld by noble people are converted by the small-minded to materialistic tricks. How lamentable!

167
The one who relies on whims and acts without being grounded will take up projects and abandon them arbitrarily. How can there be progress? The one who depends on emotional perceptions in seeking realization finds delusion instead. That is hardly the lamp that burns eternally.
I should tolerate the excesses and mistakes of others without objection, but never my own. I should put up with my own humiliation and disgrace, but never those of others.

To be able to rise above the vulgar is remarkable, but the one set on being remarkable is not remarkable, but only trying to be different. To stand apart from corruption is an act of purity, but the one who renounces corruption just to be pure is not pure, but simply self-righteous.
When offering charity, start sparingly and then increase your gift. If you start heavy and end up light, people will forget your kindness. When exercising authority, start sternly and then exercise leniency. If you start leniently and then become stern, people will resent you as someone who is mean.

When your mind is empty, your nature appears. Endeavoring to see into your nature with a discontented mind is like stirring up waves to see the moon. When thoughts are cleansed, the mind is pure. If you don’t understand about the mind, you are like someone who tries to see reflections in a mirror by laying on more dust.
When respect one gets from others is deference, it is deference to a tall cap and broad sash. When condescension one gets from others is scorn, it is scorn for padded clothing and straw sandals. So if their deference isn't toward the person, why should I be glad? If their scorn isn't toward the person, why should I be offended?

“Always leave boiled rice out for mice and keep lamps dark out of pity for moths.” The ancients had this sort of concern, and it’s really the whole point of life, generation after generation. Without it, one can only be called a blockheaded carcass.
The essence of the heart-mind is none other than the essence of heaven.
A thought of joy is a lucky star or an auspicious cloud. A thought of anger is a roll of thunder or torrential rain. A thought of kindness is a genial breeze or sweet dew. A thought of severity is the hot sun or an autumn frost. Which of these should we skimp? Just follow them as they randomly rise up and randomly die away. With broad and unimpeded composure, your essence will be one with the great void.

When at leisure, the mind can be hazy. It is important to be totally alert, completely serene, and in harmony. When busy, the mind is easily put to rout. It is important to be totally alert, completely serene, and in control.

心體便是天體，
一念之喜，景星慶雲；
一念之怒，震雷暴雨；
一念之慈，和風甘露；
一念之嚴，烈日秋霜。
何者少得？
只要隨起隨滅，
廓然無碍，
便與太虛同體。

無事時心易昏煩，
宜寂寂，而照以惺惺；
有事時心易奔逸，
宜惺惺，而主以寂寂。
People who are consulted about an endeavor are outside, and deliberate on facts of profit and loss. People who engage in an endeavor remain inside, and forget about such considerations.

The noble personage who holds power and influence and has an important role must be very clearly principled in conduct, and sympathetic and easy in administration, with never a hint of casual acquaintance or common cause with the malodorous, yet not so severe as to risk the venom of wasps and scorpions.
178
Those who make a signboard affirming their honor will certainly be slandered for their announcement. Those who make a show of their morality will often invite censure on those very grounds. Thus the noble person will avoid wrongdoing, and not seek to establish a name for goodness. Living in complete harmony in this way is the very treasure of life.

179
Deal with deceitful frauds by touching them with your authenticity. Deal with the fierce and violent by affecting them with your sincerity. Deal with the wrong-headed and corrupt by encouraging discipline with your justice and integrity. Thus in the entire realm no one will be unaffected by your forge and kiln.
A single kind thought can brew harmony between people. Purity in the innermost heart can mill a fine fragrant powder for a hundred generations.

Secret schemes, strange habits, eccentric conduct, and peculiar accomplishments—all these are wombs of calamity in the course of human affairs. It is just ordinary virtue and conduct that give rise to harmony.
There is the saying, "When climbing a mountain, you must endure a steep path. On a snowy road, you must endure a dangerous bridge." Explore the significance of the word "endurance" fully. Human life suffers steep inclines on the way through the world. If you don't keep "endurance" as your watchword as you go along, how will you tolerate the thorny undergrowth and the pits and ditches?

Those who boast forcefully of their achievements or make a shining display of their literary compositions seek to justify themselves as human beings by externals. They don't know that the luster of their essential mind shines unerringly. Without even an inch of achievement or a single literary word they are equitable, and are naturally justified as human beings.
If you want to snatch a bit of leisure while you are busy, you ought first find a handle when you are at leisure. If you want to gain some quiet amidst clamor and noise, you ought first master the art of sitting quietly. There is no one who can otherwise avoid being shifted around by circumstances, fluttering at the mercy of things.

Don't cloud your conscience; don't exhaust the goodwill of others; don't drain the energy of things. With these three precepts, you can establish your mind in accord with heaven-and-earth, establish your virtue in accord with people, and make blessings possible for your descendants.
There are two principles for those in office: “Only impartiality gives rise to clarity” and “Only honesty gives rise to authority.” There are two principles for the householder: “Only with tolerance is there harmony” and “Only with thrift is there sufficiency.”

Those enjoying positions of wealth and honor need to know the tribulation of being poor and lowly. Those in the vigor of youth ought to bear in mind the bitter hardships of the old and debilitated.

Don't maintain yourself as excessively pure. You need a little disgrace and contamination as part of your mix. Don't be too scrupulous about your association with others. You need to keep a little tolerance for the good and bad, the intelligent and dull.
Give up alienating petty people. Petty people are naturally hostile. Give up flattery in approaching noble people. Noble people are fundamentally without self-interest.

The disorder of bad habits can be cured, but it is hard to cure the disorder of addiction to principles. Circumstantial and material obstacles can be shifted, but it is hard to shift righteous morality.

Burnishing your character should be like refining gold one hundred times. Quick training cannot be profound. Launching a task should be like taking up a ten-ton catapult. A casual start does not bring an easy success.
It is better to be disliked and criticized by petty people than to be fawned upon. It is better to be censured and corrected by noble people than to be indulged.

The person intent upon profit deviates from morality, but the mischief is apparent and superficial. The person intent upon reputation takes refuge in morality, and the mischief is hidden and profound.

Not returning a favor received from another, however abundant it might be; to bear a grudge for even a trifling wrong; not to doubt a report of something bad about another, however dubious it might be; to be suspicious about even an obvious good—these are all extremely mean-spirited faults. Guard against them.
Slander and defamation are like bits of cloud that veil the sun. Before long the sky will be bright again. Flattery and fawning are like a chill wind invading through a crack in the wall. One does not really sense their harm.

High in the mountains there are no trees, though plants and trees flourish in the winding valleys. In rushing streams, there are no fish, though fish and turtles gather in deep pools. In a similar way, the noble person keeps strict injunctions against conduct that is exclusively lofty, and passions that are one-sided and hasty.

Those who are accomplished and render commendable service are generally completely humble. Those who miss opportunities and make a mess of things are likely to be obstinate and unbending.
In your social life, it is never good to identify with the vulgar, yet it is never good to alienate yourself from them. In the process of accomplishing something, it is never good to antagonize others, yet it is never good just to humor them.

The sun is setting and the evening clouds are more colorful than ever. The year is about to end and the oranges and tangerines are all the more fragrant. Thus noble persons in their old age should all the more enliven their spirits a hundredfold.
200

Standing, the hawk looks asleep. Walking, the tiger looks ill. Actually, these are ploys for grasping and biting their prey. Like this, noble people do not expose their wisdom or show off their talent. Thus they retain the capacity to shoulder grave responsibilities.

201

Thrift is a fine virtue, but in excess it is stinginess, which is unbecoming to the elegant Dao. Deference is pleasing conduct, but in excess it is servility, which often rises with a manipulative intent.

202

Don’t worry when things go against you. Don’t rejoice when your wishes are met. Don’t count on stability to last long. Don’t lose heart at early difficulties.
The family that drinks and feasts to excess cannot be counted as good neighbors. The person who is habituated to singing and dancing cannot be counted as a good citizen. The one who is preoccupied with name and standing cannot be counted as a good official.

Worldly people tend to delight in things that go their way, but in their pursuit of pleasure they are drawn into suffering. Mature people take pleasure in sweeping away inclinations, so their tendency to suffer can eventually be pleasurable.
The condition of one who is replete is like a vessel at the point of overflowing but not quite yet flowing over. One more drop would be dangerous. The state of one in eminent danger is like a tree at the point of falling but not yet quite fallen. One more push would be dangerous.

Regard others with cool eyes; listen to words with cool ears; confront feelings with cool emotions; reflect on principles with a cool mind.

Humane people are relaxed and expansive. Thus their ample and infectious happiness endures. Everything they do contributes to a relaxed and expansive atmosphere. Mean-spirited people are stressed and harried. Their allotment will be scanty and their blessings meager. Everything they do seems stressed and harried.
Don’t assume something bad if you hear something wicked about a person. Perhaps someone is venting slander. Don’t seek intimacy too quickly if you hear something good about a person. Perhaps someone is posturing with self-interest.

The fellow with a parched or coarse disposition does not accomplish a single thing. The level-headed and harmonious person spontaneously garners a hundred blessings.

Don’t be exacting with people who work for you or those who can be of use to you will drift away. Don’t be indiscriminate in your choice of friends or flatterers will bear tribute to you.
In harsh wind and driving rain, you must stand firmly. Amid lush flowers and alluring willows, you must fix your eyes above them. On reaching a precipitous place on a dangerous path, you must turn back.

If people who are faithful to principle temper their manner with pleasantry, they will keep the road to dispute firmly closed. If people of high moral reputation cultivate modesty, they will keep the gate to envy tightly shut.
As a distinguished person in official office, you should show restraint in your personnel paperwork and in granting interviews, so as to screen out those who are flattering their way through the bureaucracy. If you are careless in this matter, you might be giving opportunists an advantage. When you are retired and living in the country, you should not be aloof. Make it easy for others to see you, and thus you can cultivate old friendships.

Superior people should be revered. With reverence for superior people, you will not slip into conceit. Ordinary people should also be revered. With reverence for ordinary people, you will not have a name for being arrogant.
When things run a bit against you and you remember people who are not your equal, your righteous bitterness will spontaneously disappear. When you find yourself in a rather lazy frame of mind and you remember that there are people who are superior to you, your vital spirit will spontaneously awaken.

Don’t be carried away by your good mood and neglect your promises. Don’t be carried away by getting drunk and allowing yourself to get angry. Don’t be carried away by success and become meddlesome and conniving. Don’t procrastinate because you are tired.
217

Those who read a book for pleasure will be led by passages to waving their hands and stamping their feet. Literary contrivances will not entrap them. Those who are good at observing things will reach the point of merging with objects. External forms will not confine them.

218

Heaven endows some with wisdom so that they can enlighten the many; yet there are those who show off their talents in order to show up deficiencies in others. Heaven endows some with wealth so that they can relieve the less fortunate many; yet there are those who use their wealth to debase others in poverty. Such are the transgressors against heaven!
The accomplished person thinks about this and worries about that. The dull person does not distinguish things or know anything. These two can work together in study or on projects. People of mediocre talent, however, have extraneous knowledge, addled opinions, and doubts. It is difficult to do anything with them.

The mouth is the portal of the mind. If not carefully guarded, it leaks true intents and motives. Feelings are the feet of the mind. If not carefully watched, they will take you onto all kinds of wayward paths.

In reprimanding others, find innocence amid faults, and your outlook will be smoothed over. In blaming yourself, find faults within innocence, and your virtue will be enhanced.
222

The child is an embryo of an adult; the budding scholar is an embryo of a high official. If at such times, the life force is inadequate or the upbringing is impure, ultimately it will be difficult to get established and accomplish things in life.

223

Noble persons are not worried when in crisis, but they are on alert when seated at a banquet. They are not uneasy when encountering the rich and powerful, but they are faint of heart on facing the distressed and destitute.
Peaches and plums may be lustrous, but how can they compare with the craggy integrity of the pine and cypress? Pears and apricots may be sweet, but how can they rival the fragrance of oranges and tangerines? In truth, the moment of ripeness does not compare with flavorless longevity, and the early budding of talent is inferior to later fruition.

You see the true realm of human life in the peaceful breeze and in quiet waves. You realize the original nature of the mind in plain tastes and quiet talk.
Merely talking about the pleasures of mountains and woods does not mean you really know the flavor of living there. When you profess distaste for fame and fortune you may not have completely banished all such thoughts.

Fishing by the water is leisurely pleasure, but one still holds a handle on life and death. Playing chess is an elegant pastime, but one's mind is still at war. Thus for keeping your essence whole, one more activity is not as suitable as one less activity, and having great talent can't compare with the complete authenticity of no talent at all.
Nightingales sing, flowers bloom and mountains and valleys are lush with color. These are illusory scenes of the cosmos. Streams ebb and trees wither, boulders are bared and cliffs stripped. Such scenes reveal the true face of heaven-and-earth.

Months and years are long, only the harried try to hurry them along. Heaven-and-earth is commodious, only the petty feel cramped. Seasonal scenes are sources of leisure, only the belabored feel put upon.

It does not take much to enjoy nature, a small basin and a fist-sized stone can evoke mists and a hazy scene. Appreciating scenery does not require journeying far, sitting by the thatched window of a bamboo hut, brushed by the breeze and moonlight, satisfies the self.
Listening to the temple bell in the still of night, I waken to the dream within a dream. Gazing at the reflected moon in the still pond, I glimpse the body beyond the body.

The chirping of birds and twittering of insects are all murmurings of the mind. The brilliance of flowers and colors of grasses are none other than the patterns of the Dao. Learned persons must be clear of heart and transparent in purpose, and thus be in harmony with the heart of all things they touch.
One can read books with written words but cannot understand books without writing. One can play the stringed lute but cannot play a lute without strings. Our use of things depends on concrete forms and not on the spirit of things. How then can we really enjoy the flavor of books and lutes?

Having no desire for things is like the autumn sky and the expanse of the sea. Sitting down with lute and books is like dwelling with the immortals.

When friends and guests gather, there is riotous drinking and merrymaking. Soon, however, late at night when the incense has burned down and the tea is cold, wine lees are repulsive and weariness sets in. This is the way things happen in the world. Why can I not take note in time?
If you can grasp the essential quality of things, it is like seeing the misty moon of the Five Lakes.³

Mountains and the great earth are but specks of dust, how much smaller are dusts within the dust! The body's flesh and blood are no more than shadows or bubbles, how about the shadow beyond the shadow! Without excellent wisdom, there is no achievement of mind.

Arguing in light struck from flint, how brilliant can you be? Disputing on the horn of a snail, how much of the world can you grasp?
The cold lamp has no flame: threadbare clothing has no warmth. Both are results of our own neglect. When the body is like dried-out wood and the mind is like dead ashes, you cannot avoid falling into vacancy.

When you are at all willing to stop doing something, you should do it right away. When you want to find seclusion, even a good marriage is full of vexation. To be a Buddhist or a Daoist is a fine thing, but then the mind is still not free from anxiety. The ancients said: “When it comes to letting go, let go right away. If you search for time to finish your task, it will never be finished.” How true!
From a cool point of view, the futility of heated hustle and bustle is obvious. A moment of leisure taken while busy makes you realize how long lasting the taste of leisure can be.

You don’t have to live in a cave or sit by a precipice to treat wealth and power like passing clouds. You can sip wine and hum poetry without being addicted to streams and mountains.

When you let others crave things and don’t mind their intoxication with them; when you are calm and composed and don’t boast of your loftiness; then you fulfill the Buddhist dictum: “Not being trapped by the Dharma and not being caught by the void leads to liberation of both body and mind.”
Whether time goes quickly or slowly is all in the mind, just as the size of things is in the mind’s eye. A single day for the person who knows leisure lasts ten thousand ages, and a tiny room for the broad-minded is really several chambers.

Reduce your desires down to just cultivating flowers and bamboos, and return everything to “Mr. Nothing.” Forget everything down to just burning incense and brewing tea, not even needing to send for the “white-clad boy.”
When you find all things before your eyes to be sufficient, you are contented and attain the realm of the immortals, whereas when you are discontented with things you remain in the mundane world. When you know how things come into being, you put them to good use, but if you don’t know, you bring destruction upon yourself.

The disaster of embracing power and influence is as tragic as it is swift. The taste of living simply and protecting leisure is the most natural as it is the longest lasting.

When I saunter alone with a staff among the pines, the mists penetrate my tattered gown. After sleeping with a book for a pillow by the bamboo window, I awaken to see moonlight on my flimsy blanket.
Lust burns like a fire, but one thought of how that might lead to illness will turn the excitement into cold ashes. Fame and fortune beckon like sweets, but one thought about dying will make them taste like wax. Thus people can muse about death and suffering, and rid themselves of illusions, thus nourishing the Dao of mind.

The road to get ahead is narrow; but in stepping back a pace, one finds that the road is wider by a step. The flavors of rich elaborate food last but a moment; but if it is a bit blander, the taste lingers a little longer.
To keep your nature unruffled in times of stress, you must learn to keep your spirit calm and pure in times of leisure. To keep your composure in the face of death, you must learn to see through things while you are alive.

There is no honor or disgrace in the forest of seclusion. There is no flaming up or cooling down on the road of moral principle.

There is no need to get rid of heat. Rid yourself of your fervent mind and you will always find yourself reclining on a cool and breezy terrace. There is no need to chase away poverty. Chase away worry about poverty and you will always find yourself ensconced in a peaceful and happy nest.\(^5\)
If you think about stepping back when you are advancing, you will avoid getting stuck in a hedge. If you think about desisting when you are planning a venture, you will avoid the danger of riding a tiger.

The avaricious person given gold resents not receiving jade. Made a duke, such a person regrets not being made a marquis. Such exalted people behave like beggars. A contented person finds humble watery fare more palatable than rich elaborate food and ordinary clothing warmer than sable and ermine. In caring for people, the contented person is not one bit inferior to a duke or king.
It is a lot more interesting to conceal one's fame than to boast about it. How can being vexed over the affairs of the world be compared to the leisure that comes from not being burdened by affairs?

One who craves solitude understands the cosmos just by looking at white clouds and rocky crags. One who seeks wealth and honor finds respite in singing and dancing. Only the self-sufficient person is unaffected by noise or quiet, the magnificent or the withered, and finds any place to be just right.

A lonely cloud emerges by the mountain, hovering or drifting as it pleases. The bright moon hangs high, concerned neither with peace nor with turbulence.

矜名不若遜名趣，
練事何如省事閒。

嗜寂者，
觀白雲幽石而通玄；
趨榮者，
見清歌妙舞而忘倦。

唯自得之士，
無喧寂無榮枯，
無往非自適之天。

孤雲出岫，
去留一無所係；
朗鏡懸空，
靜躁兩不相干。
The taste that lingers comes from plain bean soup and water, not from rich food and wine. The bamboo flute and the lute nurture a sad heart, not miserable solitude. When flavor is intense, it is short-lived; when it is bland it is authentic.

A Chan saying affirms: "Eat when hungry and sleep when tired." A poetic rule affirms: "Put the scene before you into words." The highest begins with the lowest, just as the most difficult emerges from the easiest. When the mind is set on doing something, it is far from actually doing it; when the mind is not set on doing something, it comes close to doing just that.
36

The water flows and yet there is no sound on shore. Thus we appreciate tranquility amid clamor. The high mountain does not hinder the clouds. Thus we awaken to the way something is really nothing.

37

Mountains and forests are scenic places, but once people want to camp there, they create a marketplace. Books and paintings are elegant things, but once you covet them, they become commodities. For those who are not afflicted, every lust-filled place is the abode of the immortals. For those who are tempted, every happy place is a sea of bitterness.
In the midst of clamor, you easily forget everyday things. In a state of repose, what you have forgotten suddenly flashes before your eyes. The difference between quiet and clamor may be small, but the difference between confusion and awareness is really huge.

Covered by a reed mat when it is snowy and cloudy, I appreciate the meaning of night. With a bamboo leaf for a cup, sipping wine and chanting poetry in the breeze and moonlight, I am far from the noise of the world.
40
Put a hermit with a goose-foot staff among fine-clad ranks, and you raise the tone. Add a court official in brocaded gown to the road traveled by woodcutters and fishermen, and you add vulgarity. Thus ostentation is not as good as simplicity, and immodesty cannot match good taste.

41
The way of transcending the world is in facing it; there is no need to escape by cutting off human contacts. The way to ease the mind is to exercise it fully; there is no need to shun all desires to extinguish thoughts.

42
With this body habitually at leisure, who can sway me with honor and dishonor, success and failure? With this mind habitually in repose, who can confuse me with right and wrong, gain and loss?
By a bamboo fence, I hear dogs bark and chickens cluck, and I seem to enter the realm of immortals. By my study window, I hear cicadas whirr and ravens call, and I realize the true world of tranquility.

I do not expect any glory or fame; why then do I have to worry about profit and benefits? I do not crave the road of success; why then do I fear the pitfalls of official life?

Lingering in the mountains among rocks and streams quiets the weary mind. Finding contentment in literature and paintings dispels worldly concerns. Noble persons often seek these conditions for attending to the mind and are not given to the allure of curios.
Scenes in spring are ornate and rich, soothing and expanding the human spirit, but they cannot compare with scenes of autumn, when clouds are pure and the breezes clear, orchids and cinnamon cast their faint fragrance, the sky and water share the same color, and the air is open and bright, all purifying the body and the mind.

One who can't read a single word, but has a sense of poetry, is actually poetical. One who cannot chant a single Buddhist verse but has a proclivity for Chan is actually a master of profound satori.
A calculating person tends to see snakes in the shadow of a bow, and crouching tigers in the shape of stone sleeping-pillows. Everything is sinister! For a person of calm mind, a stone tiger can become a seagull and the sound of frogs is sweet music. Everything touched is truly genuine.

When the body is like an unmoored boat, it floats about until it bumps the shore. When the mind is like ashes, what harm is there in being cut up by knives or wiped out by scent?
It is human to delight in the singing of nightingales and to tire of the croaking of frogs. It is also human to want to cultivate flowers and get rid of weeds. These are all functions of our likes and dislikes. But considering the nature of things, aren't each of them, the nightingale, the frog, the flowers, and the weeds, expressions of their own natures, their own expressions of life?

Hair and teeth falling out are only the decay of the flesh. Birds singing and flowers blooming enable us to recognize the true essence of our nature.

A covetous mind can heat up a cool pond and will find no quiet even in the depths of mountains and forests. An emptied mind can cool oppressive summer heat and be unconscious of the clamor at a market.
Those who hoard great riches perish anyway. Being rich is not as carefree as being poor. Those who climb in life fall quickly anyway. Those highly placed do not rest as easy as the lowly and common.

As one studies the Book of Changes by the window in the morning, one grinds the ink-stick with the dewdrops from the pine trees. While discoursing on the classics by the table at noon, one hears the jade chimes announce the breeze in the bamboos.

Flowers in pots ultimately lack the will to live, just as birds in cages are reduced in their natural joy. Isn't it much better to let birds and flowers shape their random pattern in the mountains, soaring and flourishing freely and naturally, expressing themselves?
People who lead self-centered lives have all kinds of cravings and all kinds of vexation. It is said: "If I didn't know there is an 'I,' how would I know that things are desirable?" It is also said: "Knowing this body is not my real self, how can lust and the passions bother me?" Penetrating words!

When you are young and look at things from the vantage of old age, you can give up the desire for fame and fortune. When you become wealthy and successful and look at things from the vantage of financial ruination, you can end all thoughts of luxury and splendor.
The ways of the world are full of unpredictable changes. You must not take them too seriously. Yaofu⁶ said, "The so-called 'I' of yesterday is today's 'that person'. And 'who' will become today's 'I'." If we look at things this way often, we can relieve much that troubles the mind.

Keep a sober eye on the hustle and bustle of life and you will be spared a lot of worrying thoughts. Maintain a little enthusiasm in times of suffering and you will gain quite a bit of true delight.

Every peaceful and happy situation has an unhappy counterpart. Every good prospect has a counter-detraction. The only peaceful and happy nest⁷ is where you eat homey fare and lead a life of simplicity.
Raise high the window curtain and gaze upon green mountains and clear streams caught up in misty clouds, and you will appreciate the just-so-ness of nature. Part the bamboos and listen to swallows and doves greet changes of seasons, and you will forget the difference between you and nature.

Knowing there must be failure where there is success, see to it that your desire to succeed is not too inflexible. Knowing there will be death where there is life, don’t let yourself get too tired out seeking ways to prolong your life.
A monk of old said: “Bamboo shadows sweep the stairs, but no dust is stirred. Moonlight penetrates to the bottom of the pond, but no trace remains.” A Confucian scholar said: “No matter how agitated the flow of water, the surroundings are quiet. No matter how profusely flowers fall, the mind remains at ease.” Body and mind can enjoy peace if we keep such attitudes about situations as they arise.

Rhythms of the pine forest and sounds of streams upon pebbles are nature’s murmurings when you listen in quiet. Firelight and smoky scenes at the grassland’s edge, as well as clouds reflected on still water, are nature’s superb compositions when viewed at leisure.
As the Western Jin became a land of thorns and bramble, it still yearned for the military way. As people of Beimang devolved to the condition of wolves and rabbits, they still lusted after gold. A saying of old states: "It is easier to tame wild animals than to curb human desires. It is easier to fill valleys than to satisfy human desires." How true!

In the depth of your mind there is no storm; everywhere are green mountains and clear streams. In your innate realm there is change and growth, everywhere you see fish leaping and hawks soaring.
A highly placed person clad in finery who sees how poised and at ease someone in a small cap can be cannot help feeling envious. A person accustomed to feasts and banquets who sees through uncurtained windows the quiet ease of bare tables of a humble abode cannot avoid twinges of forlorn nostalgia. Why must people continue to strive for fame and fortune as if “Lighting fire on the tails of oxen and driving them into the enemy camp” or forcing bulls and mares to mate, and not let things take their own course?

Fish swim in water but do not think about water. Birds fly in the wind but do not know about wind. Realizing this enables us to rise above the burden of things and to take delight in the ways of nature.
69
The wolf slumbers amid ruins and the rabbit dashes about on abandoned terraces, all once places of song and dance. The dew-chilled yellow flowers and the smoke-shrouded wasteland are scenes of former battlegrounds. What normalcy is there to rise or decline? What security is there to the strong or the weak? Such thoughts turn the heart to ashes!

70
Not minding being favored or dishonored, one watches the courtyard flowers bloom and fall. Not caring whether to leave or to stay, one follows the clouds on the far horizon as they roll and unfurl.
In the moonlit night sky, where can you not soar? Yet the moth heads directly for the candle. With clear streams and lush fruits, what is it that you cannot savor? But the owl prefers the rotted flesh of the rat. Alas! How many people in this world are like the moth and the owl!

If you have the talent to ford a river by using a pole and yet don't depend on it, you are a Daoist worthy. If you ride a donkey in search of a donkey, you can never be a Chan master.
When viewed with a cool eye, the rich and powerful parading and the heroes contesting are not unlike ants swarming over odorous meat, or flies sucking blood. When considered with a clear and calm mind, disputes over right and wrong that rise like swarms of bees, and arguments over profit and loss that rise like porcupine quills, will subside like liquid gold or snow melting in hot soup.

Tethered to material want you experience the sadness of life. At peace with your true nature you experience happiness. Knowing the cause of sadness will quickly dispel cares; knowing the cause of happiness will bring you to the realm of the sages.
When you have not a speck of material want in your heart, it is like snow melted on the stove or ice melted under the sun. You will see a vast brightness like the moon in a clear sky and its reflection in the ripples.

The muse prompts a light recitation on Baling Bridge, and the mountains and forests become expansive and noble. Rustic feelings arise when you visit Jing Lake or the river Qu in solitude, and the surrounding hills and waters reflect one another alluringly.
Those at rest will soar high; those who begin too early will fade quickly. Knowing this will help you to avoid worries about climbing up and ahead, and dispel thoughts of impatient hurry.

When you see that leaves inevitably fall, you realize how and why they flourish; when you realize that people head inevitably to the coffin, you know the futility of being beautiful and rich.

The true void is not void; the world of illusions is not real, and seeing through illusions also is not real. What did the Buddhist ancestors say about all this? "Whether one remains in the world or transcends it, following desires is a source of suffering and getting rid of desires is also a source of suffering. Listen to us and practice self-cultivation."
A noble statesman might decline a grant of a thousand carriages, while a greedy person will fight for a single penny. The two are as different as heaven and earth, yet craving fame is not different from craving profit. The emperor worries about the country and the beggar wails for food. Their situations are like heaven and earth, yet is the worrying thought really different from the worrying wail?

Even though they are well versed in the ways of the world, some people are reluctant to acknowledge sudden change. Even though completely tuned to human sentiments, some people tend merely to nod their heads when they are told to do chores.
If you are set upon achieving no-mind, in the end you do not achieve it. The only thing to do is not to allow a previous thought to linger and not to welcome a succeeding thought. When you have once dispatched current desires, you enter gradually into Mu.

What the mind grasps intuitively becomes the desired end. Things borne of nature reveal nature's true mystery. Add a little intervention and arrangement and the flavor is reduced. Bo said: "A thought is suitable when not encroached upon; the breeze blows fresh in nature unimpeded." How interesting! How true!
If the spirit is clear, eating when hungry and drinking when thirsty will be enough to nurture body and mind. But if the heart is bewitched, all talk about Chan and chanting of sutras will only be games with the mind.

The human mind has its true realm, its happy mood not modulated by music and its fragrance not created by incense or fine tea. Wandering in the true realm comes when desires take complete leave, and cares for worldly things are tossed away.

Gold comes from ore, jade comes from stone, and truth comes from the illusory. The Dao may be found in the wine cup and immortals amid flowers. Refinement is not to be denied, but it is not separate from the ordinary.
To the ordinary eye the myriad things of the universe, the myriad sentiments of the human relations, and the myriad affairs of the world are all different from one another. But to the eye of the Dao, everything is similar and plain. What need is there for differentiation? What need is there to select or reject?

Sleeping soundly and comfortably in coarse bedding, one knows the primal harmony of the universe. Finding lingering flavor in bramble soup, one becomes aware of the true joy of life.
Casting off attachments is a function of the mind. When the mind is done with desires, even a slaughterhouse or a tavern becomes the Pure Land. Otherwise, with a zither, a crane, or a bouquet, the practice might be elegant but the devil still hangs about. There is a saying: "If you can cast off attachments, the world of dust becomes paradise. If you cling to desires, even as a monk you are still a layman." How true!

In a small chamber, all my cares are gone; there is no need to speak of carved pillars and flying eaves, or of beaded curtains keeping out the rain. After three cups of wine I am one with nature, knowing only to pluck the zither under the moon or to play the flute in the breeze.
In all-pervading quiet I suddenly hear a bird chirping, and this brings me much delight. In a desolate scene devoid of flowers, I suddenly see one plant still thriving, and this fills me with limitless verve for life. My original nature does not wither, and my spirit is easily sparked.

Bo said: “Why not leave your heart and mind alone, and let heaven decide on life!” Chao said: “Why not restrain your heart and mind, be still and return to the quiet!” The one condones unbridled behavior while the outcome of the other is solitary atrophy. Only those in control of their minds can let go or rein in the mind as they please.
On snowy moonlit nights, one's mind becomes clear and transparent. Encountering the breezes of spring, one's thoughts become agreeable. The human mind transforms itself and seamlessly mixes with nature.

Essays are improved from their initial lack of subtlety, as is the moral way. This term “lack of subtlety” is truly rich in meaning. For example, the lines "dogs barking in the Peach Blossom Grove and chickens crowing amidst mulberries" evoke simple and genuine sentiments, whereas such lines as "The moon is reflected in the cold pond and crows are perched on withered branches," though finely wrought, convey feelings of forlorn decline.
95

When it is I who change things in the
world, I do not take delight in successes
or worry about failures. Everything is light
and easy. When outside things become my
masters, I get resentful if they are against
me but take delight when they are with
me. On this path, even a single hair can
be nettlesome.

96

When the principle is at rest, the matter
is also at rest. Those who dispatch a matter,
but still cling to its principle, get rid of
the shadow and retain the form. When the
mind is empty, the whole realm is empty.
Those who rid themselves of the realm, but
retain the clinging mind, are trying to shoo
worms from slaughtered meat.
The hermit is always at ease and composed in daily affairs. In drinking wine, the pleasure does not come from being challenged; in chess, the winning is not in the rivalry; in flute playing, the tone is not in the tunes; in lute playing, the height of enjoyment is not having any strings; in having guests who require neither welcome nor send-off one finds candid ease. If there is even a trace of contrivance and formality, one falls into the worldly sea of bitterness!

If you think of how you looked when you were born, or what you will be like after you die, your myriad thoughts will turn into cold ashes. With quiet recollection, you can transcend the myriad things and roam the world prior to their creation.
It is not foresight to value health when you become ill or to appreciate the blessings of peace when you encounter turmoil. To be fortunate and perceive that fortune is the root of calamity, and to enjoy life and perceive that life is the cause of death—is this not an excellent way of viewing things!

Actors powder and rouge themselves, using the tip of the eyebrow pencil to produce beauty or ugliness. But when the show is over, what is left of beauty or ugliness? Chess players vie against each other, pushing their chess pieces to decide on victory or defeat. But when the game is over, who is the victor or the vanquished?
Only the one who is calm and composed can fully enjoy the beauty of flowers in the breeze and the transparent purity of the moon on a snowy night. Only the one who knows leisure can feel the blooming and decline of plants and the decay of bamboos and stones.

Offer rustic elders fat chicken and plain wine, and they beam with happiness. Tell them about sumptuous feasts, and they show no comprehension. Offer such people short jackets and hand-me-downs, and they grin with pleasure. Ask them whether they want embroidered robes, and they seem befuddled. Their nature is full; therefore their desires are minimal. This is how life ought to be.
When the mind becomes no-mind, what good is introspection? Buddhists maintain that those who examine their minds end up increasing hindrance. All matter is fundamentally the same; why should we sort it out? Zhuang Sheng\textsuperscript{15} said, "Those who try to sort out matter will discover its essential unity."

Those who pick up their coats to depart at the height of festivity are admired as adepts who can halt at the precipice. Those who pursue their night journey after their candle has burned out are ridiculed as ordinary persons awash in the bitter sea.
If you are not yet in firm control of yourself, you should shun the hurly-burly world so that your mind will not be tempted by desires. Avoid being disturbed and become aware of your quiet nature. If you are in full control, you can mix with the world, and your mind, though encountering temptations and desires, will not be flustered. Thus you nurture your tranquil nature.

Those who prefer quiet to noise tend to avoid people and seek solitude. They don’t know that just thinking of avoiding people simply engenders the self, that thinking to be quiet is itself the spark to become active. How can they realize that others and they are actually one, and reach the point where there is no distinction between activity and repose?
One is fresh and at ease living in the mountains; everything touched occasions a pleasant thought; viewing a single cloud and a wild crane can bring transcendence to mind; fording a pebbled brook can make one think of becoming pure; touching a gnarled juniper or the winter plum tree can firm up one's resolve; keeping the company of gulls and deer can clear the mind of calculated scheming. With just one step into the worldly dust, though external matters might not ensnare you, you will surely belong to the depraved.

When the occasion arises, walk barefoot in the fragrant grass and keep company with birds freely flying about. When the mind becomes one with the scene, put on a cape and sit amid fallen petals. The silent clouds will tarry and keep you company.
Fortune and calamity are made in the mind. Thus Buddhism states: “Strong burning desires are the fiery pit. To indulge in greed and avarice is to fall into the sea of bitterness. One clear and calm thought turns the fiery pit into a clear pond, and one bit of alertness enables the boat to reach shore.” We therefore see that one shift in thought can change everything. Can we afford not to be vigilant?

A rope saw will cut through the wood, as water will wear through a stone. You who cultivate the Dao should persevere in your quest. The watercourse forms when the stream approaches, and the melon drops when ripe. One achieves the Dao by letting it happen.
When desire and want are quiet, the moon comes up and the wind arises, there is no need to languish in a sea of bitterness. With the mind detached, dust and hustle disappear, and there is no need to be a hermit in the hills.

As plants decay, new buds appear at their roots. In the cold of winter, warmth is nevertheless preserved in the ashes of reeds.¹⁶

When you view mountains after the rain, the scene is fresh and alluring. When you listen to the temple bell at night, the sound is particularly clear and far-reaching.
114
Ascending mountains expands the mind; lingering by flowing water extends the mind; reading on snowy or rainy nights clarifies the mind; singing on top of hills invigorates the senses.

115
For the broad-minded, a thousandfold emolument is but an earthen pot. For the narrow-minded, a single hair is as big as a cartwheel.

116
Without wind, moon, flowers, and willows, there is no nature; without feelings and desires, there is no mind-body. But only when I am in control of material things, and material things do not control me, can the mundane world become the realm of principle.
Only those who understand themselves can treat the myriad things according to their myriad natures. Only those who let go of the world can be delivered from the world while in the world.

In life, too much leisure produces extraneous thoughts, and too much work keeps you from your true nature. Thus you cannot completely ignore worrying about your own welfare, at the same time you should not completely shun the pleasures of leisure.
Many times, when your mind is agitated, you will lose awareness of your true nature. If you don’t allow the birth of a single thought, you can sit in complete peace, watching and traveling with the clouds, feeling purified by the passing rain, finding pleasant awareness on hearing the birds, and understanding yourself with falling petals. Where will you not find truth? Where will it not function?

At childbirth, the mother is endangered. A hoard of wealth attracts the robber. What joy does not contain grief? In poverty, you can learn to be frugal; in illness, you can learn to take care of your health. What grief does not contain happiness? The wise person should treat felicity and adversity as the same, forgetting both joy and sorrow.
121
The ear hears the wind roar through
mountain gorges, but then it is gone,
and no sound remains. This is just like right
and wrong—both disappear. The mind
is like moonlight on the water, empty and
unattached. It is just like the self together
with material things—both are forgotten.

122
When people are tethered to fame and
fortune, they speak of the world as dust
and the sea as bitter. They do not know
of white clouds and clear wind, flowing
rivers and majestic rocks, beckoning
flowers and chirping birds, and the songs
of woodcutters echoing in the valley.
The world does not have to be one of
dust and the sea one of bitterness; it is
you who mire yourself in the mud and
belabor your mind.
123

There is exquisite pleasure in fixing your eyes on half-opened flowers and in drinking only to a half-tipsy state. Full flowering and total intoxication will surely lead to self-loathing. People whose plates are full should ponder this deeply.

124

Edible foods from the mountains are not irrigated by the world, neither are wild fowl fed by the world. Yet they are excellent in flavor. Is there anyone who is tainted by the world who can escape from carrying its aroma?
Cultivating flowers and trimming bamboos, or taking delight in cranes and goldfish, all must be done as self-cultivation. If you are just amusing yourself, poking at things, that is no more than what Confucians call "into the ear and out through the mouth," or what Buddhists call "grasping at emptiness." Where is the refinement?

Those of mountains and forests are at leisure and fulfilled. Those of fields lead a crude life but maintain their innate essence. Those who fall into the calculating ways of the marketplace would do better dying in a remote gulch, for at least their bones would remain pristine.
Fortune that is not yours to share, and gains that accrue for no reason are, if not nature's bait, certainly enticements to disaster by the world. Without high-mindedness in such situations, you will surely fall into someone's conspiracy.

Human life is really a puppet show. So long as I am in control, not a string gets out of order, folding or unfolding. I decide on movement or rest, not a bit controlled by others. This is the way to transcend this world.
Every matter begets a detriment. Thus people think that one less thing is often a blessing. To quote a poet of old: "I advise my lord not to take up warfare or the acquisition of fiefs. One general's victory means the bones of ten thousand." Again: "Would that the myriad affairs be settled in peace; there would be no regrets about swords rusting in their boxes for a thousand years." Knowing this, even heroic hearts and fierce ambition will melt like ice.

A wanton woman may repent and become a nun, and an enthusiast may turn to tranquility to enter the Dao. The pristine threshold often offers a refuge for the lascivious and wicked.
With waves rising to heaven, those in the boat are not afraid, but those ashore are greatly alarmed. When the party becomes quarrelsome, those attending are not upset, but those outside are greatly distressed. Thus the noble person, while attending to things, must also be mindful of matter outside.

If you save a little in your life, that much is transcended. If you reserve a little in social relationships, that much in disputes is reduced. If you withdraw a little of what is said, that much in error is saved. If you reserve your cleverness a little, there is that much chance to be well received. If you don't seek daily reductions but look for daily increase, you are indeed shackling yourself.
133

It is easier to cope with hot and cold climate than it is to get rid of the hot and cold of human relationships. It is easier to get rid of the hot and cold of human relationships than it is to remove the cold and unfeeling in our hearts. When this cold and unfeeling are removed, harmony and the spring breeze pervade everything.

134

In tea drinking, it is not the blend that is important but that the pot must not be allowed to be dry. In drinking wine, it is not the strength of the wine that matters but that the wine cup must not be empty. The unornamented lute is always tuned even without strings, and the flute is perfectly suitable even without tunes. It may be impossible to surpass Emperor Xi, it is certainly possible to reach the level of Ji and Ruan.\(^\text{17}\)
Buddhism teaches you to follow your karma, and Confucianism teaches holding to your station. These two teachings are life buoys for crossing the sea. The worldly roads are vast and unpredictable. A host of extraneous thoughts arises from one thought of selfish survival. Follow natural encounters with peace and security, and you will find contentment at every turn.
NOTES TO THE CAIGENTAN

1 The expression "Five Lakes" is often used in literature but seldom connotes the same five lakes; all are found in east-central China.

2 *hao* of Chen Xianzhang (d. 1501) of Xinhui in Guangdong.

3 See the preface by Yu Kongjian and note.

4 A boy who brings wine, connected with the hermit Tao Qian (372–427).

5 *anle wo*, familiarly associated with Song Neo-Confucianist Shao Yong (1091–1187).

6 Courtesy name of the Neo-Confucian philosopher Shao Yong (1091–1187), who declined many appointments to office. The "peaceful and happy nest" referred to in II:28 was also Shao's usage.

7 See II:28, II:58.

8 Western Jin (265–317), once a military power after the Three Kingdoms, nevertheless collapsed.

9 Mountain near Luoyang, long the burial ground of the rich and powerful, now a roaming ground for animals foraging for food.

10 Refers to the battle plan of Tian Dan of the State of Qi during the Warring States period to stampede a thousand oxen with their tails on fire into the camp of the State of Yan.

11 Located in Chang'an County (present-day Xian) in Shaanxi Province. Noted as the spot where friends bid farewell; also known as Suohun Qiao (Soul Locking Bridge).
12 Jing Lake, also known as Jian Lake, is south of Shaoxing County of present-day Zhejiang Province, next to the Qu’er River. This river area, a watery expanse at the time, began by the Song period to turn into the farmland it is now.

13 Bo Juyi (771–846), Late Tang poet.

14 Chao Buzhi, literatus of Northern Song.

15 Zhuangzi or Zhuang Zhou (c. 369–280 B.C.E.), whose second chapter on “Sorting out Matter” many consider to be the cornerstone of his Daoist philosophy.

16 Young reeds were burned and kept in bamboo tubes to give weather forecasts. When ashes flew up out of the bamboo, the weather was about to turn.

17 Fu Xi, the legendary emperor, and Ji Kang and Ruan Ji of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove fame. Ji Kang wrote the Classic on the Lute, and Ruan Ji, noted for his natural philosophy and having served in a high post, was often considered the leader of the Sages. Many such groups formed the qingtan (pure talk) tradition of the fourth and fifth centuries.
Those who subsist on shrubs and weeds are almost all pure and clear as jade; those who dress in finery and eat sumptuously have the complexion of fawning servitors. For true ambition is manifest in simplicity and purity, and integrity perishes in sweet fat.

The sentiment in the above quotation is one of 360 observations on life comprising the Caigentan, written by Hong Zicheng 洪自誠 some four hundred years ago in Late Ming China. Earlier, during the Song dynasty, Zhu Xi, the grand synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism, said, “One can see that people who cannot chew the roots of vegetables, therefore going back on their nature, are increasing in numbers. One must take heart!” With simplicity and humility implicit in its messages intended for life and society, the Caigentan has charmed the imagination...
over the ages to this very day. Even Mao Zedong valued the same metaphorical vegetable roots.²

While the work has come to enjoy modern popularity, in Japan throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in China and Europe from the last quarter of the twentieth on, the author, true to the spirit of simplicity and self-effacement in the quotation, remains biographically unknown. The work itself defines the man.

The history of Caigentan’s editions is complicated and at points confusing.³ No original text of the Caigentan is available in China. The earliest of its printed versions are preserved in Japan, where a strong and sustained interest in the work is evident. It is sensible to speak of two traditions in which the Caigentan has come down to us, identified by three prefaces. The first is by a contemporary friend of Hong’s by the name of Yu Kongjian, which is translated in full in this text; the second and third, dated 1768 and 1794, are by Suichu Hall Master (Suichutang zhuren) and Three Hills Invalid Tongli (Sanshan bingfu Tongli) respectively.

Yu’s delves into friendship, admiration, style of life, and the thought of the times. Much can be inferred from this preface, which shows that Yu knew of Hong’s “having tumbled and fallen in the wind and waves, his having scaled dangerous cliffs and obstacles,” as well as “his
self-admonition and means of self-strengthening." It also identifies Hong Zicheng as the author, with a sequential order of the aphorisms probably closest to the Ming original. This Yu-prefaced edition will be referred to as the Zicheng version.

The other two prefaces say little about the work. The Three Hills Invalid preface is full of concern for his own illness while a friend brought him the book in search of a preface, but managed to say:

Alas, the vegetable root is a jettisoned item, just like this book, neglected by most people. But then the fragrance of vegetable roots is not apparent to those who are not steady of nature, just like this book, meaningful only to those who are quiet of mind. Whether this is so or not we cannot check with the original author, but we can wait for future wise persons to judge. Thus I offer this preface on the third day after Zhongyuan festival, 33rd year of Qianlong [1768].

The Suichu Hall Master states in his preface:

I was happening by an old temple and discovered among literary rubble and discarded papers one volume entitled Caigentan. Reading it, I find it might be
Chan [Zen] Buddhist with relevance to the study of mind, body, and human nature. Thus I brought it back and edited it and had it fine-scripted into a volume. It possessed an introduction, but the language is not elegant and it has little relevant to say about the work. So I excised it. The author of this work is Hong Yingming. We know nothing about him.

Second day of second moon, 59th year of Qianlong [1794]

The latter two prefaces say little about the work or about the author, but they both list Hong Yingming  洪應明 as the author. Moreover, the texts that follow their prefaces are identical and show a sequence of aphorisms vastly different from the Zicheng version. They are best referred to as the Yingming version.

Fortunately there are in Japan copies of the Zicheng version that are probably closest to the original. According to Ogaeri Yoshio 魚返善雄, the copy preserved in Sonkeikaku Bunko is a Ming print, without its cover or preface by Yu. Another copy is preserved in the Naikaku Bunko, edited by Wang Qianchu 汪乾初, who styled himself as the Awakened from Delusion Daoist Priest (Juemi daoshi 觉迷道士), perhaps dated 1591. This text appears to be a supplement attached to a work edited by Gao Lian 高濂, entitled Yashangzhai zunsheng bajian
雅尚齋遵生八箋 (The Eight Commentaries Honoring the Life of the Yashang Studio). This edition contains the preface by Yu Kongjian and lists the author as Huanchu daoren Hong Zicheng of the Ming. During the mid-Tokugawa, Hayashi Yu 林瑜 (literary name: Sunpo 蒜坡 1781–1836) reedited this Naikaku Bunko text, wrote a preface, and had it set on wood blocks made by his disciples and printed. This first Japanese printed edition appeared in 1822 under its Sino-Japanese title of Saikontan. The subsequent popularity of the book in Japan is based on this version, which offers two books of 225 and 135 entries each, with no subheadings.

Hayashi Yu, descending from the line of Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), who advised the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate on adopting Neo-Confucianism as its official philosophy, wrote an informative preface to this first printing of Caigentan in Japan. In an elegant "grassy" script done with the brush, Hayashi Yu extolled the work from the Confucian point of view and revealed himself as preferring Confucianism's "Golden Mean" features to its stronger features as a state philosophy and rationalism. Not once in this preface did Hayashi Yu mention Buddhism or Daoism by name, true to his school's distaste for the two teachings. But he admired the moderate and quietist elements of Confucian self-cultivation and enjoyment of nature and the arts. Since the work became
broadly known through Hayashi's printing, however, the view that the second part is more Daoist and Buddhist has arisen to suggest a difference in content between the two books, the first Confucian and the latter Buddhist-Daoist. This is most likely misleading if Hong Zicheng is to be seen as an amalgam of all three teachings. Hong moved from a qualified Confucian view of self and society in the first part to a fuller exploration and appreciation of the self in the second, as will be seen in the section on self and society later on in this essay. This two-part edition appears also to be the version that a priest by the name of Sheng Yin published in Taiwan in 1958 under the title of *Talks on the Caigentan*. However, while this version also has two books, it has only 222 entries in the first and 134 in the second. When the work was republished under a changed title in 1993, the books were restored to 225 and 135 entries, making a total of 360. The current translation follows Robert Aitken's copy of the Zicheng version prefaced by Hayashi Yu in 1822, cross-checked for text accuracy and completeness with the modern versions by Sheng Yin, Wu Jiaju, and Feng Zuomin, all of whom follow the Zicheng edition.

In China, the majority of the currently available *Caigentans* follow the Yingming version, which also has two books, with the first subdivided into four sections, sequentially titled as "Self-cultivation" (xiushen 修身 or...
xiusheng 修省), "Social Relations" (yingchou 應酬), "Critiques" (pingyi 評議), and "Leisure" (xianshi 閒適). The second part is simply labeled "General Comments" (gailun 概論). The two books contain 383 entries, 23 more than the Zicheng version prevalent in Japan but less than in China.

Actually, the Zicheng and Yingming versions differ widely not only in number but also in the ordering of items, which affected differences in content. The Yingming version shows many more editorial changes and liberties. Suichu Hall Master said in his preface that he had revised it to his liking and that "we know nothing about him [the author]." Subsequent versions within the Yingming tradition also show editorial excisions and additions. In editorial history and reprinting terms, the Zicheng tradition shows much adherence to Hong and the work, with the two-part division kept intact for clear provenance. The Yingming tradition does not reveal such reverence; rather, the tendency throughout is to popularize it, suiting whatever issuer's preferences. Publishers throughout China, in remote towns and provinces, from Inner Mongolia to Yanbian for instance, have come forth with reprints of the work, rarely with editorial study or notation. The work also lends itself to calligraphic presentation, with illustrations. A group of vegetable roots—inspired paintings by Fu Yiyao, the daughter
of famed artist Fu Baoshi, is available not only in print but on the Internet, accompanied by the calligraphy of Lee Siu Leung. Civic groups also have found the work appealing, some emphasizing only certain parts of the book. The traffic police department of Hangzhou has a handbook adapting Caigentan to its training sessions. A popular comic book by Cai Zhizhong, entitled Cartoon Caigentan: The Meaning of Life (Manhua Caigentan: Rensheng de ziwei), has gone through numerous printings by many Chinese-language publishers in Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia. All this popularity, however, has only occurred since the mid-1980s and seems to have followed its craze in Japan, where courses on the art and science of management gave it a high profile and appreciation.

In Japan, by that time, the book had already had over a century of exalted status and received sustained reprintings. The Yingming version is less orderly and does not lend itself to publication in other languages. The version translated here, with its numbered sequences, makes citations and acknowledgments easier and clearer. In other words, the Zicheng version is better suited to study. Readers can follow the sequentiality of the author's intellectual and sentimental passage through life and can glean from the work well-worded gems. The Yingming version is suitable only for the latter.

Hong, according to the priest Sheng Yin, also wrote
the following works now believed lost: Lianjin (String of Gems), Qiaotan (Simple Sayings of the Woodcutter), Bichou (Fields Reclaimed by the Brush), and Chuanjiabao (Family Legacies). He was also the author of the Mysterious Itineraries of Worthies and Arhats (Xianfo qizong), which, according to the General Catalogue of the Four Complete Libraries, consisted of four chapters and was completed in the thirtieth year of Wanli, which would make it 1602. A copy is in the palace collection in Taipei. It covers episodes of about sixty-three Daoists from Laozi to Zhang Sanfeng; comments on immortality; nineteen patriarchs of Indian Buddhism, from Sakyamuni to Prjnata (c. 457); and forty-two patriarchs of Chan Buddhism, from Bodhidharma (c. 502) to Chuanzi (ninth century); and mysteries of eternity. This, however, is a work mixing history, fiction, and the imagination. It is noted for its imaginary flights and feats rarely encountered in the human world, yet appreciated by the human world bent upon attaining something better in life. We glean from this work that Hong might have suffered, like his friend Yu Kongjian, a disappointing departure from official life joining the increasing ranks of recluses in the towns and lake areas of the lower Yangzi River region.

From the discussion of Zicheng and Yingming versions, one may gain the impression that they were by two different authors. It is from the mention by the
General Catalogue of the Four Complete Libraries of Hong's authorship of the *Xianfo qizong* 仙佛奇蹟 that Hong Zicheng and Hong Yingming are revealed as the same person, with Yingming as the given name and Zicheng as the courtesy name (*zi*). His literary name (*hao*) is "Huanchu daoren 還初道人," the latter suggesting his Daoist leanings with its reference to "returning to the origin," and its self-styled *daoren* (Dao adept). Yet this is only one component of what turned out to be a Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist amalgam found with increasing frequency in Late Ming China, although not always in the same proportions in each case. In Hong, however, these three strains spoke through a literary recluse and philosophical eclectic. It would be futile to gauge which of the three persuasions is the strongest or the weakest in Hong Zicheng's makeup, although certain parts are stronger or weaker in the two books of the work. But it is safe to assert that the world-cleaving aspects of Confucianism, with its penchant for serving in office and patriarchal rectitude, are not pronounced at all in Hong. It should be noted that while Hong was not a world-cleaving Confucian, nor was he a world-denying figure in Late Ming society. The *Caigentan* shows him to be a recluse within society and not one out of society. In any event, his friend Yu Kongjian's own life and brief preface tell us something of the times and the circumstances of Hong Zicheng's writing the work.
Other inferential research suggests Hong might have been a native of Xindu, north of present-day Chengdu, Sichuan Province. He was active, however, in the lower Yangzi River valley around Nanjing at the time of the writing of the *Caigentan* and *Xianfo qizong*. Here is where Hong and Yu both thrived during the reign of Wanli (1572–1620). Yu (zi Yuanshi 元時, bao Taijing 泰景) received his highest degree in 1580 and served in regional as well as capital posts important enough for him to memorialize the emperor frequently. Emperor Shenzong, however, was not always an attentive prince and turned a deaf ear to Yu and a whole host of other high officials.

Yu Kongjian was one of the scholar-literati disgraced and demoted by the emperor who left government in 1588; he repaired to his native Jintan, near Wuxi. Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612) often invited Yu to lecture at the Donglin Academy. It was during Yu's twenty years of retirement at Jintan that Hong Zicheng sought him out to write a preface to his *Caigentan*. Yu's wording of his own retirement sentiments accord well with the views expressed in the *Caigentan*. Perhaps that was why Hong asked him to write the preface. Writing prefaces in the Chinese scholarly tradition presumes some degree of acquaintance if not friendship. As it was and still is among Chinese scholars the custom to use courtesy (zi) names with one another, Yu referred to him as Zicheng. The
preface by Suichu Hall Master tells us little of the incep-
tion of the Caigentan, complaining, as we have seen, about
another preface and justifying his own excisions and
revisions. The same note of self-centered complaint has
been remarked upon in the Three Hills Invalid preface.
From Yu's preface, we learn that his own retirement in Jin-
tan dates from 1588, and from the mention of a possible
1591 version of the Caigentan edited by Wang Qianchu,
we can place the appearance of Hong Zicheng's work
somewhere during those four years.20

LATE MING MILIEU OF THE CAIGENTAN

End-of-century ennui was not known among Chinese
intellectuals four hundred years ago, but end-of-era
moods and sensations, fed by dynastic decline and
oppressive rule, were clearly prevalent. Hong Zicheng
and his contemporaries chose different ways to cope with
the times. The Caigentan spoke what he saw and felt. Hong
certainly referred to the world in which he found himself
as "decadent times—shuji zhi shi." (See 1:50.)

Late Ming China's society and culture, so masterfully
written about by Ray Huang in his 1587, A Year of No
Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline21 and by William
Theodore de Bary in his Self and Society in Ming Thought,22
and richly mined in a growing number of cultural studies,
now offer a fuller picture and flavor of Chinese life and outlook. This growth of culture accompanied a political state in decline, a process that escalated after the death of Prime Minister Zhang Juzheng 張居正 in 1582. Earlier works on the Ming had given it a dismissive designation as a time of decline, especially if viewed from the vantage point of Confucian morality and political ethics.

The Ming by the time of the Wanli 萬歷 reign (1573–1620) had begun its inexorable dynastic decline. Reasons for the process were a complex mix of institutional, demographic, and personal factors. Zhang Juzheng was at the helm for the ten years between 1572 and 1582 and exercised political skill at managing the bureaucratic machinery that had been in operation for over two hundred years. The well-intentioned Zhang, seeing the need for economic and financial reform, could not in the end cope adequately with the needs and problems of the times. One measure may serve as example. By the middle of the Ming, early tax measures had become irrelevant but had actually increased in both the tax rates and numbers of ordinances. In trying to bring relief to the situation, a measure was devised to amalgamate all the taxes into what came to be known as the Single Tax System (yitiao bianfa). The measure quickly produced a far heavier tax burden and suffered from uneven application. It soon gained the reputation of being the Single Whip System,
also called *yitiao bianfa*, with punning on the word *bian*, a homophone for both amalgamation and whip. People were lashed with government exactions.

There were other reasons for decline in the Ming. One structural factor was that the cabinet and high bureaucratic structure no longer had the kind of bureaucratic checks and balances that characterized the Tang dynasty government and provided some degree of containment of imperial power. Other factors were costly wars and demographic changes, the results of which, but not their causes, were known to Confucian bureaucrats. Of wars, the one against Japan fought in Korea for seven years during the 1590s did the most in sapping the strength of the Ming and diminishing its reputation in East Asia. Traditional Chinese historians, perhaps not really cognizant of the dimensions of this Seven Years' War, included it as part of the Ming's border clashes with the Mongols in the northwest and ethnic minorities in the southwest. Then too, between 1586 and 1590 (and also 1637 and 1644), severe food shortages resulted from climate changes, in turn causing and caused by flooding, drought, and other natural calamities. In the northeast, the restive Manchus were challenging the Ming commanderies and readying themselves to launch an even longer-lasting dynasty. Along the coast of China, Wako pirates made serious inroads into the hinterland, bringing dislocation
to people and economy. All these factors, with national and international import, were not perceived nationally. They were probably viewed with the same level of importance as was the presence of a small group of Jesuit missionaries in the remote southern promontory of Macau.

Of all the factors read by Ming cognoscenti as signs afflicting the times, none was as important as the personal. Confucian political philosophy had always envisioned moral person in moral government. This *politico-moralis* had been invited by the early Han rulers to serve as the reason of state as China went through state building in the centuries over Qin-Han rule during the two centuries before and after the change of era. Early Han scholars like Lu Jia 陸賈 (?–c. 170 B.C.E.), Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–168 B.C.E.), and Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c. 179–104 B.C.E.) had laid out the entire rationale of rule by scholars in government. Confucianism became a state religion in this sense. Then, this notion of moral person in moral government had received a Neo-Confucian redefinition in the Song, which elevated it even higher as ideal and fortified this political philosophy with naturalism forged from Buddhist metaphysics and Daoist metempsychosis. In all this, the emperor was not only head of empire, patriarch of the nation family, but also first scholar of the land and moral exemplar.

The reign of Wanli did little to justify this expectation.
The emperor's profligacy is well-known and fueled the Confucian tendency to fault human failings above structural or institutional reasons for historical downturns. To the already harsh Ming government noted for its cruel treatment of officials, Emperor Shenzong, Wanli's dynastic title, added deliberate negligence and personal debauchery. Clever and accomplished in the literary arts, but vengeful and unforgiving, Shenzong gave free rein to his foibles and emotions. Both the inner and outer courts came to be corrupted. His reign also gave wanton play to pervasive eunuch politics, now dominated by the notorious Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627). Earlier eunuchs in the Ming government, such as Liu Jin 劉瑾 (d. 1510), Feng Bao 馮保 (at time of Zhang Juzheng), and Wang An 王安 (d. 1621), made good contributions to the government. Wang An was in fact called a "good eunuch." But not Wei Zhongxian, the eunuch with no redeeming virtue, who used threats, secrecy, and torture as he monopolized inner and outer court politics. The eunuchs under him formed a secret service, feared and hated by the scholar-literati. In the latters' eyes, Wei, the Wanli emperor, and the large numbers of corrupt officials who fawned over such power and fame all tarnished the Confucian vision of service by the learned. An ad hominem judgment was entirely reasonable in Confucian terms. Scholar-officials remonstrated and did so heroically.
Many were punished for this remonstration, some by torture and some by death. Many also left government service. Those who did so, therefore, left with an unrequited ethical sense. They had to pour out their thoughts somehow, to someone and in some place. These forces of discontent soon galvanized into academies and scholar-literati groups. The best known was Donglin Academy in Wuxi, where Gu Xiancheng was the leader of a large coterie of disaffected Confucian scholars pressing for a return of morality to government.

The Donglin, however, was only one outlet for disenchanted scholars. With its main purpose of returning to Confucian morality and stern politics, not to protest it, it was not enough to contain other moods and sentiments of the times. People more politically oriented turned to other academies, of which the Fu She is the most celebrated. People not so politically motivated found other paths to follow. Literary groups sprang up, painting circles formed. Eccentrics found the entire lower Yangzi valley, with its abundant lakes and hills and fairly remote from the capital, conducive to free roaming in the real and the metaphorical senses.

Historians have not quite sorted out why Late Ming China, so politically weak and deleterious, was also a time of enormous cultural growth in numerous areas. In philosophy, literature, the arts, material culture, and
general cultural pursuits like book printing, publishing, and collecting, there was not only growth but vibrancy as well. Late Ming China’s cultural scene is nothing short of dazzling. Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1528), who emphasized intuitive knowledge (liangzhi 良知), had injected a note of subjective vigor into the state philosophy of Neo-Confucianism. In terms of Confucian moral quest, the past emphasis on studying the teachings of the sages (daowenxue 道問學) had with Wang become the pursuit of sagehood (zundexiang 尊德性). In other words, there began an interest in grasping internal essences rather than following external norms and forms. This stress on innate knowledge intuitively grasped brought far-flung changes to approaches to personal conduct, painting, and writing, as it inspired individuality and free flow of the spirit. While his emphasis on mind/heart unity was not entirely new with him, as the “Mind School” of Neo-Confucianism had already had Song precedents, Wang came at a time when official philosophy had resulted in much formalism of thought and literary practice. Confucian formalism, in turn, can be seen in Zhu Xi’s canonization of the Five Classics (Odes, History, Divination, Rites, Spring and Autumn Annals) and the Four Books (Analects, Mencius, Golden Mean, Great Learning) as Confucian scripture and made up the substance of subsequent imperial examinations, and in
the arrival of the eight-legged essay, which imposed strict stylistic prescriptions on essay-writing, a major activity as well of the imperial examinations. While Wang's philosophy had worthy successors like Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583) and Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541), others who carried his outlook and spirit to their own freer heights were people like Li Zhi 李贽 (1527–1602) and Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593). Li Zhi and other Late Ming free spirits carried Wang's message for subjective, individual freedom in painting, prose, and personal styles to an extent for which the sobriquet "Mad Chan" (kuangchan 狂禅) has been thought appropriate.

Wang Ji had emphasized the autonomy of innate knowing, that this was a link from the ordinary world to that of the sagehood. He influenced the thought of Nakae Tōju (1608–1648), who combined Wang's Neo-Confucianism with elements of Shintoism to form the Wang Yangming School in Japan, the Yomeigaku. Wang Gen carried Wang's philosophy and envisaged the common man as sage. Li Zhi was probably the best known of China's uncompromising individualists and nonconformists, a reputation that won him accolades as well as scorn. Li Zhi was one of the rare lights on the horizon of Chinese thought, refusing the formalistic learning of his times and even refusing to take the examination for the higher degrees. His scorn for Confucian moralism
and formalism was open and searing. In search of being a human (cheng yige ren 成一個人), he shaved his head to become a monk in 1590. In 1592 his Fenshu 焚書 (Book Fit to Be Burned) was published, for which there was a volume two. In it he poured out his nonconformist views on history, philosophy, art, and literature. In 1600 he came forth with his Cangshu 藏書 (Book That Ought to Be Hidden). Both books he wrote to be censured, and they were. In 1602, he was put in jail, condemned by a high court for a long list of crimes. He wrote a verse with his own blood in jail and slashed his throat. This event was well-known at the time, just at the time Hong Zicheng was coming out with his works.

Xu Wei, mentioned above, was another person who extended Wang Yangming’s philosophy without being identified with his school. Noted for his nonconformism, Xu came close to being a true genius of the literary arts, with a temperament toward madness not unlike that of van Gogh. He rated himself in the following order: calligrapher, poet, prose writer, and painter. Yet, it is in art history that he has become known to us. He painted in defiance of all established rules, with one painting showing a rock promontory done in ragged strokes of the brush unseen in any other landscape painting. He was also a playwright and a crafter of light literature.27

All four persons are mentioned to give some personal,
social, and intellectual context to Hong Zicheng and his Caigentan. Thus, when Hong spoke of rising above or awakening from the mundane, ordinary world (wu), he was philosophically sympathetic with Wang Ji. Hong's sympathy for the common people was in line with Wang Gen's view that sagehood was possible for the common person. For instance, he says, "A commoner who is willing to cultivate virtue and dispense kindness is an untitled noble minister. A noble who covets power and wealth is a beggar with a title." (1:93) This feeling for the commoner's virtue as pure and more reliable than that of high stations is inherited by both Wang Gen and Hong Zicheng from Mencius (c. 372–289 B.C.E.), who gave the most eloquent voice on behalf of the people in ancient times.

Then again, Li Zhi's emphasis on the "childlike mind" functions the same way as Hong's "innocence" (suxin) (1:15), and his scorching attack on "phony sages" and hypocritical officialdom found resonance in Hong Zicheng's more temperate mocking throughout the Caigentan of those who wore finery and ate sumptuous food. While Hong did not renounce Confucianism as Li Zhi did, he nevertheless shared with Li Zhi the desire to be a human (cheng yige ren). With Xu Wei, Hong might not share any singular trait, but in Xu's paintings, which of all Late Ming paintings carried the most philosophic content, one sees spontaneous brushstroke working in
perfect cadence with his mind, unimpeded by extraneous thoughts and values. Although not quite commonly accepted as Mad Chan style, his painting and light prose breathe Chan. In Xu's artistic and literary compositions, we can see what Hong meant when he referred to nature (mountains and forests, brooks and rocks, birds and flowers) as co-terminous with states of the human mind, as well as the calligraphic essay (*wenzhang*), with calligraphy understood also as an art form in Chinese culture.

The *Caigentan* partook of the style of critique of the times, a style showing little awareness of the institutional factors in the shaping of history but a great deal about the personal factors that gave flavor and nuance. It was, after all, a literary work and not a historical treatise; but then it was a literary work at the interstice of literate mortals witnessing decadent decline and desiring meaningful change. The message was, and is, personal, perfectly reasonable within the Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist universe.

**LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE CAIGENTAN**

The *Caigentan* belongs to the tradition of light literature (*xiaopin wen* 小品文), which was coming into its own in the Late Ming. Sometimes, it is called informal literature, and it is not included, for example, in the tradition
of the great vernacular novel for which the Ming is well-known. Subgenres of the *xiaopin wen* could include notes on travel, personal notes among friends, prefaces and citations on paintings, light verse for special occasions (for instance building or renovating a gazebo in a friend's garden-house), and any event that occasions jottings (*suibi* 隨筆), maxims, meditative notations. Lin Yutang, well-known in the 1920s and 1930s for his revival of the *xiaopin wen*, viewed it as writing "not... between an austere schoolmaster and his pupils, but one between friends." He also states that the "I" is indispensable to the liveliness of *xiaopin wen*.

In terms of style, the *Caigentan* is in the main a form of parallel prose (*pianwen* 騷文), balancing and contrasting ideas, words, and imageries; for instance, "Making friends requires a few measures of gallantry; cultivating true character needs a bit of innocence." (I:15) However, Hong has varied from a strict adherence to this form, thus avoiding monotony and repetitive cadence over 360 nuggets of light prose. Parallelism pervades old Chinese literature and has enjoyed voluminous scholarly rhapsodizing for its revelation of Chinese thought and culture. Recently, another literary feature, that of the chiasmus, a contrapuntal placement of related ideas in phrases and sentences, revealing a correlative logic (*yin-yang*, old-young, tall-short, high-low, good-bad, for instance, all
indicating place and occasion), is receiving attention.\textsuperscript{32} The \textit{Caigentan} has ample chiastic elements. For example: "A good deed with no apparent benefit is like the melon in the grass, growing quietly unseen. A bad deed with no apparent injury is like the spring snow in the front yard, thawing away unnoticed." (I:164)

Parallelism and chiasmus are related devices in the history and corpus of the Chinese language and literature. Thus parallelism, for example, is AB, AB relationship; chiasmus is AB, BA relationship. As Old Chinese lacks morphology and inflection, its syntactical matters of logic, rhetoric, and the like depend on positioning and indication of time, rather than on notions of space and time as understood in the West. Sentence order, therefore, is of paramount importance in argumentation and presentation of ideas. With that in mind, one can say that traditional Chinese worldview and aesthetics find rich and beautiful expression in these parallelisms and chiastic constructions. The \textit{Caigentan} belongs in this linguistic and literary weave of words and images, thought and culture. In addition, the two other East Asian literary traditions, Japanese and Korean, are also rich in this tradition of parallel and chiasmic prose, and this fact may explain, in part, the popularity of the \textit{Caigentan} in those two cultures as well.

Other genres of writing to which the \textit{Caigentan} bears
a close resemblance are morality books (*shanshu* 善書), works on admonition (*quanshi* 劝世), various aphorisms (*geyan* 格言), and sayings (*yulu* 語錄). The ancestral inspiration of this type of work is the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (*Treatise of Moral Retribution by the Most Exalted Being*) of the Song dynasty. By the Late Ming, there were numerous editions of this and similar works. They all evince a Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist approach to how good deeds were recompensed and bad deeds punished. Whether read by the general public or the sophisticated, such works tell of the times of cultural merging in China: Confucian ethical scholasticism merging with Daoist and Buddhist messages of suffering, deliverance, and hopefulness on the popular level.

A contemporary work similar to the *Caigentan* is the *Shenyinyu* 唱吟語 (*Murmurings of the Infirm*) by Lu Kun 呂坤 (1536–1618). Both works are *xiaopin*, seemingly sharing the genre of books of aphorisms and maxims. Yet the *Shenyinyu* deserves more the designation of aphorism and maxim in that it is more clearly didactic in imparting Confucian moral scruples. A much larger work, the *Shenyinyu* is clear in its categories of advice: On Rites, Music, Ethics, Self-cultivation, Sagehood, Dao of Government, and so forth, in seventeen volumes. The tone of the aphorisms is earnest and sincere, as to be expected from a Confucianist concerned with the moral degradation of the times. Even
so, the *Shenyinyu* partook of the Late Ming tendency to consider things in terms of human sentiments (*renqing*) or reasonability. Its moral preachments always had to pass the test of human sentiments to be worthy of adoption. In this sense the work is a typical Late Ming work combining other philosophical outlooks while keeping Confucianism at the core.

The *Caigentan*, on the other hand, is not strictly a book of aphorisms. But it is easily likened not only to the *Shenyinyu* but also to the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* and the *Maxims* of La Rochefoucauld of other traditions.¹ In Chinese usage, it belongs to the *qingyan* 清言 (pristine talk). Much smaller in scope than the *Shenyinyu*, the *Caigentan* exudes a different spirit. There is no moral gravitas in the work, which breathes with a sense of personal alleviation from the mundane tradition. Yet, both works belong to the Late Ming conjoining of diverse strains of philosophy, with the elements of the conjoining speaking their individual parts in individual dosages. This brief comparison of these two works is to show the prevalence as well as the uniqueness of Late Ming informal literature. Let us now turn to the *Caigentan* itself.
VOCABULARY AND AUDIENCE
OF THE CAIGENTAN

chen, hongchen 塵, 紅塵  literally, dust, or red dust, used by Buddhists to signify the phenomenal world of desires and lust. The ideal would be to be "in" the dust and not be stained by the dust (shenru hongchen buranchen 深入紅塵不染塵) (II:109).

chushi rushi 出世入世  literally, exiting the world and entering the world, or out-of-world and in-world, but not necessarily exclusive of each other. A Buddhist adept would be a chushiren, but then he could be a rushi monk. The words could also mean otherworldly and thisworldly. One can be "otherworldly" in this world, but seldom "thisworldly" in the other world (II:105, 111, 116, 117).

dan 淡 light, pale, plain, and sparse, especially in taste. Hong Zicheng values this quality of having no spice added. The cornerstone of his minimalism, it denotes detachment (II:22).

danbo 澹泊 the unaffected, simple, forthright, and unadorned. A quality without artfulness, much prized by Hong if not in the extreme (I:11).

dao 道 the way or the path. Confucians look on it as the way of life, with nature's regularities affirming social and familial order. Daoists look on it as the way to
enlightenment, a point at which psychic nature and physical nature are one and undifferentiated.

daoren 道人 a person who has attained dao. Daoist adept or priest. Some recluses call themselves daoren.
daren 達人 a person who has attained moral adequacy, especially with self-awareness. Sometimes the term is used to describe arrival at wealth and status, but not by Hong (II:104).
de 德 virtue, moral integrity, kindness (I:2, 5).
dianran 點染 tainted, especially by the world’s vices (II:124).
ergen 耳根 the ear, as one of six roots (gen) in Buddhist reckoning of basic human proclivities. Others are the eye, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind. Desire rises from them singly and collectively (I:77, II:121).
gongde 功德 beneficence, merit. While Confucians speak of virtue and integrity, Buddhists speak of de as virtue that comes from doing good deeds. Personal merits increase with such deeds. In this sense, it is not entirely the same as the Confucian sense of self-cultivation of virtue (I:142).
guanwu 觀物 perceiving things, not with the eyes, but with the mind (I:217).
guanxin 觀心 a Buddhist term for introspection, literally the internal gazing upon the mind. It implies cultivation of self-awareness (II:103).
bui 悔  repentance, remorse, vis-à-vis jin (l:18).
jin 睢  arrogance, boastfulness, vis-à-vis bui (l:18).
jing 境  a favorite Buddhist term to indicate realm, land, vista, aspect, phase.
jing 淨  cleanliness, purity, pristine quality, as for instance the "Pureland" in Buddhism.
jing 靜  quietude, composure, restfulness, state of being unfettered.
jixie 機械  method, system, instrument. It also connotes calculation and calculating ways (l:2, 146).
jixin 機心  a calculating mind versus one that is adequate within its own contented void; used by Buddhists and Daoists to denote the ways of the phenomenal world (l:201).
junzi 君子  here translated as the noble person, one who is morally sovereign (indicated by the word jun), often set off against the petty person (l:36, ll:131). It also means the authentic person.
kong 空  emptiness or void. Buddhists and Daoists share in this concept of truth being seamless. The Daoists, however, are fond of using the term xu, meaning by it a literal no-thing-ness, from which thing-ness comes. Both usages connote an ineffable ultimacy.
kou'er 口耳  literally, the mouth and the ear, a Confucian usage indicating superficiality or trivial habits of things that enter the ear just as quickly as they exit from the mouth (ll:125).
**ku** 鬼  literally, the state of being withered, dried up, or desiccated. Used by Buddhists and Daoists to exemplify the mind stripped of its desires and senses of glory. It is viewed as a valuable state, but not in excess (1:29).

**kuhai** 苦海  sea of bitterness, Buddhist indication of suffering, the first truism of Buddhist teachings (II:37, 97).

**li** 理  principle, reason, sanity. In Neo-Confucianism, it is the organizing principle of the universe, dualistically opposed to *qi*, material manifestation. Hong uses it in both this sense and in the sense of reason, as opposed to *yu*, desire.

**nong** 濃  literally, thick or thickened, coagulation, elaborate, ornate. It connotes a natural state unnecessarily or gaudily presented. Also, a fixated interest in something, as versus detachment.

**pulu** 樸鲁  a good naive quality as used against conceit and artfulness (1:2).

**qi** 氣  the primal force or matter-energy with varying Confucian, Daoist, or natural/unnatural, pure/impure, free-flowing/clogged manifestations. In Neo-Confucian reckoning, it is the phenomenal appearance of the noumenal *li*, principle.

**shenjing** 聖境  sagehood, pristine realm, the same as *zhenjing*. 真境.
suwei 素位 a Confucian value of staying within one's own place in life, often used opposite climbing and boastfulness. Contentment (II:60).

suxin 素心 innocence, humility, often juxtaposed to vying, ambitious thrusting (I:15).

wankong 空 a specious emptiness which Buddhists have noticed among some claimants of spiritual arrival (II:125).

wen 文 patterns or markings. It is at the center of the Chinese view of civilization and culture. From the earliest times, the notion of patterns developed richly and quickly in meanings all associated with the way nature manifests itself (patterns of trees, clouds, water ripples, bird feathers, and sounds) and how to render them for cognitive understanding. Chinese expressions of art and language and literature came from this. The Chinese expression for civilization is wenming or "manifest pattern," and for culture wenhua or "transforming pattern." Liu Xie 劉勰 (465–522), in his Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Sculpting of Dragons), gave eloquent disquisition on the links of nature's patterns and literature. So much so, persons of learning in the East Asian tradition all call themselves wenren, of whom Hong Zicheng was a Late Ming example (II:55).
wenzhang 文章 in the Caigentan, it is both essay and nature's composition in the sense discussed above (II:64).

wu 物 literally, material things, but also meaning the phenomenal world, the world as it appears.

wu 無 void, emptiness, nothingness. Daoism's main notion of ultimate realness, same as kong 空.

xiaoren 小人 the petty person, one who is not certain of the self, tends to blame or covet others, and is always fretful. The opposite of the junzi, who is magnanimous and composed (I:36).

xin 心 The word in all three East Asian languages means both mind and heart, the seat of psychic energy. Its companion word in Buddhist usage, for instance, is yu (desire). In Daoist usage, its ultimate state is wuxin (non-mind). For Daoists, it is "minding" that has given us the phenomenal world, therefore distorting as we merely look at it. To go beyond this distorting world (the world of thing-ness), one needs to achieve "non-mind." In modern psychological language, one needs to rid oneself of the ego.

xing 性 nature, human nature. Used in relationship to xin, Confucians talk about one's individual "mind" in the particular and "human nature" in the universal. Neo-Confucians since the Song have developed a whole metaphysic of the noumena (li) and phenomena (qi) to explain the naturalistic universe. They also applied
this metaphysical reasoning to explaining human ethics just as one correlates the phenomenal \( xin \) (mind) to the noumenal \( xing \) (nature). Thus did Confucianism enter into the triadic vocabulary with Daoism and Buddhism.

xuanji 玄機 mysterious plan, metaphysical vortex (II:47).

yu 欲 desire, lust, want, sentimentality; all are reasons for suffering in fundamental Buddhist teachings.

zaowu 造物 the world as made.

zhenjing 真境 true realm, paradise, nirvana, utopia.

zhenkong 真空 true or authentic void.

zhenxin 真心 true mind, non-mind, non-intentional, true self, not the egotistical self, the authentic mind.

This vocabulary, with its frequent references to the arrived person, the noble person, presumes a literate, fairly sophisticated, and more than successful audience, numbering about a million during his time.\(^{35}\) His readers were set off against the common people in that their education demanded of them a moral compunction to amend their ways and improve themselves. He says, “Those who study without appreciating sagely wisdom are mere scribes. Those who serve in office and have no affection for the people are thieves in courtly garb. Those who teach and do not act upon their teachings are merely mouthing Chan. Those who build careers without thinking
of planting seeds of virtue are but flowery flourishes." (1:56) Lest Hong's writing for the literate members of his social level be taken as his being bound to that level's class values, we read with relief and humor his treatment of "noble person" and "petty or ordinary person." He says, "Noble persons feigning goodness are no different from petty persons openly doing evil. Noble persons veering off the moral path are not as good as petty persons reforming themselves." (1:95)

That Hong Zicheng was aware of the political and social decadence of his time could also be seen in an instance where he noted lascivious monks and nuns behind monastery walls (II: 130). The Caigentan also possesses a sense of history, reminiscent of the two types of historical poems that are found in major cultural traditions: historical poems in praise of past deeds (yonggu shi 詠古詩) and historical poems lamenting the past (huai gu shi 懷古詩). Hong's cadence is found in II: 69: "The wolf slumbers amid ruins and the rabbit dashes about on abandoned terraces, all once places of song and dance. The dew-chilled yellow flowers and the smoke-shrouded wasteland are all scenes of former battlegrounds. What normalcy is there to rise or decline? What security is there to the strong or the weak? Such thoughts turn the heart to ashes!" Past glory contrasted with the ruins of the present teaches the lesson of the meaning of historical deeds.
Similar sentiments are to be seen in I:148, II:100, and II:104.

The historical metaphor for Hong was a way to recommend an objective eye (literally, cool innards, lengchang 冷腸), to be detached, in other words. He had colorful ways of imparting this view: “Actors powder and rouge themselves, using the tip of the eyebrow pencil to produce beauty or ugliness. But when the show is over, what is left of beauty or ugliness? Chess players vie against each other, pushing their chess pieces to decide on victory or defeat. But when the game is over, who is the victor or the vanquished?” (II:100) Further: “Those who pick up their coats to depart at the height of festivity are admired as adepts who can halt at the precipice. Those who pursue their night journey after their candle has burned out are ridiculed as ordinary persons awash in the bitter sea.” (II:104) The audience for the Caigentan was certainly expected to do something, at least about themselves, in the downward spiral of Ming dynastic fortunes.

SELF AND SOCIETY IN THE CAIGENTAN

The Caigentan, although a Late Ming product, addresses the human condition with uncanny aptness for times and places beyond Ming China. The Late Ming, as indicated above, had produced many forms of external and
self-assessment, from the direct, caustic criticisms of Li Zhi to the dazzling eccentricity of Xu Wei, from the philosophical extensions of Wang Ji and Wang Gen to the plethora of xiaopin and morality books. Hong's social critique, however, was not a caustic or aggressive attack; rather, it took the form of admonition for self-awareness and self-transformation. The richness of his views is in the way he admonished the world to come into a dimension of the internal world for handling the external world. The notions of chushi and rushi (out-of-world and in-world) provide the warp and woof of Hong's Caigentan. Let us pursue a few aspects.

Although Hong voiced a triadic union of Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist persuasions, his Confucianism was not world-cleaving. In fact, we find little mention of the cardinal Confucian values of ren, yi, li, zhi, and xin (仁, 義, 禮, 智, 信, interpersonal benevolence, rightful moral impulse, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness) in their senses as positive values. Even when mentioned, such values were thought to be impediments to realization of the self. Hong states, "When one drops the desire to gain fame and fortune, one rises above the vulgar; when one no longer sets one's mind on morality and righteousness, one enters sagehood." (1:33) Also, his critique of wealth and fame was not made on moral grounds, but rather from the way fame and fortune were attained. He says, "A scholar
should gather up spirit and energy in single-mindedness. If your quest for virtue is for reasons of fame and fortune, you will never amount to anything. If in scholarly endeavors you indulge in fashionable verse and stylistic flourishes, you cannot attain depth and stability of mind."
(1:44) He says further, "Wealth and honor, when attained ethically, are like flowers in the mountains, flourishing and luxuriating naturally; when attained artificially, they are like flowers in beds, having a time to flourish and a time to decay; when attained forcibly, they are like cut flowers in vases, rootless and certain to wither." (1:59)
This naturalistic approach to morality explains why he did not mention the familiar Confucian values in a positive vein. Nor was there any mention of filial piety and notions of patriarchy. But Confucian notions of self-cultivation (xiushen) are emphasized for the self in society. But this self is conceived in Buddhist and Daoist terms.

Personal survival not only in troubled times but also in times of success seems to be Hong's concern, with survival not in the sense of taking advantage of gaining safe haven for oneself at the expense of others, but in the sense of attaining personal freedom from attachment to false values.

The philosophical structure discernible in Hong's Caigentan is dualistic; yet this dualism is transcended by Hong's notion of the self and self-attainment. Throughout
the book, there is an obvious juxtaposition of *li* (reason or principle) and *yu* (desire, sentimentality),\(^{36}\) *wo* (self) and *wu* (thing, outer world). The whole of *Caigentan* is Hong’s effort to bridge this dualism, to lead the self out of this world (*chushi*) while being in this world (*rusbi*). This is the juncture where a transition from an in-world partially Confucian view of self and society shades off into a Chan and Dao emphasis on the non-self in self and society, roughly the passage of Book I to Book II of the *Caigentan*. Book I may be read for its numerous and humorous exhortations of good behavior for those in office, already showing Hong’s disenchantment with overt Confucian society and with wealth and power. For this, read especially items II:132, II:140 (Confucian officials as rats), I:177, 185, 186, 213, and 214. In Book I also, Hong shows his keen observation of human nature and how it cowers or stiffens in front of wealth and power. For this, see I:23, 30, 36, 116, 151, 156, 165, 220, 221, and 223. Also, in this section, he still speaks of the Confucian type of relations, as in I:96 and 133, in terms of how to conduct oneself regarding them. He speaks also of forging character in terms of assiduous application and determination, as in I:53, 69, 112, and 127. Book I may be viewed as the *rusbi* (in-world) Hong Zicheng, and Book II as the *chushi* (out-of-world) Hong Zicheng. The two are inexorably bound up as Hong Zicheng’s intellectual and
temperamental growth, not in terms of jettisoning one style for the other, but in the sense of fuller awareness of personal potentialities and tastes.

Book II finds Hong speaking more like a Chan Buddhist and Daoist, both excelling in the language or non-language of getting rid of desires, fully aware that desire's lodgment is the egotistical self. The two books, however, are not mutually exclusive. There is, for instance, a very prominent mention of the Buddhist mind and kindness in 1:45. One way of viewing the two books of the work with Hong's evolution is to find the beginnings of Buddhist-Daoist elements in Book I and weaker elements of Confucianism in Book II. Still another way of looking at the two-part volume is to realize the many instances of admonition in the first, admonition not to be mired in worldly enticements, admonition against official behavior and misbehavior, and admonition against inadequate behavior. The language of "thou shall not," in Chinese wu 勿, occurs more in the first than in the second; it also is accompanied by witty and thought-provoking suggestions for remedying social ills. The second part is finished with this mode of social critique and ridicule. It settles on the task of attending to spiritual reorientation of the self. The wit and wisdom of the first part are still there, except that they are used on the self as ego, an area where Chan and Daoism are rich in perceptive comment. In the
second part, the problem of divestment and detachment has become simply a matter of the mind (chantuo zizai zixin). (II:89)

Hong Zicheng came to view the mundane world as a Buddhist, using such metaphors for it as red dust and sea of bitterness. In this world, fame and fortune, rank and emolument tended to be tainted values. For instance: “With just one step into the worldly dust, though external matters might not ensnare you, you will surely belong to the depraved.” (II:107) Or, a rhetorically posed question: “Edible foods from the mountains are not irrigated by the world, neither are wild fowls fed by the world. Yet they are excellent in flavor. Is there anyone who is tainted by the world who can escape from carrying its aroma?” (II:124) Also: “Those who mind the world lightly are also lightly stained by it; those who enter deeply into worldly affairs are mired in its calculating ways. Thus noble persons would rather be naive than clever, relaxed rather than bent upon trifles.” (I:2) Further: “One who does not draw near to power, wealth, and luxury is pure” (I:4), and “Thresholds to power and private gain must not be crossed; once crossed, the whole life is stained.” (I:111)

How then to cope with this world? Hong had many answers. Among them: “Where the road narrows, step aside to let others pass; when enjoying tasty food, leave
three measures [out of ten] for others to taste. This is the most felicitous way to pass through the world.” (I:13) Another: “In everything you do, practice a little moderation. In this way, heaven and earth cannot envy you and demons cannot harm you. Seeking total success in every endeavor and fullness in every honor may not only cause internal discord but will surely lead to external troubles.” (I:20) Note the awareness of the sovereignty of the self in these statements, a sense of sovereignty without ego and based in the philosophy of yielding. He says further, “It is wise to yield a step going through life, for yielding a step is really fundamental to improvement. Toward others, a measure of broad-mindedness really brings fortune, for benefiting others is fundamental to benefiting oneself.” (I:17)

The uninitiated might mistake this attitude of yielding to be a form of negative fatalism. Certainly it stands in contrast to the positive world-affirming Confucian attitude and world-cleaving Confucian action. Hong’s own words may compound this view: “It is a lot more interesting to conceal one’s fame than to boast about it. How can being vexed over the affairs of the world be compared to the leisure that comes from not being burdened by affairs?” (II:31) Again: “Every matter begets a detriment. Thus people think that one less thing is often a blessing.” (II:129) Lest this be the charge against Hong, one should
be aware of how arduous he thought the process was to self-awareness and deliverance. He says in 1:127: "Adversity and hardship are the furnace and anvil for forging heroes. Those who can take the trials enjoy benefits to their mind and body; those who cannot stand the forging lose in both mind and body." Again: "In adverse situations, even though around you are needles and medicines that will help you through the trials, you are unaware of them. In favorable circumstances, all around you are swords and halberds which will whittle away your flesh and bones, you do not know about them." (1:99) There is also Yu Kongjian's testament to Hong Zicheng's trials and tribulations in arriving at the thoughts in Caigentan, when he says, "He has named these sayings 'Roots of Vegetables,' meaning that they are distilled from the tribulations of simple and humble circumstances. There is the meaning of watering and growing as well. One can imagine his having tumbled and fallen in the wind and waves, his having scaled dangerous cliffs and obstacles" (Yu's preface). Hong says further: "Heaven endows me with little fortune, yet I greet it by increasing my virtue. Heaven burdens me with toil, yet I calm my mind to supplement it. Heaven blocks me from smooth encounters in life, yet I persevere in the Dao to clear the obstacles. What else can heaven have in store for me?" (1:90)

To do what Hong says above, one will have to go
through taxing introspection. What Hong is saying in effect is that this search for internal awareness is the means to intellectual and personal freedom. His many other statements become understandable when one realizes what sort of life situations there are and how best to handle them. "Nurturing virtue quietly" (1:19), "the talents of a noble person should be like hidden treasures, not easily noticed" (1:3); "In public affairs, it is not necessary to always claim credit; not committing any error is your credit. From others one need not always expect recompense; not causing resentment is your recompense" (1:28); "Planning for a merit not yet deserved is not as good as preserving an enterprise already achieved" (1:80), are all offered by Hong as attitudes to have in coping with the world.

Hong Zicheng's getting out of the world while in the world (chushi, rushi) is the message of "self and society" in the Caigentan. Written in an elegant language, terse and cursive in appropriate places, with occasional excursion into mundane patois, the work is not without an aesthetic dimension. In Hong's choice of metaphors for the journey of personal quest for freedom and meaning in life, one detects some artistic touches of a person who appreciated the art of life even though he had, as his friend Yu Kongjian says above, "tumbled and fallen in the wind and waves, his having scaled dangerous cliffs and obstacles."
Here, Hong Zicheng might just have been a minimalist 400 years ago: "The humble abode with its cleanly swept floors and the poor girl with her neatly combed hair present, if not luxuriant appearances, at least sensible elegance. So then, you honorable people, when encountering adversity, do you just then sink into self-pity and cease all efforts?" (I:84) Again: "In tea drinking, it is not the blend that is important but that the pot must not be allowed to be dry. In drinking wine, it is not the strength of the wine that matters but that the wine cup must not be empty. The unornamented lute is always tuned even without strings, and the flute is perfectly suitable even without tunes. It may be impossible to surpass Emperor Xi, it is certainly possible to reach the level of Ji and Ruan."

(II:134) Also: "Not minding being favored or dishonored, one watches the courtyard flowers bloom and fall. Not caring whether to leave or to stay, one follows the clouds on the far horizon as they roll and unfurl." (II:70) He challenges the imagination when he says, "One can read books with written words but cannot understand books without writing. One can play the stringed lute but cannot play a lute without strings. Our use of things depends on concrete forms and not on the spirit of things. How then can we really enjoy the flavor of books and lutes?" (II:8) Can such sentiments come from someone with limited artistic impulses?

This exquisite recommendation is found in II:54: "As
one studies the Book of Changes by the window in the morning, one grinds the ink-stick with the dewdrops from the pine trees. While discourse on the classics by the table at noon, one hears the jade chimes announce the breeze in the bamboos." Although one may wonder whether such suggestions would find resonance with everyone in society, the aesthetics in the Caigentan tell us that Hong Zicheng was a full-fledged wenren of the Late Ming, skilled in letters, responsive to his surroundings, and imbued with artistic impulses.

For Hong Zicheng, the "promised land" of such efforts at personal discovery was called the authentic realm or sagehood (zhenjing, shengjing). But sagehood here is no longer that of the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi or even Wang Yangming, but that of the Buddhist or even Daoist notion of a state of pristine genuineness: "One need not have achieved great undertakings to make a name for oneself, merely avoiding the vulgar would do it. One need not study highly or broadly to improve oneself on the way to sagehood, merely divesting oneself of worldly encumbrance would do it." (1:14) One does not need a fixed moral goal to achieve this "real realm"; all one has to do is to heed this advice: "An essay wrought to perfection is not so remarkable as it is simply just right. Human character brought to perfection is not so unusual as it is simply innate." (1:102) It is simply cultivating innocence (suxin). (1:15)
Such then is the minimalism we detect in Hong Zicheng. Like Daoists and Chan Buddhists, there is inherent difficulty in using words to convey truths that are ineffable and unexplainable by reason. To those accustomed to concrete examples, the task is even more difficult. Yet, the use of metaphors and the appeal to artistic visions and impulses should be elucidating to people with imagination. Truth is to be mused at, not cognitively stated. The latter would be part of the mundane world, anyway. Then, too, Hong's work is not without its appreciation of the attainable and the unattainable. Self and society turn on this wryness. Hong makes an honest admission: "The sun is setting and the evening clouds are more colorful than ever. The year is about to end and the oranges and tangerines are all the more fragrant. Thus noble persons in their old age should all the more enliven their spirits a hundredfold." (1:199) Clearly he himself had not yet attained the "real realm." He says further: "Whether one remains in the world or transcends it, following desires is a source of suffering and getting rid of desires is also a source of suffering. Listen to us and practice self-cultivation." (II:79) Self-deliverance through self-discovery is indeed a long and continuous effort.

The Caigentan, then, is more than just a book of aphorisms or a series of meditative observations. In form, it may appear so, but in substance, its literary form tells the
story of a lettered person’s transcendence of the legacy of Neo-Confucian dualistic philosophy in hopes of self-discovery and deliverance in other vocabularies that reflect and inform human existence. Hong Zicheng’s passage through the last decades of the Ming dynasty may have been quiet, compared to others, but his work does the weighty task of giving us a flavor of an important time and place of Chinese history. Not all works can accomplish this, no matter the written form. Ray Huang’s 1587, A Year of No Significance does much by way of a scholarly treatise. In its simplicity and minimalism of outlook and its wit and subtlety of style, Hong’s work is also able to do just that in drastically different format. In this sense, the CaiQentan also shows that the xiaopin, so-called light or informal literature, has an appeal and significance waiting for ever greater appreciation. Meanwhile, the end result is just as the work itself values most: true beauty is simplicity and true greatness is the ordinary.

Another significance of the CaiQentan is its successful combination of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, so much so that this fusion has come to describe what being Chinese meant. Chinese life outlook no longer could be claimed by any of the three in separation from the others. Terms of reference for the person in society, for the person’s discourse with the outer world of nature and society, and for the person’s internal discourse with
spirit and psyche come from all three strains. The merging of philosophic trends, the meshing of art and thought, and the forging of personality in terms of self and society are all manifest in the Caigentan.

The Caigentan is noteworthy for its timelessness. Ostentation, ornamentation, arrogance, avarice, pretense, hypocrisy, conceit, delusion, deceit, exaggeration, egotism, jealousy, and false fronts were replete in the world of Hong Zicheng. The Caigentan, then, addresses perennial questions of self and society. How, indeed, does one conduct oneself in and out of society? Perhaps by savoring the roots of vegetables.

NOTES TO THE AFTERWORD

1 Zhuzi quanshu (Complete Works of Zhu Xi), 4 (Studies), p. 10 in Siku quanshu (The Four Complete Libraries), Wenyuan digital edition, case #077. Another often-quoted saying is by Wang Xinmin of the same period: “If one chews on the roots of vegetables, one is able to accomplish all things.” For instance, noted in Xinyi Caigentan (New Annotated Caigentan), Wu Jiaju, annot. (Taipei: San Min Shuju, 1998), p. 1.

2 Mao praised the Caigentan along with the Rongzhai suibi. See a tandem publication of the two works honoring Mao by Nanjing University Press, 1994, edited by Wang Tongshu. The Rongzhai suibi 容齋隨筆 (Jottings of Rongzhai) was a Song work dated 1180 by Hong Man. The two works are in the suibi (jottings) tradition of learned men commenting on history, government, episodes large and small. They are prized for the wisdom and lore they convey.


5 According to Imai Usaburō 今井宇三郎 as noted by Vos, Dictionary of Ming Biography, vol. 1, pp. 678—679. The translators have not seen this version. But if the assertion is true and it was already edited in 1591, that would place the Caigentan's appearance shortly before that date.

6 Noted by Wu Jianqu, in Xinyi Caigentan, cited, p. 7 of preface.

7 Fengwu changyi fang yanliang: Caigentan qianji houji jianghua 風物長宜放眼量: 菜根譚前後集講話 (Viewing All Things Equably: Talks on the Caigentan sections one and two) (Taipei: Yuanming chubanshe, 1993).

8 The text has a printing date of 1825 and was published by Sōzandō of Edo (Tokyo).


13 For instance, Shaku Sōen’s 釋宗演 Saikontan Kōwa莱根譚講話 (Tokyo: Kyobunsha shōdo, 1926) went through eleven reprints in just two years.

14 See note 7. An earlier version of this work was issued in 1958.

15 See Vos, note 5.


17 Priest Sheng Yin mentioned this quizzical impression in his 1993 work, cited, p. 32.


20 The Jintanxinwen wang 金壇新聞網 (Jintan News Net), dated July 16, 2004, in an article discussing Yu as a Donglin member from Jintan, states that he went home to stay for twenty years. See reference to 1591 in note 5.


23 See at least the following two books by Timothy Brook: Praying for Power, cited; and The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See also Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China, Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).


26 For Li Zhi and selection of his writings, see de Bary, *Sources*, cited, pp. 865–874.

27 See inclusion of Xu Wei as exemplar of *xiaopin* literature in Yang Ye, *Vignettes from the Late Ming: A Hsiao-p’iin Anthology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), pp. 18–21.


29 For the influence of Chan on esthetics in the Late Ming, see Mao Wenfang 毛文芳, 晚明閒賞美學 (Late Ming Leisurely Esthetics) (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng shuju, 2000).

30 See above-named work by Yang Ye for finely selected writers as well as discussion of this genre. See also Stephen Owen, ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), esp. pp. 807–833 for Late Ming informal prose.


32 See forthcoming work by David McCraw, *Criss-cross: Chiasmus in Old Chinese Literature*.

33 See tandem publication, Lu Kun/Hong Yingming 呂坤/洪瑩明, *Shenyin yu. Caigentan* 叹吟語. 傳根譯 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2000). For a good treatment of the reorientation of Lu Kun and other scholars in Late Ming, see Joanna F. Handlin, *Action in Late Ming Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
34 See Vos, cited.
35 Estimated by Ray Huang, cited, noted by Lo, cited, p. 137.
36 This dualism is strong in Neo-Confucians as early as the Song. The Complete Works of Zhu Xi, cited, especially Volume Four (Studies), is clear on this dualism, as well as on wealth and poverty, superior and inferior person, and others in the course of self-cultivation. At points, even Hong’s language is in the cadence of Zhu Xi’s Volume Four.
37 Even the article by Lo Yuet Keung, cited, for all its scholarship and generally sympathetic treatment of Hong and his work, makes this charge of negative passivism. See p. 142.

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## PINYIN TO WADE-GILES GLOSSARY

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yin-yang

yitiao bianfa

yonggu shi

yu

Yu Kongjian

yulu

zaowu

Zhang Juzheng

Zhao Buzhi

zhenjing

zhenkong

zhenxin

zhi

Zhu Xi

Zhuuziquanshu

zundexing

yin-yang

i-t'iao pien-fa

yung-ku shih

yü

Yu K'ung-chien

yü-lu

tsao-wu

Chang Chü-cheng

Chao Pu-chih

chen-ching

chen-k'ung

chen-hsin

chih

Chu Hsi

Chu-tzu Ch'üan-shu

tsun-te-hsing
WITHDRAWN
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of discovering the good, the true, and the beautiful. Epigrammatic in style, this pocket-sized discourse is a classic book of timeless wisdom.

Translated by Robert Aitken Roshi, America's senior Zen teacher, and Daniel W. Y. Kwok, his old friend, author, and celebrated professor of history, this complete version will immediately become the standard for generations of English readers to come.

ROBERT AITKEN is the author of nine books, including Taking the Path of Zen, Zen Master Raven, and The Morning Star. Aitken Roshi has been a leader in establishing Zen Buddhism in the West and was a founding member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. He lives in Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

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If your heart is bright, then even in a dark chamber there is blue sky. If your thoughts are gloomy, then even in broad daylight cruel demons appear.

The mouth is the portal of the mind. If not carefully guarded, it leaks true intents and motives. Feelings are the feet of the mind. If not carefully watched, they will take you onto all kinds of wayward paths.

One is fresh and at ease living in the mountains; everything touched occasions a pleasant thought; viewing a single cloud and a wild crane can bring transcendence to mind; fording a pebbled brook can make one think of becoming pure; touching a gnarled juniper or the winter plum tree can firm up one's resolve; keeping the company of gulls and deer can clear the mind of calculated scheming. With just one step into the worldly dust, though external matters might not ensnare you, you will surely belong to the depraved.