

The Taizhou Movement

Being Mindful in Sixteenth Century China

Johanna Lidén

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of Religion at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Saturday 8 December 2018 at 10.00 in hörsal 7, Universitetsvägen 10 D.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to define and analyze the religious ideas, praxis and organizations of the Taizhou movement using the earliest sources from the Ming dynasty. The Taizhou movement originated with a salt merchant named Wang Gen (1493–1541), who became a disciple of the well-known Neo-Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming (1472–1529). Wang Gen's thoughts were similar to his, but his ideas about protecting and respecting the self were new. These ideas and the pursuit of making one's mind calm inspired his followers who, like Wang Gen, tried to put them into practice. The thesis contextualizes Wang Gen and some of his followers who were active in the sixteenth century such as Yan Jun, Luo Rufang and He Xinyin. It contains texts which have not been translated into English before.

Contrary to previous research, the thesis proposes that the Taizhou practitioners did not form a "school" in the strict sense of the word but became a "movement". The reason was that their ideas corresponded to the anxieties and concerns of people from all levels of society and that they engaged in social and religious activities on the local level. Their ideas and praxis are heterogeneous, a result of the free discussions that were held in private academies. The religious praxis of the Taizhou movement included singing, reciting, individual and communal meditation, discussions and ethical commitments. Another claim of the thesis is that the Taizhou practitioners did not regard meditation in isolation as contradictory to social activism but as two complementary pursuits. Furthermore, the thesis argues that Huang Zongxi's criticism of Wang Gen for adding Chan Buddhism to the philosophy of Wang Yangming was reasonable, contrary to what some researchers claim. The problem with his criticism is that it pertains also to Wang Yangming himself.

The demarcation lines between Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism as well as those between "schools" within each tradition were porous, which is exemplified by the Taizhou practitioners. Sometimes they manifest Buddhist and Daoist influences, but their framework is Confucian. In general, they were not concerned with which tradition they belonged to but with transforming the individual and society. The Taizhou practitioners did not worship any Buddhist or Daoist deities, but they were engaged in reaching a specific state of mind and rendering the secular world sacred. Awakened understanding should be experienced personally. The Taizhou practitioners can be regarded as 'religious' using definitions of religion which affirm such experiential aspects, but their movement cannot be defined as a religion if the definition requires an institution. Officials and literati scholars criticized the Taizhou practitioners and some of them were persecuted. Luo Rufang experienced administrative persecution; Yan Jun was imprisoned for a period; He Xinyin was killed in prison in 1579, the same year as the Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng prohibited free discussions in the private academies. The thesis claims that it was their ideas and actions perceived as dangerous to men of power which resulted in their persecution. The fact of belonging to a certain social segment had less importance.

Keywords: *Taizhou movement, Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Wang Gen, religious ideas, religious praxis, self-respect, self-protection, calming the mind, Wang Yangming, Buddhism, Yan Jun, Daoism, He Xinyin, Luo Rufang, religious persecution.*

Stockholm 2018

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-161354>

ISBN 978-91-7797-502-1
ISBN 978-91-7797-503-8

Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and
Gender Studies



Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm

THE TAIZHOU MOVEMENT

Johanna Lidén



The Taizhou Movement

Being Mindful in Sixteenth Century China

Johanna Lidén

©Johanna Lidén, Stockholm University 2018

ISBN print 978-91-7797-502-1

ISBN PDF 978-91-7797-503-8

Printed in Sweden by Universitetservice US-AB, Stockholm 2018

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	vii
Abbreviations.....	x
List of Illustrations.....	xi
List of Ming emperors and their reigns.....	12
Provinces of China.....	13
Map of Ming China.....	14
1. Introduction.....	15
Aims, research questions and demarcations.....	18
Outline of chapters.....	21
Key terms.....	22
Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism.....	24
School and lineage.....	31
Network, current and movement.....	34
Tradition and mysticism.....	36
2. Method, sources and previous research.....	41
Method.....	41
Works by Wang Yangming, Wang Gen and other Taizhou practitioners.....	42
Sources.....	44
The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning.....	45
Local Gazetteers.....	46
Previous research.....	47
3. Ming society and its religious milieu.....	53
The Jiajing and the Wanli reigns.....	54
The lower Yangzi area.....	57
Salt production and trade.....	59
Ideological control through schooling and examinations.....	62
The academies and community compacts.....	64
Commercial publishing.....	66
The three traditions.....	67
Bureaucratization of religion.....	68
Confucianism.....	69

Daoism	73
Buddhism.....	76
The question of syncretism	79
4. Wang Gen initiates a social movement	85
Wang Gen as a charismatic religious leader.....	85
The ideas of Wang Gen	101
Learning as joy and joy as learning.....	101
To secure the self and establish the root	103
Some Neo-Confucian key concepts in Taizhou discourse.....	107
To protect and respect the self.....	113
Wang Gen's political ideas	119
Wang Gen's view of the five bonds.....	122
Conclusion	123
5. The Taizhou network	127
"The Taizhou School" and the agenda of Huang Zongxi	127
Levels of orthodoxy	132
Wang Ji's Buddhist inclinations compared with Wang Gen's.....	134
Growth of a network.....	137
The five sons of Wang Gen.....	143
Wang Bi.....	144
Transmission procedure	145
Conclusion	149
6. Praxis and organization of the Taizhou movement.....	151
Material culture.....	151
Music, song and recitation	154
Meditation	157
Yan Jun's seven-day seclusion	158
Organization	167
The academies.....	168
The community compact	169
Yan Jun's ideas about the community compact	172
Conclusion	177
7. Secular or sacred?	179
The question of "religionization".....	179
Contemporary definitions of religion and the Taizhou movement'.....	183
The emotional dimension and the question of personal experience.....	188
Sacred rituals and sages.....	189
Conclusion	191
8. Wang Yangming's and the Taizhou practitioners' relation to the three traditions	193

Buddhism and Daoism in Neo-Confucianism.....	193
Daoist and Buddhist influences on Wang Yangming.....	196
Wang Gen and the three traditions.....	203
Daoist traits in Wang Gen’s thoughts.....	203
Wang Gen’s lack of Buddhist references	206
Three “Buddhist” poems by Wang Bi and Han Zhen	207
Yan Jun’s “Discourse on the three teachings”	210
He Xinyin.....	219
Luo Rufang	220
Conclusion	222
9. Officialdom fights back.....	225
Criticism and persecution of the Taizhou practitioners	227
The highest level of the government: three Grand Secretaries	227
The Ming scholars Wang Shizhen and Gu Xiancheng	230
The arrest and punishment of Yan Jun.....	238
The arrest and punishment of He Xinyin	240
A brief comment on the case of Li Zhi.....	246
Degree of persecution	249
Conclusion	253
10. Overall conclusion.....	257
Sammanfattning på svenska	265
Bibliography	269
Primary Sources	269
Literature	272
Appendix A.....	288
Appendix B.....	289

Like a bird on the wire
Like a drunk in a midnight choir
I have tried in my way to be free

Leonard Cohen

In memory of my father

Acknowledgements

To begin with, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Emeritus Per-Arne Berglie, who opened the door of academia for me as a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Ethnology, History of Religion and Gender Studies at Stockholm University and supported my wish to deal with a historical subject. I am also indebted to Professor Emeritus Torbjörn Lodén, who suggested I should have a look at “the Taizhou School”. Professor Olof Sundqvist became my supervisor in the second half. He has been most supportive both practically and theoretically helping me to improve the structure of my thesis and to clarify my argumentation. Professor Emeritus Roger Greatrex has been of invaluable help with his vast and deep knowledge of Chinese history and related sources. Although acting as external supervisor, he has been very much involved in my project. Without his critical reading of my drafts, questioning of my assumptions and never-ending enthusiasm, it would probably have stranded. His wife Fumiyo has also contributed by serving me delicious dinners whenever I visited Lund.

I would also like to acknowledge the participants of the Higher seminar at our department, including Egil Asprem, Frédéric Brusi, Erik af Edholm, Kristoffer af Edholm, Per Faxneld, Niklas Foxeus, Urban Hammar, Peter Jackson, Marja-Liisa Keinänen, Johan af Klint, Tommy Kuusela, Stefan Larsson, Annette Lindberg, Susanne Olsson, Ferdinando Sardella, Frederik Wallenstein, Anna Westman Kuhmunen and Andreas Nordberg. They have all contributed ideas, comments and suggestions, and Susanne has even contributed children’s clothes, which was fantastically convenient since her daughter is called Lina, so I could simply add Me in front of the name to get my daughter’s name Melina written on the clothes. I have also discussed my project with Marie-Thérèse Charpentier.

Especially, I would like to express my gratitude to Erik af Edholm, who carefully read and commented on the manuscript before printing. Together with Christer Hedin and Per-Arne Berglie, he got me deeply interested in the subject of religious studies when I turned up at the Department of History of Religion back in the 1980s. A generally protective and supportive attitude from Annika Olsson, the Head of our department, should also be mentioned. Also at Stockholm University, Professor Staffan Carlshamre at the Department of Philosophy has shown interest in my project.

During my time as a Ph.D. candidate, I visited China twice (2009 and 2011). The professors who discussed my research idea with me were Chen Lai, Deng Zhifeng, Ge Zhaoguang, Peng Guoxiang, Wu Yiye, Wu Zhen, Yang

Guorong, Zhou Qi and Zhou Qun. Wu Zhen generously gave me several of his articles and books. Deng Zhifeng, whose course on Mencius I followed at Fudan University (Spring 2011), spent time with me reading *The Recorded Conversations* by Wang Gen, which was my initial battle with Ming Chinese. I had also lively discussions with Peng Guoxiang both in Beijing and in Stockholm. My thanks go to Professor John Makeham, who made me aware of Peng. Zhou Qi, researcher on Buddhism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, gave me the opportunity to test my ideas on her students. She also invited me to her home in Beijing and played zither (*guzheng* 古筝) for me and copied a great number of zither pieces, which I later listened to while resting on the floor on my office during pregnancy. With renewed energy I could then go on reading and writing.

I am furthermore deeply grateful to Professor Timothy Brook, who invited me to the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 2013 and opened the world of local gazetteers to me. He made me a participant of his reading group of Ming texts. Discussions with him and the other participants such as Alison Bailey, Sarah Basham, Dai Lianbin, Noa Grass and Leo K. Shin were stimulating and fruitful. During this semester, I also had the opportunity to listen to lectures at UBC and to follow courses, such as one on Chinese History by Professor Leo K. Shin who spent time discussing my project. Timothy Brook warmly invited me to his and his wife's house on Salt Spring Island. During this visit, he discussed and commented on a draft of my thesis and played Esbjörn Svensson on his grand piano – an unforgettable memory. During my stay in Canada, Professor Catherine Swatek was instrumental in putting me in touch with Dr. Dai Lianbin, who became my tutor while I was perspiring over texts by Yan Jun. He also introduced efficient research tools to me and always had – and still has – suggestions on how to proceed when Ming texts are impenetrable. I would also like to express my gratitude to my ex-husband Hans, who took parental leave during spring 2013 and travelled with me and Melina to Canada, which was a prerequisite for my research visit.

In June 2017, I had my final seminar and I have benefitted greatly from the comments and suggestions Professor Barend ter Haar's gave me on this inspiring occasion, comments which had to do with terminology and other issues. Afterwards, he also sent me useful up-to-date literature.

I am indebted to Deng Fei for buying books in China, when I did not have the possibility to travel. For material search, layout and printing matters, the librarians Inga Nyman, Emma Palmqvist Wojda, Grant McWilliams, Olivier Höhn, and Nobuko Kuramasu at the Library of Stockholm University have all been of great help. Jing Liu at the Asian Library at the University of British Columbia helped me during my stay in Vancouver. Of great importance has also been the support from Hedvig Egerö, Jannica Vestergård and Erik Östling for solving administrative and computer problems.

Michael Knight has made an important contribution by proofreading my manuscript and making it readable in English.

Without financial support from several Foundations, it would have been impossible to realize and complete my project. During my Ph.D. period I have received support from the Donations Scholarships, Stockholm University; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; the National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies, Fudan University; Margot and Rune Johansson Foundation, Uppsala University; the Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation and Olle Engkvist Byggmästare Foundation.

My friends Annica Planemo, Zhou Tongke, Taoqi and Zou Rongmei have supported me in various ways and have always stood behind me. I have received invaluable help from Margareta Roseen and her family, not least Agnes, my foremost baby-sitter. I would also like to express my gratitude to Cecilia Lindqvist, who inspired me to study Chinese already as a teenager and to Bikash Acharya, who initially encouraged me to write a thesis and made me recognize my yearning for a deeper intellectual confrontation with Chinese history, philosophy and religion. Not to be forgotten are also my inquisitive students, both at Stockholm University and Södra Latin Upper Secondary School, who were always posing relevant questions.

Finally, I would like to mention the love and support from my family, including my mother Dagmar, my daughter Melina, my brother Magnus and my aunts Eva and Monika. I can trace the roots of the questions of self-respect and self-protection to my mother, while Melina provides the solutions.

Those who have helped me during these years of wrestling with my thesis are numerous. It is unfortunately not possible to name you all and everything you have done for me. However, although I have received countless comments and suggestions, the responsibility for the final text is entirely mine.

Abbreviations

- DMB *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644*, L.C. Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., N.Y.: Columbia U.P., 1976, 2 vols.
- HXYJ *He Xinyin Ji* 何心隱集, Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖 ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1960.
- HDC *Hanyu Da Cidian* 漢語大詞典, Luo Zhubian 羅竹風 ed. Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1986.
- MRXA *Mingru Xuean* 明儒學案, Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, punctuated by Shen Zhiying 沈芝盈 Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2008.
- TZXA “Taizhou Xuean” 泰州學案, in *Mingru Xuean*.
- WXZQJ *Wang Xinzhai Quanji* 王心齋全集, Nanjing: Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2001.
- XZW *Chongjuan Xinzhai Wang Xiansheng Quanji*, 重鐫心齋王先生全集, 1604. Tokyo Library.
- YJJ *Yan Jun Ji* 顏鈞集, Huang Xuanmin 黃宣民 punctuated and ed., Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1996.

List of Illustrations

1. Provinces of China.....	13
2. Map of Ming China.....	14
3. Portrait of Wang Gen (XZW, Ch. 1: 16a).....	87
4. Portrait of Wang Gen's father Wang Hong.....	90
5. Wang Gen in meditation posture.....	92
6. Wang Gen's hat and dress (XZW, Ch. 1: 20b–21a).....	94
7. Wang Gen's chariot.....	96
8. Hall of Striving for Humaneness.....	100
9. Wang Gen's family grave-yard.....	142
10. The Hall of Joyeous Learning.....	152
11. Religious objects (XZW, Ch. 1: 32b–33a).....	155

Figure 90, 92, 96, 100, 142 and 152 are all from Wang Gen 1912.

List of Ming emperors and their reigns

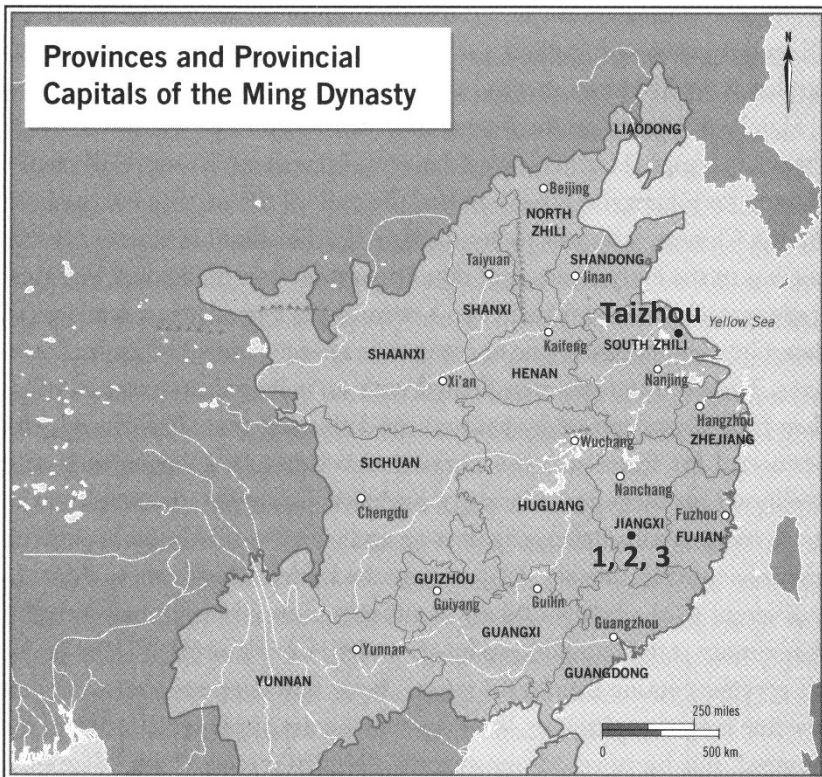
Name	Reign	Reign years
1. Zhu Yuanzhang	Hongwu	1368–1397
2. Zhu Yunwen	Jianwen	1398–1401
3. Zhu Di	Yongle	1402–1423
4. Zhu Gaozhi	Hongxi	1424–1424
5. Zhu Zhanji	Xuande	1425–1434
6. Zhu Qizhen	Zhengtong	1435–1448
7. Zhu Qiyu	Jingtai	1449–1456
8. Zhu Qizhen	Tianshun	1457–1463
9. Zhu Jianshen	Chenghua	1464–1486
10. Zhu Youtang	Hongzhi	1487–1504
11. Zhu Houzhao	Zhengde	1505–1520
12. Zhu Houcong	Jiajing	1521–1566
13. Zhu Zaihou	Longqing	1567–1571
14. Zhu Yijun	Wanli	1572–1619
15. Zhu Changle	Taichang	1620–1620
16. Zhu Youjiao	Tianqi	1620–1626
17. Zhu Youjian	Chongzhen	1627–1643
18. Zhu Changxun	Hongguang	1644

Provinces of China



1. Provinces of China

Map of Ming China



2. Map of Ming China

I am indebted to Timothy Brook for giving me permission to use his map from Brook, 2010, "The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties", page 41. To his map, I have added places relevant for the Taizhou movement, i.e. 1. Yongxin County 2. Ji'an Prefecture (which cover both Yongxin and Yongfeng) 3. Yongfeng County, and Taizhou County.

1. Introduction

In the middle and late Ming dynasty, a network of people inspired by a man called Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541) engaged in a strong and vibrant movement in the lower Yangzi region. Wang Gen referred to as Taizhou after the prefecture in the northern Jiangsu province where he was born.¹ This name has been used by later scholars to describe him and his followers.

Wang Gen was a self-taught salt merchant who had an enlightenment experience in Qufu, the hometown of Confucius located in Shandong Province. Wang Gen said after his visit to the temple of Confucius in Qufu: “Confucius was a human being and I am also a human being”,² expressing the provokative idea that he had the same nature as the Sage. Later, he became a disciple of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), a Confucian thinker, administrator and military leader in the Ming dynasty, whose impact on Chinese thought, intellectual history and politics is both broad and deep. Already before the death of Wang Yangming, Wang Gen was active in teaching and gathering followers from all levels of society.³

The teaching of Wang Gen quickly spread not only in his home region, but also to other provinces in the whole country. Several later Taizhou movement leaders came from Jiangxi Province, which became a new centre for its activities beside Taizhou. The most well-known of these are Yan Jun 顏鈞 (1504–1596), Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515–1588) and He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517–1579).⁴ One local source tells with pride that while Wang Yangmings learning was spread widely among influential people with high positions, Wang Gen’s learning was spread among people on the local level and touched them, thanks to the lively debate which was created.⁵

¹ Taizhou refers to Wang Gen, the place, as well as the learning of Wang Gen. It can be difficult to know which meaning it has in different texts. The names of Wang Gen will be discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4.

² Xu Yue 徐越 (d. 1552), *Biography* (of Wang Gen) *Biezhuan* 別傳. (In: XZW, Ch. 5: 29b) Xu Yue states that the nature *xing* 性 of Confucius and Wang Gen was the same.

³ For information on the life of Wang Gen see XZW, Ch. 3 (*The Chronological Biography*), Zhao Zhenji 1586: *passim*, Geng Dingxiang 1598: *passim*, Huang 1693 (2008), vol. 2: 709–711.

⁴ General sources on the Taizhou movement are de Bary 1970: 145–248, Cheng 1996 and Wu 2009a, to name just three.

⁵ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817. 24: 2b–3a. *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* refers to *Mingwenhai* 明文海 by Huang Zongxi, but instead of sympathising with his appraisal of Wang Yangming it criticizes it.

Like Wang Yangming, the Taizhou practitioners gave emphasis to action, and claimed that the commoner is a sage. Wang Gen's ideas have similarities with Wang Yangming's but what was new about Wang Gen was that he emphasized self-respect and the need to protect oneself.⁶ He questioned the ethics of sacrificing oneself for rulers and superiors, arguing that a dead subject was of little value, even for the ruler.⁷

Yan Jun emerged in Jiangxi Province as a charismatic leader and a healer. According to sources attributed to him, he cured Luo Rufang who suffered from a mental disease due to overzealous meditation. Yan Jun declared that Luo Rufang was only suppressing his desires, which made him sick instead of reaching a state of enlightenment.⁸ Beside Luo Rufang, He Xinyin is also said to have been a disciple of Yan Jun. He Xinyin, like Yan Jun, was critical of the traditional Neo-Confucian view of desires.⁹

The Taizhou leaders were engaged in teaching and organizing people on the local level. Learning discussion meetings (*jianghui* 講會) were held in retreat places and private academies. These meetings were not primarily theoretical. They focused on practical ethical questions and included singing, meditation and drinking ceremonies. The Taizhou practitioners did not follow any diet, and they did not impose any sexual restrictions on themselves. The aim was to create a transformation of the self into a sage. Several of the Taizhou practitioners have left descriptions of their own enlightenment experiences, which were rather common among Neo-Confucians in general. Beside meditation practices, they engaged in charitable works, helping poor people and villagers suffering from calamities of various kinds.

However, the Taizhou practitioners discarded typical religious aspects of Daoism and Buddhism, such as the worship of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Daoist divinities; they did not study the Buddhist textual corpus, nor did they create their own canon, at least not at the beginning of the movement. They simply composed and collected some songs and poems, which were sung and recited at their meetings. Their focus was on discussing burning questions, meditating to reach a desired state of mind, engaging in charitable works and making their followers behave according to ethical codes such as filial piety and humaneness. Furthermore, they did not engage in constructing big religious buildings apart from a few retreat complexes. It was more common for them to use already existing buildings such as private academies and family shrines.

⁶ Wang Gen elaborates these ideas in two texts: "On Wisdom and the Protection of the Self – A Farewell Message for Yaohu's Departure to the North" (XZW, Ch. 3, 30a–31 and "On Wisdom and the Protection of the Self" (XZW, Ch. 3: 31a–33b.)

⁷ XZW, Ch. 3: 33a.

⁸ Not much is written about Yan Jun in Western scholarship. The best existing source is Yan Jun Ji (Hereafter YJJ).

⁹ As for He Xinyin, see Dimberg 1974.

Wang Gen argued that true learning was joyous, and if it was not, it was not true learning. Thus he established a retreat complex including “The Hall of Joyous Learning” (*Lexue Tang* 樂學堂). This retreat complex was originally a family shrine, but visitors from other parts of the country stayed there as guests and took part in discussion meetings. Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Luo Rufang also established local organizations: Yan Jun established a “A hall for coming together in harmony” (*Cuihe Hui* 萃和會) and He Xinyin a “A society for collective harmony” (*Juhe Hui* 聚和堂), which was an attempt to create a utopian society taking care of social welfare and schooling on a collective basis. It failed when He Xinyin remonstrated against taxes imposed on the community by the government, which then led to his arrest and imprisonment. Luo Rufang wrote extensively on the community compact (*xiangyue* 鄉約), which was a social contract drawn up by the local authorities; it laid down rules by which the members of the community should live. It functioned at the local level in settling conflicts and improving morality. The compact was used by the Taizhou practitioners as a basis for lecturing and uniting people. Luo Rufang, himself a government official, made it less authoritarian compared to the community compact drafted by Wang Yangming and its precedents from the Song dynasty (960–1279). It furthermore seems as if Luo Rufang abolished the register of good and bad deeds used earlier which had been combined with public criticism and self-criticism during the compact meetings.¹⁰ Compact meetings were learning discussion meetings but learning discussion meetings were not necessarily compact meetings. In the compact, a vow of ethical conduct was signed. This vow might possibly be regarded as a Confucian equivalent of the Bodhisattva vow.

Wang Gen and his followers stayed in contact with many disciples of Wang Yangming, for instance, several scholars belonging to another network which has been called the Jiangyou School or the Jiangyou group. The division between different schools of Wang Yangming is not very clear in the Ming material. I agree with those modern scholars who regard this division of schools as a construction made in the early Qing dynasty (1644–1912) by the famous scholar Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–95).

The Taizhou practitioners’ yearning for freedom, striving for an equal distribution of properties and the unification of friends and brothers show some similarities with the goals of the European Enlightenment, which is something that has been discussed by several scholars, especially Chinese mainland scholars.¹¹ However, parallels cannot be drawn strictly. The rereading of the Confucian classics in the light of their own experiences is closer to the Reformation than the Enlightenment, as well as the pious

¹⁰ Yu-yin Cheng 1996, 322–323. For general information, on the life of Luo Rufang, see also Wu 2009a: 313–323.

¹¹ Hou Wailu 1987 (2005), Ji Fangtong 2005.

character. There is no parallel among the Taizhou practitioners to the fierce criticism of the Roman Catholic Church formulated by the Enlightenment thinkers, except for Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), who was inspired by the Taizhou practitioners but whom I regard as staying outside their movement.¹²

The Taizhou movement inspired not only scholars but also merchants, craftsmen, artisans and writers. The fact that they included people of all walks of life makes them different from other Neo-Confucian groups. Among their leaders there were even potters and woodcutters. Women are almost invisible in the materials available. There are writings about worthy mothers, but these texts are usually written by their sons.¹³ The pattern is that there are male voices about women, but that the women themselves are silent. Wang Gen's five sons, for instance, are discussed and we know a good deal about them, but daughters are not mentioned in the genealogical records. Other women are mentioned, such as his mother and a sister-in-law,¹⁴ so it might be the case that he simply had no daughters. However, mothers are often mentioned and praised by their sons.

If some people were inspired by the Taizhou practitioners, others disliked them and tried to control their activities; this criticism came from high officials, county magistrates and prominent intellectuals. Yan Jun and He Xinyin were arrested, but while Yan Jun was released thanks to help from Luo Rufang and others, He Xinyin was killed in 1579 while still under arrest. Who was behind the murder is still not known. The Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582) banned the private academies in 1579, which was a heavy blow for the Wang Yangming movement in general, and especially to the Taizhou movement. It became even more difficult for the learning discussion movement when the Manchus took over and the Ming Empire fell in 1644.

The movement has continued to be controversial. Today it is hotly debated in East Asian scholarly works as well as on the Internet.¹⁵

Aims, research questions and demarcations

The purpose of this thesis is to define and analyze the religious ideas, praxis, and organization(s) of the Taizhou movement in the sixteenth century Ming China. The purpose is also to contextualize the Taizhou movement from social

¹² The Taizhou movement had a metaphysical basis, which in fact is similar to the Enlightenment. Although the Enlightenment thinkers criticized the church, they still believed in “natural religion”.

¹³ Cheng 2001: 103–118.

¹⁴ XZW, Ch. 2: 52b.

¹⁵ Wu 2009a, Ji 2005, Deng 2004, Gong 2001 and Wang Fan-sen 1999. Google has 104,000 matches for “The Taizhou School” 泰州學派. (Sept. 2, 2018)

and historical perspectives. The study focuses on Wang Gen, the founder of the movement and three disciples from the Jiangxi province: Yan Jun, Luo Rufang and He Xinyin. They also became strong leaders of the movement. When talking about “the Taizhou practitioners”, I mainly refer to those four leaders. However, a few other practitioners will also appear in my descriptions and discussions. As for the court convictions, in which the Taizhou practitioners were sentenced for various crimes, I will limit myself to Yan Jun and He Xinyin, although I briefly mention other judicial cases in the sixteenth century to create a background for comparison. For instance, Li Zhi, like Yan Jun and He Xinyin, was sentenced to imprisonment, and he is said to have committed suicide in prison, but I will only shortly describe his case since I do not regard him as a Taizhou practitioner.¹⁶ He was inspired by the Taizhou ideas, but as an “arch individualist” he never became an integrated part of the Taizhou movement.¹⁷

One reason for analyzing this movement is that some ingrained ideas on fundamental issues will be turned upside down. When studying the Taizhou practitioners, several assumptions must be reconsidered about where the borders are to be drawn between religious and secular, between Confucianism and other traditions, between East and West, between premodern and modern. A second reason is that Asian scholarship pays attention to the Taizhou movement, but that this interest is not reflected and recognized in Western scholarship. Therefore, a close examination of this movement will give the Western scholar and reader a deeper understanding of how complicated Confucianism and other Chinese traditions are, as well as their relation to Chinese society.

Initial questions are how to categorize the Taizhou practitioners and whether the group should be defined as a school, a current or a movement. The school concept is linked to the transmission of learning following master-disciple successions and is therefore related to whether it is possible to regard the Taizhou practitioners as part of a tradition, or more specifically – a religious tradition. My hypothesis is that they cannot be defined as a school, and that the word movement best describes this popular, heterogeneous network as well as its activities. In earlier research, there has been discussions about who ought to be considered to belong to which school, but the school concept itself has not been discussed critically. Most East Asian as well as Western scholars go back to the classification made by the scholar Huang

¹⁶ Most scholars, Chinese and Western, do not classify Li Zhi as a Taizhou practitioner – although most of them see the link between them and him, they conclude that he is too much of an individualist to conform to any “school”. A few examples are Wu 2009a: 30–37, and de Bary 1970: 193. Billeter discusses his friendship with several Taizhou practitioners without making any statement whether Li Zhi should belong to the Taizhou movement, see Billeter 1979: 101–108. Pauline Lee regard him as a Taizhou practitioner, but does not explain why. See Lee 2012: 56.

¹⁷ de Bary 1970: 188.

Zongxi (1610–1695),¹⁸ who lived during the Ming Qing transition. In his work on Ming scholars, *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* (*Mingru Xuean* 明儒學案) he added a section called “Records of the Taizhou Learning” (*Taizhou Xuean* 泰州學案). This leads to several questions that are important for my study: Why did Huang put the Taizhou practitioners together in a specific section in his work? Is it possible to draw a sharp line between the Taizhou practitioners and other Neo-Confucian groups in the Ming dynasty? And can we be sure that they are exclusively Confucian – if it is possible at all to use the concept of Confucianism – and did not combine their ideas with Daoist and Buddhist ideas and concepts? Although I find it very difficult to draw any lines between this network and other groups belonging to the larger Wang Yangming movement, I will nevertheless use the word Taizhou practitioners for those who, in a stricter or looser sense, were inspired by Wang Gen and his emancipating ideas about self-respect and self-protection.

This study addresses the concrete actions of the Taizhou practitioners according to the Ming primary sources. They include the kind of social and religious activities they were engaged in, as well as the kind of network and organization(s) they tried to build and the purposes of their activities. Whether or not their ideas and activities can be regarded as religious in character will be discussed and analyzed. The latter question has been discussed in Taiwanese scholarship,¹⁹ and to a certain degree by mainland scholars.²⁰ Wang Fan-sen, for instance, concludes that Confucianism goes religious with the Taizhou movement,²¹ an idea which will be discussed in Chapter 7. In fact, these Chinese scholars do not explicitly define religion.²² In this chapter, I will use two contemporary definitions of religion, one bounded and one unbounded, to discuss whether the Taizhou movement could be regarded as a religion.

Together with other Neo-Confucian groups, the Taizhou practitioners were interested in the dichotomy “movement – stillness” (*dong* 動 – *jing* 靜).²³ To be active and engaged in family life and social life was something most Neo-Confucians regarded as a commitment, although some of them tended towards a life in seclusion. Some of them went rather far in this respect by living in grottos, for example, which makes them come close to the life of a hermit. The meditational sessions at the private academies or other places

¹⁸ Lee 1990: *passim*, Cheng 1996: *passim*, Ji 2005: *passim*. Wu 2009a: 40 is most critical; he even puts “the Taizhou School” in quotation marks.

¹⁹ Wang Fansen 2004.

²⁰ Wu 2007.

²¹ Wang 2004.

²² Although they do not define religion, it is possible to infer that, for instance, Wu 2007 has Edward B. Tylor’s (1832–1917) definition “beliefs in spiritual beings” in mind.

²³ See, for instance, YJJ: 37–38 and He Xinyin’s text *Original stillness* (*Yuanjing* 原靜) in: HXYJ: 41–42.

make them look like semi-monastic organizations or ashrams. The Taizhou practitioners could stay there for longer or shorter periods, engaging in meditation with the aim of reaching a mental state of stillness and harmony. This is not very different from other Neo-Confucians, and the Taizhou practitioners were not very different from Buddhists or Daoists either. Some Buddhists take the vows and decide to become monks or a bodhisattva, and some Daoists decide to become hermits, but the majority of lay Buddhists and Daoists lived conventional family lives with ordinary commitments in society. Furthermore, both the Buddhist monk and the Daoist priest are highly involved in secular life.

This study will address the question how the Taizhou practitioners perceived the contradiction between a life in seclusion and a life with social commitments. My hypothesis is that they did not regard it as a contradiction at all, but that the the meditation praxis and the social commitments were mutually supporting activities. My arguments for this will be presented in Chapter 6.

Finally, the question of the reception of the Taizhou practitioners' ideas and activities among their contemporaries will be discussed, and why they were so controversial from the very beginning. The thesis will investigate some critical voices from the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties. These critics were influential officials and intellectuals who disliked the Taizhou practitioners' emancipatory claims. They feared their organizational skills and potential societal unrest. The criticism of the Taizhou movement is related to its decline, a question which has not been thoroughly studied in previous scholarship.

Outline of chapters

In this introduction, I give background information on the Taizhou movement in general. This chapter includes aims, demarcations and research questions, as well as discussions on various concepts used in the thesis.

Chapter 2 is devoted to research methods, sources and previous research. It also contains a short discussion on what a primary source is and what a secondary source.

Chapter 3 gives the historical background of the societal and religious situation in sixteenth century China. This includes the dynamism of Ming society, especially in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, and in Jiangxi Province. The three teachings of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism during the Ming period are briefly summarized.

Chapter 4 centres on the founder of the Taizhou movement, Wang Gen, and discusses questions concerning his ideas and praxis.

In Chapter 5, the perspective is broadened to cover the whole Taizhou network. This chapter examines the mapping of the Taizhou School in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* by Huang Zongxi and discusses views of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Furthermore, it briefly describes the growth of the Taizhou movement.

Chapter 6 addresses questions regarding the Taizhou practitioners' religious praxis. Here, questions about their material culture, meditation techniques and organization or organizations are discussed, such as the academies and the community compacts.

In Chapter 7, I refer a discussion among Chinese scholars about an idea that Confucianism underwent periods of what they call “philosophication” and “religionization” and that the sixteenth century would be an example of the latter. To investigate whether such an idea contribute to our understanding of Confucianism, I investigate what happens if I apply the Taizhou practitioners I study to two contemporary definitions of religion.

Chapter 8 further explores Wang Yangming and the Taizhou practitioners' relation to Daoism and Buddhism, including the Buddhist language of Wang Yangming. Differences between various Taizhou practitioners are discussed and analyzed, for instance, how they relate to the *ru* tradition compared with “the learning of the sages”.

Chapter 9 describes and discusses the criticism of the Taizhou movement. Different narrations about three judicial convictions are related, namely the conviction of Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Li Zhi. These convictions may be regarded as part of the persecution of the Taizhou movement.

In Chapter 10, I summarize my overall conclusions.

All translations are mine if nothing else is stated. Titles of works written with simplified characters are also in simplified characters in the Bibliography and the text, otherwise they are written with traditional characters. Characters are given in the Bibliography for names of authors whose works mentioned there are written in Chinese.

Key terms

In presenting some key terms, I follow Peterson and Pike in their division of *etic* and *emic*. *Etic* concepts are technical concepts used from a ‘many places’ standpoint, in my case history of religions and other fields in the humanities.²⁴ They are, for instance, the concepts of Neo-Confucianism, religion and religious, which have no exact equivalent in Ming Chinese. These *etic*

²⁴ An alternative to the concept of “etic” is the term “generic”. The equivalent for “emic” would be “autonym”. For the latter usage, see ter Haar 1992: 7.

concepts are used as heuristic and analytical categories to create a contrast or comparison. They have a meaning for the researcher, but not for those who are objects of the investigation. The *emic* concepts are used from a ‘single place’ position, often related to ‘the locale’ or members of the culture studied, and those concepts the researcher tries to understand, explain and contextualize. In my study, *emic* concepts are used by people in Ming China.²⁵ Ming China is, of course, not “a single place” but a vast empire. Local places in Ming China stood in relation to a nationwide administration, with a standardized language contrasting with broad local linguistic variation within the Empire. Wang Gen and Yan Jun both refer to several Confucian classics, but at least in the case of Wang Gen, his knowledge of them could have been acquired through oral transmission and not through reading. Yan Jun was not well educated either. He Xinyin had some basic education, although, contrary to what most scholars believe, he did not come out first in the prefectural examinations.²⁶ This has bearing on arguments by scholars why He Xinyin was treated harsher than others, so it is an important point. He Xinyin had rather unusual and creative ways of interpreting the Confucian classics although he had probably read the standard interpretations. Luo Rufang took the palace examination which means he was very well read. To decipher Wang Gen’s, Yan Jun’s and other Taizhou practitioners’ argumentation it is necessary to go back to their references to understand what the setting is. There are often several layers of references, where the classic referred to in turn refers to another classic. The Taizhou practitioners quite often, for instance, refer to *The Analects*, where Confucius in his turn refers to *The Book of Songs* or other classical texts. Trying to capture the Taizhou practitioners’ main ideas, my work has sometimes been rebuslike, but almost as a rule the argumentation crystallizes when the references are sorted out.

To generalize, the *etic* concepts discussed in this study are concepts used in secondary sources, whereas the *emic* concepts turn up in the primary sources.²⁷ Several *etic* terms have no equivalents in Ming Chinese languages. Sometimes there are several concepts which are used differently or as synonyms. For instance, the umbrella term Neo-Confucianism has many equivalents in both classical and modern Chinese, with slightly different meanings. I will return to this problem below.

Scholars also have difficulty in rendering *emic* concepts as clarifying concepts in the academic literature, and it does not always make it easier and more clarifying if the academic language is modern Chinese. Here, I will only comment on two *emic* concepts, namely *junzi* (君子) and *xin* (心). *Junzi* I

²⁵ Peterson & Pike 2002: 5–19.

²⁶ As for my findings about He Xinyin’s merits in the civil service examination system, see Chapter 8, “The arrest and punishment of He Xinyin.”

²⁷ To a certain degree concepts in Modern Chinese is a third field. In a study like mine, where I discuss concepts used in modern Chinese academic literature, I would have needed to make an analysis following both time and space axials.

consistently translate as ‘authentic person’. Traditionally it is translated as ‘gentleman’, which I think gives the Western reader the wrong associations. ‘An exemplary person’ would be an alternative, but since the *junzi* tries to be sincere to himself and to others on his way towards his goal of sagehood, I find that the translation ‘authentic person’ better describes what the Taizhou practitioners were talking about. There are, of course, different meanings of the word *junzi*, like other concepts, but in the Taizhou sources I have not met so many other meanings of *junzi* than this meaning of “an authentic person”, beside one occasion when I think it just means Wang Gen. The concept of mind in Neo-Confucian is influenced by Buddhist discourse. The Chinese word *xin* originally meant ‘heart’ and still does. The double meaning of mind and heart has resulted in the frequent translation of *xin* as “mind/heart”, “mind-heart”, or “heart-and-mind”, which I find clumsy. I have chosen to translate the word as ‘mind’, unless I find the translation ‘heart’ more suitable in the context. It is important to remember that the word ‘heart’ *xin*, was at a very early stage linked to conscience and ethical behaviour, in the same way as Westerners talk about having a good heart. This ethical dimension does not exist in the Buddhist concept of mind. Related to the concept of mind is another key term in Neo-Confucianism, *liangzhi* (良知), which is often translated as ‘knowledge of the good’, a translation I also use.

Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism

Confucianism could be regarded as an *etic* concept created by Western scholars, who Latinized the epithet of Kong Fuzi (Master Kong)²⁸ to Confucius (551–479) and made it into an *ism*, to mark that it is an ideology or religion originating with this man, who had the family name Kong.²⁹ This is not the case with any word in classical or modern Chinese, in which there are different ways of talking of this tradition. Two common concepts are *rujia* 儒家 and *rujiao* 儒教, where *ru* 儒 stands for someone who personifies the *Ru* tradition; this concept has linguistically nothing to do with the man ‘Master Kong’ *Kong fuzi* 孔夫子 or *Kongzi* 孔子. In modern Chinese, *jia* 家 usually connotes the philosophical aspect of Confucianism and other traditions, compared with *jiao* 教, which has a stronger religious significance. A common expression, for instance, is *rujia sixiang* 儒家思想 ‘Confucian thought’. However, traditionally the words *jia* and *jiao* were not related to philosophy

²⁸ Often, he is only called Kongzi. Kong was his family name. His personal name was *Qiu* 丘 and his courtesy name *Zhongni* 仲尼.

²⁹ It is quite clear that it was the Jesuits who Latinized the name Confucius, but not that they were the first to use the concept of Confucianism. This might have been James Legge (1815–1897) who first used it while lecturing at Oxford. See ter Haar 2016: 94.

and religion respectively. One very important reason is that our modern concepts of philosophy and religion did not exist then. *Jia* had to do with the person, the family or the clan, and *jiao* had to do with teaching, instruction and transformation. *Jiao* turns up in the compound *jiaohua* 教化 ‘to transform by education’. A rather common view among scholars before the 1970s was that there existed an early philosophical phase exemplified by the old classics such as *The Analects*, *Daode Jing*, *Zhuangzi* and others. This phase was labelled the phase of Confucian and Daoist philosophy (*rujia* and *daoja*). According to this view, this phase preceded later Confucian and Daoist religious phases (*rujiao* and *daojiao*), which included elaborate ritual systems. Historically, it is difficult to distinguish between these two phases.³⁰ The background for this division into phases is the fact that the classics of the early teachings are still extant, but that it has been more difficult to obtain clear information about the religious praxis. Although, the more elaborate religious systems and institutions are later, it is likely that the earlier religious practises were still linked to the texts, or rather the other way around; that the texts were written with a consciousness about the rituals, which in the beginning were simpler. There is no evidence that the philosophical and religious aspects were ever separated,³¹ although even the ancients could separate thought from action and ideation from ritual praxis.

There has been a scholarly debate on who the *Ruists* were since the *emic* word *ru* existed before the time of Confucius.³² According to the dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 from the 2nd century AD (which, however, is after Confucius), *ru* means *fangshi* 方士, a ritual specialist.³³ The connotation of learned literati scholar came later. Several scholars claim that Confucianism is a problematic concept; some would like to replace it with something else,³⁴ since Confucius was not the founder of the Confucian tradition. Confucius did not, of course, create the later *Ru* tradition, but in analogy with such reasoning we would also have to do away with concepts like Buddhism and Christianity, since Buddha and Jesus did not invent the religions of Buddhism and

³⁰ A turning point might have been the Bellagio Conference on Daoism in 1968, when the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi were linked to later religious expressions such as alchemy, hygiene, communication with supernatural beings, church liturgy and theocratic states. At this conference Kristofer Schipper criticized the stance of separating an older philosophical stage from a later religious one, arguing that the religious tradition did not come later, and that Zhuangzi had “references on every page to trance techniques.” Welch 1970: 107–136.

³¹ The ancient Greeks regarded philosophy as something that should be lived. See below under the heading: “School and lineage”. Furthermore, religion cannot be defined as ritual praxis only, but includes intellectual aspects such as conceptions, beliefs and sometimes dogma.

³² Yao 2000: 17–20. Chen 1996: 334. (*Gudai Zongjiao yu Lunli –Rujia Sixiang de Genyuan*, Beijing: Sanlian Shudian.) Hu Shi 1953. (*Shuo Ru* Discussion on Ru) In: Hushi Wencun Taipei: Yuandong Tushu Gongsi, vol. 4. Fung Yu-lan *Yuan Ru Mo* (On the origins of Ru and Mohists).

³³ Karlgren does not mention the character 儒 in *Grammata Serica Recensa*, but the radical is ‘man’ and the phonetic part *xu* 需 meant ‘grass for fuel or forage’, which is irrelevant here.

³⁴ Tillman 1993, Nylan 2001, ter Haar 2016.

Christianity either. It would, for instance, be possible to follow the pattern of Islam, which has successfully replaced the older label Mohammedanism. For the practitioners, the concept of Islam catches what they regard as a fundament or essence of their creed and praxis. The word means ‘submission’, ‘surrender’ – but has the root *salam* which means ‘peace’, ‘safety’. From a marketing point of view, this is perhaps a wise strategy. Christianity could, for instance, have the label *agape* (unconditional love), Buddhism *karuṇā* (compassion) and Confucianism *ren* (humaneness) or something more appropriate. However, in my view, to implement such a renewal of parlance seems to be an overwhelming project. I regard the *etic* concept of Confucianism as a translation of the *emic* term *ru*, although as a translation it might not be ideal.

Another approach which some scholars support is to regard the traditions as ontologically void, or that they are constructions and reconstructions, to use more postmodern vocabulary. There have been several attempts to deconstruct the Confucianism of various eras of Chinese history, if not for the whole period. There is the argument that the *Ruists* after the time of Confucius were not followers of him but “classicists” who mainly studied the antiquity and the classical works of that time, and did not claim they were followers of Confucius.³⁵ This however, is not a very common view by Chinese scholars, and is disputed by Christoph Harbsmeier, who argues that there were those who regarded the *Ruists* as followers of Confucius already in the Late Warring States era (475–221 BC), as well as in the early Han dynasty (Western Han 206 BC–25 AD); he therefore claims that it is too late (sic!) to deconstruct Confucianism.³⁶

Later, other profound changes took place in the development of Chinese religious traditions. Is it possible to have the same concept for those early followers of Confucius in the Warring States and Western Han as for those who became *Ruists* after making Confucianism the state ideology in the Eastern Han (25–220)? Do we need different concepts for “Confucianism” before Emperor Wu’s decree in 136 BC, in which he stated that the *Five Classics*³⁷ should have canonical status, compared with Confucianism afterwards, when Confucianism became the official state ideology?³⁸ In analogy with this, we might ask if we need a new concept for Christianity after the edict of Theodosius the Great in 381, making Christianity to the only recognized religion in the Roman Empire compared with Christianity before this important event. A tradition will naturally transform dramatically, when it changes from a minor discussion or a subversive force to an ideology

³⁵ Nylan 2001: 364.

³⁶ Harbsmeier 2013: 19. Harbsmeier however, is rather modest in reclaiming the concept of Confucianism compared to Chen Lai.

³⁷ *The Five Classics* were *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of Documents*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Book of Changes* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.

³⁸ Nylan 2001: 32.

supported by political power. We might wonder if there is any essence left after such a shift – if ever there was an “essence” in the first place.

Further on, there are several groundbreaking changes. In the case of Christianity, we have the split between the Eastern churches and the Western Roman Catholic Church in 1054, and the split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches in the sixteenth century. At least the official approach of the Chinese state is that two labels are required to describe certain organizational and political differences between what they regard as two distinct world religions: Catholicism *Tianzhujiao* (the teaching of the Lord) and Protestantism *Yesujiao* (the teaching of Jesus) often called *Xinjiao* (the New teaching), although in common speech the “umbrella term” Christianity *Jidujiao* (the teaching of Christ) is frequently used. Most Europeans would reject this view, regarding Catholicism and Protestantism as two branches of the same religion, and the East European Churches would find it provocative to neglect the orthodox churches. Beside Catholicism and Protestantism there are three officially recognized religions in China today: Buddhism, Daoism and Islam. Confucianism is not regarded as a religion by the Chinese state.³⁹

The Confucian or the classicist tradition went through many changes. One change which has been regarded as especially profound started in the Song dynasty (960–1279) or perhaps even earlier. A very common way to deal with this change is to keep the term Confucianism, adding the prefix Neo to mark the difference. Thus there is the assumption of a former “pure” or original Confucian era followed by a later, Neo-Confucian one which added something new to the former tradition.⁴⁰

But what was added? And what was the characteristic of that which came into existence? Or perhaps nothing was added, only things subtracted. Michael Nylan points to a similarity between the Protestant Reformation and the project of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) focusing on a select portion of the earlier canon and thus leaving out the great part of it.⁴¹ Zhu Xi selected the *Four Books* because of their brevity. They were *The Analects*, *The Book of Mencius*, *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. The last two classics are short parts of *The Book of Rites*. When literacy became widespread, but common men and women still did not have the time or capacity to read the whole corpus, a smaller portion was digestible. Not even an extremely learned man like Zhu Xi had time to read everything. Lutherans and Calvinists abolished most of the religious images, and Zhu Xi had iconoclastic tendencies too. Why rely on images when you can read the text? However, although the Reformation implied a reduction, it also added things.

³⁹ Ashiwa & Wank 2009: 3.

⁴⁰ Two diametrically opposed standpoints to the concept of Neo-Confucianism are articulated by Tillman 1992: *passim* and de Bary 1993: *passim*.

⁴¹ Nylan 2001: 56.

To take Martin Luther himself, he was productive as a translator, author of hymns, writer of theological essays and so on. In the same vein, to regard Zhu Xi as merely a reductionist would not do justice to his importance. He was a creative systematizer taking a broad variety of aspects into his system, not only philosophical issues and intellectual debate but also practical matters such as rituals within and without the family, community-based organizations, ethical ideas in governing and in daily life, self-cultivation, meditation and so forth.⁴² Zhu Xi was not the only one who contributed to this system, but he was the systematizer.⁴³ This system developed during the Song dynasty, continuing during the Yuan (1279–1368), the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1912). Despite heavy criticism of Zhu Xi – especially in the beginning – his commentaries on *The Four Books* became compulsory reading for the Civil Service Examinations in 1313, during the Mongol rule, and until 1905, when the imperial examination system was abolished a few years before the Manchu dynasty fell in 1912. This means that Zhu Xi’s ideas dominated the imperial educational system for almost 600 years and as a result the imperial bureaucracy and political life as well. We must admit that this system was astonishingly powerful and resilient; it was not a condensed version of earlier Confucianism but a change that reduced certain aspects of it while others were added.

It might be possible to say that if the concept of ‘Confucianism’ is a Western construction – although I regard it is an attempt to translate the Chinese *emic* term *ru* – the *etic* concept of Neo-Confucianism is even more so. The main problem with the concept of Neo-Confucianism cannot be that it is Western; it is that what it denotes consists of too many diverging tendencies.⁴⁴ Behind it are a number of *emic* concepts such as ‘learning of the Way’ *Daoxue* 道學, ‘Learning of Principles’ *Lixue* 理學, ‘Learning of the Mind’ *Xinxue* 心學, and also ‘Learning of Principles in the Song and Ming dynasties’ *Song Ming Lixue* 宋明理學.⁴⁵ Especially the difference between the “Learning of Principles”, often labelled “the ChengZhu School” referring to the philosophies of Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), and the “Learning of Mind” or “the LuWang School”, referring to Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–93) Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529), are described as two opposite tendencies. Usually the so-called “ChengZhu School” is described as theoretical, objective and dry, whereas “the LuWang School” has been given

⁴² There are plenty of works by and on Zhu Xi. Here I only mention a few, such as Chan 1967, Tillman 1982, Ebrey 1991, Ching 2000 and Gardner 1990.

⁴³ As a systematizer, he has been compared with Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). See Ching 2000: 209.

⁴⁴ It is important to distinguish the Neo-Confucianism of late imperial China from the New-Confucianism of the 20th and 21st century, which beside Neo-Confucian thought is also inspired by Western philosophy, especially Kant.

⁴⁵ See Makeham, 2010: x–xiv for a discussion and an exposé of the history of the concept of Neo-Confucianism.

the opposite epithets like action oriented, subjective and dynamic. I find these schematic descriptions deceptive; it was more like a discussion and a development of discourse. Furthermore, this comparison only deals with Neo-Confucianism as philosophy. I belong to those who claim that Neo-Confucianism – or whatever we call it – was something more than that. It has been described as a philosophical system synthesizing metaphysics, ethics, social ideals, political aspirations, and individual discipline.⁴⁶ Scholars have preferred literati culture,⁴⁷ or religious culture,⁴⁸ and I can agree with that, (however, with the Taizhou movement the culture was not restricted to the literati any longer) but still it does not solve the problem of the concept of Neo-Confucianism. What kind of literati culture or religious culture are we talking about? As already mentioned, some scholars argue that “classicist” is the best way to render the Chinese concept of *ru*.⁴⁹ This might fit an earlier period, but not the sixteenth century. James Legge (1815–1897) avoided the concept of ‘scripture’, when translating the Chinese classics (*jing* 經), since he was a Protestant and did not want to place the Chinese classics on a par with the Bible.⁵⁰ To take a less biased stance, I find it acceptable to recognize that some of the Chinese classics were holy scriptures for the *Ruists*. Since the body of *jing* has changed over time, it would be complicated to translate this term as ‘scripture’. Which classic *jing* should be translated as ‘scripture’, and which should not? The Chinese translation of ‘Bible’ *Shengjing* 聖經 shows that the Chinese Bible translators saw the parallel between a Chinese classic and the Bible. Some of the Chinese classics were as sacred for Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming as the Bible was for Jews and Christians. The Buddhist translators had also used *jing* when translating the word ‘sūtra’. For Zhu Xi *The Four Books* was not only the most elementary reading, it was also the most sacred part of the Canon. Contrary to the intention of Barend ter Haar, which is to show that the *Ru* tradition is religious,⁵¹ the concept of ‘Classicist’ gives us the opposite impression, as if they were sitting in a classroom studying the grammar of ancient Chinese all day long. The great Ming “Classicist” Wang Yangming did not spend most of his time doing that. He had probably done so in his youth, but he had also meditated and studied practical skills. Later, as an adult, he spent a few years in exile among the natives in Yunnan; he planned military strategies, carried out military actions including capturing bandits and subduing ethnic groups in Yunnan, lectured at discussion meetings in academies or Buddhist temples and talked to his

⁴⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica online.

⁴⁷ Bol 1992: *passim*.

⁴⁸ ter Haar 2016: 104.

⁴⁹ Nylan 2001, ter Haar 2016.

⁵⁰ ter Haar 2016: 99.

⁵¹ ter Haar 2016: *passim*.

disciples.⁵² He obviously wrote a great deal, but he did not read everything before he put the writing brush to the paper. Not even Zhu Xi spent all his time reading the classics but tried to divide his days between studying and meditation. Therefore, the concept of “classicist” does not take us to the other shore.

There is a fundamentalist tendency in the Taizhou movement in the sense that they returned to the classics, interpreting them in their own way without following the dictum of learned scholars. This is a parallel to Protestantism and the production of Bible translations into vernacular languages, enabling commoners to make their own interpretations. If Wang Yangming was no “Classicist”, the Taizhou practitioners were even less so. However, “Scripturist” would not be an alternative, so my suggestion is to keep the concept of Confucianism for the time being, because it does make more sense especially to a non-specialist reader than, for instance, “Classicist”, “orthodox tradition”⁵³ or *daoxue* 道學 ‘succession of the Way’.⁵⁴ (Not even quite well-read Chinese scholars understand the concept of *daoxue*.) I even find Neo-Confucianism a functional term. The prefix Neo is used in other contexts to describe profound changes, such as the concept of Neo-Platonism. In Neo-Platonism, a whole range of Hellenistic ideas and practices are interwoven with the thought of Plato, and the outcome is a new creation. Similarly, in Neo-Confucianism the former Confucian tradition has adopted new practices and perspectives from Daoism and Buddhism and from them created something new. However, everything is not blended into a total mix. Although there are certain approaches of the Buddhists and the Daoists which are applied, I would still not use a conglomerate concept such as “Buddhodaoruisim”.

Keeping the concepts of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as heuristic concepts, would it then be possible to say that there were Confucians of the old style in the Song and the Ming dynasties? Before 1200, culture, birth and office-holding defined the sociopolitical elite, that is, the *shi* 士 or officials. Power was concentrated among influential clans, forming an oligarchy. After 1200 pedigree did not have the same importance;⁵⁵ instead, education became the normative ground for gaining high office and a more meritocratic system developed. To be more specific, the officials were transformed from aristocrats into civil bureaucrats in early Northern Song (960–1127), and during the Song they were transformed into the local elites of literati.⁵⁶ There was in practice no difference between officials *shi* and

⁵² For information on the life of Wang Yangming see Chan 1963a: xviii–xli. Ching 1976: *passim*, but especially 25–51. For a more critical view of Wang Yangming see Shin 2006b: *passim*.

⁵³ de Bary 1993: 547–548.

⁵⁴ Tillman 1992: 455–474.

⁵⁵ Bol 1992: 33.

⁵⁶ Bol 1992: 32.

literati scholars *ru* any more. Thus before the Song dynasty there was a difference between being an official and a literati scholar. From the Song and onwards this difference was erased because of the meritocratic system.

In the sixteenth century, Wang Gen challenged the view that the *Ruist* had to be a literati scholar and established himself as a *Ruist*, although he was a commoner. In *The Dongtai County Gazetteer*, numerous men are listed as belonging to the *Ru* category. Most of them seem to be commoners. Many of them are for instance soldiers. This means that in the local sources from the area where Wang Gen came from, it was possible to regard commoners as *Ruists*.⁵⁷ It seems this change came with Wang Gen and the Taizhou movement.

It is important to note that the literati scholar could have different identities as Buddhists, Daoists and followers of Confucius. A learned scholar like the well-known Ming intellectual Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), would hardly call himself a *Ruist* since he followed a female Daoist master.

School and lineage

The common practice of using the *etic* concept of “school” to describe the Taizhou practitioners started with Huang Zongxi, who divides the Neo-Confucian thinkers into seventeen different schools in his *Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*. Later works on the history of Chinese philosophy followed suit, and even present-day Chinese scholarship regard the “Taizhou School” as a “school of thought” (*sixiang liupai* 思想流派).⁵⁸ In the following section I will discuss the Chinese school concepts and touch upon the Western school concept. Is the Chinese and/or the Western school concept fit to describe the Taizhou practitioners? I will return to my argument that both the Western and the Chinese school concept fail to describe the activities of the Taizhou practitioners in Chapter 5.

Several Chinese *emic* words lay behind the Western school concept, one of which is *jia* 家 often translated as “school”. The modern Western view of a philosophical school usually only considers the cognitive aspects and discards the social, ethical and practical sides. This easily creates a misunderstanding. Buddhologists have pointed out this problem before, claiming that the Chinese Buddhist schools did not emphasize doctrinal content over religious praxis and social aspects, as is supposed to be the case with the Greek philosophical schools.⁵⁹ However, we have a problem in this comparison, since not even the ancient Greeks regarded philosophy as a pure cognitive activity. It certainly had a broader meaning, including a specific way

⁵⁷ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817: 906–917.

⁵⁸ Wu 2009a: 1.

⁵⁹ McRae 2005: 1235.

of life, and practice linked to certain ethical ideas. The dividing line is between the modern and the premodern mode of thinking and reasoning, not between Western and Eastern thought.⁶⁰ Chinese scholars often insist that, to be counted as a school, there must be a transmission of learning from a master to a disciple or several disciples.

Jia is an ancient concept used in the expression “the hundred schools of thought”, which denoted different thinkers before the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC). It was also used for the Confucian, the Daoist and the Buddhist tradition (*rujia*, *daoja* and *fojia*). *Jia* later became synonymous with the master himself. It cannot be a coincidence that the word used for a master and those surrounding him was and still is the common word for “family” and “home”. The tradition or the school was a family to which one belonged. The transmission from master to disciple is a parallel to the transmission of heritage from father to son, and sometimes it is even stronger than the parent – child relationship. If we take the relationship between Confucius and his favourite disciple Yan Hui as an example, it is described as emotionally very strong in *The Analects*, compared with the pale picture of Confucius’ relationship to his son. *The Analects*, in fact, describes the founder of the Confucian ideal of filial piety in a way which gives more attention to the master-disciple relation than to the father-son relation.

Lineages are very often reconstructions, and they are simplifications of a much more complicated reality. Nathan Sivin aptly stresses the very act of transmission in the Chinese lineages regarding it as more important than the actual teaching, and he also points to the common situation of a school as “a claim made by individuals or groups about their connections to forebears.”⁶¹ Forebears are very important, like the ancestors in the Chinese family rituals. There is thus a parallel between “biological” ancestor and “spiritual” ancestor, something which also is evident in the Buddhist context. Buddhist schools were called *zong* 宗, which originally meant ‘ancestor’ and ‘clan’.⁶²

Eventually, there was a need for a new concept to describe schools and subschools, since the concepts *jia* and *jiao* were used for the large traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. As mentioned, the word *zong* was used for Buddhist schools. To describe the Confucian branches many concepts were used, such as *men* 門, *pai* 派, and later also *paibie* 派別, and *xuepai* 學

⁶⁰ Pioneering in highlighting the practical side of the ancient Greek philosophers was Pieree Hadot, see Hadot 2002. For a short introduction to the resersch of Hadot, see Chase 2013: 1–9.

⁶¹ Sivin 1984: xiii–xiv.

⁶² Weinstein 1987: 482–487 discusses the Chinese Buddhist Schools, arguing that: “the term *zong* should be translated as ‘school’ only when it refers to a tradition that traces its origin back to a founder, usually designated ‘the first patriarch,’ who is believed to have provided the basic spiritual insights that were then transmitted through an unbroken line of successors or ‘dharma heirs’”. According to McRae 2005: 1235, *zong* refers to “lineages of exegetical interpretation, styles of devotional or cultivational practice, or a combination of both.”

派. Huang Zongxi talks of Confucian schools as *men* (gates),⁶³ which means school and sometimes also sect. Huang uses *pai* derogatorily when talking of Yan Jun and He Xinyin, since in his opinion they deviated from the Confucian teaching of Wang Gen.

The main function of lineage is to legitimize power. According to Chan Buddhist lineage descriptions, the patriarchal robe is transmitted to the disciple with the most profound understanding. Then all other disciples are discarded.⁶⁴ The Buddhist narratives usually have a growing network of disciples, but very seldom more than one founder. Such narratives have been questioned by several Buddhologists.⁶⁵ Scholars have claimed that the Buddhist lineages were Chinese constructions. This has in turn been questioned, since there were already lineage-based transmissions in Indian Buddhism and in fourth and fifth-century Kashmir. McRae urges us to “remember that Indian Buddhists had parents and teachers, family genealogies and initiation lineages, just as the Chinese did.”⁶⁶

Robert H. Sharf’s study of a Chinese medieval text made him search for a new understanding of Buddhist schools and the three traditions.⁶⁷ Initially he regarded them as “syncretic”, an understanding he later felt obliged to reevaluate.⁶⁸ Sketching a wider picture of the Buddhist schools, Sharf argues:

Scholars are now aware that the lines separating San-lun from T’ien-t’ai, T’ien-t’ai from Pure Land, Pure Land from Ch’an, Ch’an from Neo-Confucianism, elite from popular, and popular from Tantra are by no means as clear as was once thought. Indeed, some of these so-called schools never existed at all as self-conscious institutional entities or religious movements in China. Even the fundamental distinctions between Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism need to be reconsidered: none of these traditions correspond to the self-contained religious and philosophical systems described in many text-book accounts.⁶⁹

Having studied the Taizhou practitioners and their network, I agree with this standpoint. The Taizhou practitioners had many friends from “schools” that later would be regarded as separate from the so called “Taizhou School”. And they had several teachers. When they needed a more profound understanding of themselves, they moved on and approached another person. McRae asks a very good question: “Could any religious figure’s identity possibly be adequately summarized by selecting only one out of a whole lifetime of

⁶³ MRXA: 15.

⁶⁴ Whether this patriarchal robe was a metaphor or an existing physical object is another question which I do not have reason to discuss here.

⁶⁵ Faure 1991, McRae 2003, Sharf 2002.

⁶⁶ McRae 2003: 5.

⁶⁷ The text Sharf studied was *The Treasure Store Treatise* (*Baozang Lun* 寶藏論).

⁶⁸ Sharf 2002: 1–27.

⁶⁹ Sharf 2002: 9.

relationships?”⁷⁰ An important question is if we have a straight line of master-disciple relations within the Taizhou movement. This question will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Network, current and movement

As discussed above, it is rather common to talk of “the Taizhou School”, which I claim is misleading, since it was not a school but something which embraced a social dynamism. In recent scholarship, the concept of “Taizhou Confucianism” is sometimes used,⁷¹ which is also problematic, since there are diverging attitudes among the Taizhou practitioners towards Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. In general, their attitudes are rather eclectic.

If the Taizhou people cannot be talked of as a school, what kind of group did they form? There are some possibilities such as network, current and movement. The concept of social network goes back to the 1950s and J.A. Barnes.⁷² It has been broadly used within social science to describe webs and ties between people socially linked to each other.⁷³ The Taizhou practitioners were a loosely connected network of friends who met, wrote letters to each other and eventually helped each other to publish their writings. It would be safe to define them merely as a social network, because that is unquestionably what they were. However, the concept of network does not say anything specific about the relationship between different persons, other than an assumption that the relations are in some way lasting. The Taizhou practitioners formed something which was more than that. However, it depends on what time we are talking about. In the beginning they form a loose network, but eventually they grew stronger and their discussion meeting would not have been forbidden if they were not a threat to the power.

A question that needs an answer is whether they had a common goal. Their individualism has been emphasized by de Bary.⁷⁴ There is, however, a problem in using the Western concept of “individualism” for the Taizhou scholars. They did not claim any “rights” for the commoners striving to improve their lives, in contrast to the situation in the post-Enlightenment era in the West; instead, they talked of “responsibilities”. Although they argued that it is necessary to realize the ultimate truths themselves, they believed in a

⁷⁰ McRae 2003: 7.

⁷¹ Cheng 1996. The concept of Taizhou Confucianism is even used in the title: “Sagehood and Common Man: T'ai-chou Confucianism in the Late Ming Society.”

⁷² Barnes 1954.

⁷³ Wasserman & Faust 1999: 10.

⁷⁴ de Bary 1970: 144–148. De Bary also discusses the shortcomings of the concept of individualism for the Taizhou practitioners. He admits that the individualism of the Taizhou practitioners was metaphysic, and that the concept of “personalism” also could be used, since their individualism “does not set the individual over against society”. See de Bary 1970: 147.

link to something which goes beyond their individual selves. They strove to be authentic persons, to be free and unrestrained, but they also felt that it was not enough to engage in autonomous self-cultivation, and that it was not possible to do that when living in a society that worked against their strivings. Their situation forced them to react against bureaucratic and legal authorities, and to do so they had to organize themselves.⁷⁵ Therefore they engaged in learning discussion meetings and organized people at the village level for mutual aid to improve communal life. As Huang Zongxi said, “the teachings of Master Wang Yangming were spread with the wind everywhere under Heaven thanks to Wang Gen and Wang Ji 王畿”.⁷⁶ What he sketched is not merely a network, but something more.

So is it possible instead to use the concept of “current” for this group? This concept has the advantage of using water as a metaphor, which I like and which has been used before by, for example, Huang Zongxi. In his preface to *The Records of Ming Dynasty Learning* he talks about the learning of the Way as the Sea, and the different traditions as the Yangzi, Huang, Huai and Han Rivers, murmuring on their way downhill to the sea. Although they have different sources, they will finally unite in one sea. The traditions (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) are likened to rivers and the schools and subschools to tributaries.⁷⁷ They might have a common source, but there might also be several sources. Compared to the tree metaphor, which has often been used to describe the development of Christian churches, the water metaphors, like rivers, currents and brooks, can converge and diverge in countless ways, whereas a tree is less dynamic. A tree always grows from a common ground to give a more divided and multiple result. That is why the tree metaphor is less suitable to describe Confucianism and its process of adapting and discarding elements of Daoism and Buddhism compared with the water metaphor.

However, the concept of “current” is mainly used in the history of literature and less in religious studies for groups which are charismatic and carry a rather strong social force. It is the charismatic and social activism of the Taizhou adherents that makes me choose the concept of “movement”.

A social movement has been defined as “a mixture of organization and spontaneity”.⁷⁸ This means that the organization is not coterminous with the movement. In the case of the Taizhou network, organization and spontaneity are the pools it moves between.

⁷⁵ For definitions of legal and bureaucratic authority see Weber 1983: 147.

⁷⁶ MRXA: 703. However, Huang also add in the next sentence that it was due to Wang Gen and Wang Ji that his teaching was gradually lost. Wang Ji (1498–1583) is regarded as a follower of the Zhezhong School by Huang Zongxi, but he had known Wang Gen and there is good reason to regard them as close friends. Wang Ji will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

⁷⁷ MRXA: 7. There are several prefaces in MRXA. This one is not translated in *Records of Ming Scholars*, 1987. It was written in 1693. (康熙癸酉).

⁷⁸ Turner & Smelser, 2017, “Characterstics of social movements” in *Britannica online*.

In the case of the Taizhou practitioners, there is a sliding scale from kinship organizations to community compact. The organizations formed by Wang Gen's second son, Wang Bi 王巖 (1511–1587), in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, and Yan Jun in Yongxin county, Jiangxi Province, were originally kinship organizations, but I assume they allowed neighbours into their organizations later. The community compacts were not kinship organizations. There is more documentation of Luo Rufang's community compact than of Wang Bi's and Yan Jun's. Still, it is rather difficult to determine if this was a social movement outside the established system, or a reform movement within the established system. Therefore, a question which will be discussed in Chapter 6 is whether the Taizhou practitioners mainly created a religious movement or a social movement. Furthermore, I will return to the question whether this movement was autonomous or an integrated part of the Wang Yangming movement.

Tradition and mysticism

As I briefly touched on in the section on Confucianism above, there has been a long scholarly debate whether Confucianism should be defined as a religion or a philosophy. In scholarly works it has been more common to treat Confucianism in works on Chinese philosophy or political thought.⁷⁹ Works on Chinese religion however, also sometimes have specific chapters on Confucianism,⁸⁰ but in many cases, those works have a different structure.⁸¹

The question whether Confucianism is a religion, or a philosophy is problematic since in traditional China there were no words for 'religion' and 'philosophy'. In the Ming, people did not talk of traditions as "religious" or "philosophical" at all. Strictly speaking, not even Buddhism and Daoism were defined as religions.

The Taizhou practitioners did not use the modern concept of 'philosophy' (*zhexue* 哲學). Scholars in late Ming and early Qing used the term *zhesi* 哲思 (literally: wisdom and thoughts),⁸² which could be regarded as equivalent to 'philosophy', but I have not seen it in the texts by the Taizhou practitioners. They use the word *zhe* 哲, but this has the meaning of 'wisdom'. When describing Wang Gen's and the other Taizhou practitioners' view of man and cosmos, I will talk of their thoughts and ideas, although it is possible to regard their views as a philosophy of life; I find, for instance, the thoughts of Wang Gen to form a coherent whole. Their focus is on action, changing people's minds and human conditions. The thoughts of Wang Yangming are both

⁷⁹ There are for instance Fung 1973, Chan 1963b and Hsiao 1979.

⁸⁰ Thompson 1979, Yao and Zhao 2010.

⁸¹ Gentz 2013 treat the three traditions separately, Poceski 2009 does this too, and Poceski has furthermore a chapter on Christianity and Islam in China. Jochim 1986 discusses Confucianism in separate sections within different chapters which are thematically arranged.

⁸² See Chapter 7, "The question of 'religionization'".

systematic and elaborated and deserve to be called a philosophy, although like the Taizhou practitioners he also emphasized action.

Confucianism could be regarded as a religion which has intellectual, emotional, behavioural, social, institutional and other aspects. However, I find it better to regard it as a tradition, as people living in the Ming dynasty did. This tradition includes a wide range of aspects such as philosophical, religious, spiritual, ethical, social, political and institutional. It is to a high degree a religious tradition, but there are also other aspects mentioned above which are vital to this tradition, such as its political aspects. Therefore, I usually do not talk of Confucianism as “a religion” but claim that it is a tradition which in many ways is “religious”. It is some of these religious and spiritual aspects of Confucianism that will be in focus in this thesis, especially in Chapter 6. The Buddhist and Daoist traditions could also be regarded as traditions rather than religions, as well as Judaism and Hinduism. Even Christianity and Islam are traditions, although they often fit into most definitions of religion. Two examples of definitions of religion will be dealt with in Chapter 7.

The concept of tradition comes from the Latin word *traditio*, which means ‘that which is transmitted’, and it is usually regarded as something which should be transmitted from generation to generation. In the Confucian context, the objects of transmission consisted of a body of classical texts. They had the function of acting as discussion material throughout Chinese history after their coming into being. The Confucian tradition is thus a commentarial one, and within this commentarial tradition there are possibilities to be creative (as in every tradition). The body of texts does not change much, but the values can and often do. Therefore, the concept of tradition does not mean a status quo in discourse and it is not a transmission of a fixed set of values. What is transmitted is besides the textual corpus a way to relate to it, which means that the texts are the point of departure but not their destination. As has been shown by John Makeham, philosophical creativity has, for instance, developed within the Confucian commentarial tradition.⁸³ The texts that are regarded as most important or sacred might vary, and there might also be new texts in the sacred canon.⁸⁴ This is also the case with the Taizhou movement with the difference that it relies more on oral tradition. How this oral tradition interacts with the textual tradition is a complicated question, which I am afraid I will not be able to answer in a substantial way in this thesis, but I hope it might be possible to draw some tentative suggestions after examining the ideas and praxis of the Taizhou practitioners.

As discussed in the previous section, it is not self-evident how a network such as the Taizhou practitioners should be categorized. The strong emotional

⁸³ Makeham 2003: *passim*.

⁸⁴ Lewis & Hammer 2007: *passim*. For me it is, however, not a big problem that the traditions are in fact creative and innovative.

fervour of the Taizhou practitioners leads our thoughts to Protestant pietism and Pentecostal revivalism, as well as to lay Buddhist movements in Buddhist countries and the Bhakti movement in India. Similarities with pietism includes the individual and communal reading of the classics, emphasis on personal experience and their socio-ethical commitments. However, in the Taizhou movement there are no personal relations with different divinities as there are in the Bhakti movement, lay Buddhism or Christian pietism or revivalism. The Taizhou practitioners try to experience a reality in themselves, usually called the Way (*dao* 道) or the Heavenly Principle (*tianli* 天理), which connects the individual with other fellow-beings and the whole world. This reality is thus not only transcendent, and not only immanent, but is also the connection between the individual, all human beings and the cosmos. However, people in the Ming did not distinguish between ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’. As in the case of the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘philosophy’ these distinctions did not exist.

The mainland scholar Chen Lai describes Neo-Confucianism in general as containing a mystical tradition.⁸⁵ For him one predominant aspect of Neo-Confucianism is its striving for a specific state of mind (*jingshen jingjie* 精神境界).⁸⁶ In describing this state of mind Chen talks of feelings of sacredness, concentration, calm and happiness, and experiences of oneness and pure consciousness.⁸⁷ However, in his view, although the Confucian tradition and especially Neo-Confucianism contain a mystical tradition, it is not its main *fora*. The strongest aspect of Confucianism is rationality, claims Chen.⁸⁸ This mystical tradition is also found in the Taizhou movement. The concepts of ‘the Way’ and ‘the Heavenly Principle’ could be regarded metaphysical concepts; they are key concepts in Neo-Confucianism as well as in the Taizhou movement. In contrast Chen Lai, Richard King claims that to put rationality and mysticism in opposition to each other is wrong; it creates an antagonism between mysticism and rationality which does not exist.⁸⁹ I agree; nevertheless many Chinese Neo-Confucians believed in such a contradiction and definitely put orthodox Confucianism which could be spoken of with correct terminology, in opposition to the mystical tradition, which is dark and obscure (*xuan* 玄). They accused its adherents and the Taizhou practitioners of having absurd ideas (*huangtang* 荒唐).⁹⁰ The Taizhou practitioners’ striving for an altered state of mind is not only similar to mysticism in other religions. Their striving for a specific state of mind, characterized by calm and a higher awareness, was gained through meditation. Wang Gen came to the

⁸⁵ Chen 2006: 359–384.

⁸⁶ Chen 2006: 3.

⁸⁷ Chen 2006: 361.

⁸⁸ Chen 2006: 362.

⁸⁹ For a discussion on the development of the definition of mysticism see King 1999, Chapter 1. The power of definitions: A genealogy of the idea of ‘the mystical’: 7–34.

⁹⁰ Wu 2009a: 437.

conclusion that such a state of mind should not end with the meditation session, but be extended into daily life. In Chapter 4, I will show how Wang Gen uses concepts such as “investigation of things” and how he talks of “resting” in different situations, focusing on “daily life” and proceeding from “here and now”.

2. Method, sources and previous research

Method

The method used in this study is mainly historical-philological; the main task has therefore been a close reading of relevant primary sources. Since the period for my investigation is limited to the sixteenth century, the main body of texts is from this period. However, the authors of these texts were part of a commentarial tradition preoccupied with classical texts dating as far back as the eleventh century BC. This means I also have had to go back to these texts to read the original context of references made by the Taizhou practitioners. *The Records of Ming Dynasty Learning* is from the seventeenth century and is also an important source, which I will comment on in the following section. It has furthermore been necessary to reach an understanding of the development of Confucianism over time, as well as to understand the contemporary social and societal situation of the Taizhou practitioners. In a study which focuses on the sixteenth century, the diachronic study of Confucianism cannot be very comprehensive, but an understanding of earlier Confucianism and its developments over time is necessary in order to be able to grasp what kind of change the Taizhou movement created and its impact on the Confucian discourse. In a similar way, I have tried to reach an understanding of the larger developments of Daoism and Buddhism. The Taizhou practitioners were products of earlier Confucian discourse and praxis and were directly and indirectly influenced by Buddhism and Daoism. At the same time, they would not have become what they were if they had not lived during a specific time. They were clearly a product of Ming society. This meant that I also had to understand the contemporary culture, society, economy and so on. In Chapter 3, I have sketched this background of Ming society and its religious culture.

The Taizhou practitioners' reading of the Classics has the contemporary situation as their point of reference, and they interpreted them from their enlightenment experiences. Wang Gen says that the Confucian Classics are only footnotes to his own mind.⁹¹ Nevertheless, there are numerous quotations from them. It has been necessary to go back to them to figure out the original context, and this original context is most of the time crucial for understanding

⁹¹ XZW, Juan 2: 11b.

the discussion and argumentation of the sixteenth century Taizhou practitioners.

One difficulty when studying the Ming material is that the narratives are often contradictory. This is the case with all the court convictions discussed in Chapter 8. I have chosen to refer to these narratives one by one to show the reader their complexity. In my analysis of these convictions, I have seldom presented my own judgements but rather pointed out different agendas of the writers to give the reader some possible scenarios.

Studying the Taizhou practitioners involves another difficulty compared with other Neo-Confucian groups in the Ming: their vernacular language, which is uneducated and colloquial and, in many ways, has a richness of expression which makes it more difficult to understand. This pertains especially to Yan Jun, but also to Wang Gen. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it is not always possible to understand their vocabulary by using traditional language tools, which cover most concepts of the elite language used by literati scholars. I have tried to grasp the main argumentation and determine which translation options are likely or unlikely.

Since I have used a wide range of genres such as gazetteer texts, letters, poems, autobiographies, prefaces and hagiographical material, including chronological biographies, it has been important in each case to adapt the interpretation to the text type. It has been crucial to bear in mind the purpose of a specific text, and that none is neutral.⁹²

I have not used the retrospective method sometimes applied in the history of religions, which means trying to understand an earlier phase in history by studying later texts; but by reading later texts by Yan Jun and He Xinyin, I became more attentive when rereading texts by Wang Gen. This also changed my understanding of Wang Gen.

Works by Wang Yangming, Wang Gen and other Taizhou practitioners

The most important sources for this thesis are works written by Wang Gen and his followers Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Luo Rufang, but to be able to contextualize them, I also had to study *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*. For instance, to trace the Buddhist influences on Wang Gen, it was necessary to go back to the works of Wang Yangming, even though Wang Gen could have been influenced by other contemporaries and by the religious

⁹² Eichman claims that the epistolary genre is the best descriptive source because the audience is specified, which is true, but I still find it necessary also to use other genres. See Eichman 2016: 4. The greater variety of sources the better, since one source can verify or question another. Furthermore, it is not always the case that the whole correspondence is intact, which can make a letter hang in the air.

milieu in which he grew up and lived in. *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming* contains the most famous text by Wang Yangming *The Record of Transmitting Moral Education* (*Chuanxi Lu* 傳習錄, hereafter shortened as *Moral Education*), which is a compilation of his sayings edited by some of his disciples.⁹³

As for sources of Wang Gen, I have used a Ming edition of *The Complete Works of Master Wang Xinzhai*, 重鑄心齋王先生全集, proof-read by Wang Yuanding, who was a grandson of Wang Gen.⁹⁴ It has a preface by Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) written in 1604 and contains selected sayings by Wang Gen, his poems, letters, essays, treatises and his *Chronological Biography*, written by Zhang Feng 張峰.⁹⁵ I have also used a modern reprint of *The Complete works of Wang Xinzhai*, compiled in 1910 by Yuan Chengye, printed in 1912. This is quite different, and *The Chronological Biography* by Yuan Chengye is more elaborate. This edition furthermore contains two sections of writings, one by his relative Wang Dong and another by his second son Wang Bi. The Ming edition of Wang Gen's writings is, of course, more reliable.

The Collected Works of Yan Jun (*Yan Jun Ji* 顏鈞集) printed in 1996 were edited and punctuated by Huang Xuanmin (1934–2001). This collection contains not only treatises, essays, poems, and letters by Yan Jun but also letters to Yan Jun, biographies of him, and other texts by his contemporaries. Huang Xuanmin has written a chronological biography of Yan Jun, comparing dates of the life of Wang Yangming. Furthermore, there is one section devoted to Han Zhen 韓貞 (dates unknown), a potter and a second-generation disciple of Wang Gen. He first received the Taizhou learning from the woodcutter Zhu Shu 朱恕 (dates unknown), and later completed his studies under Wang Gen's son Wang Bi. This work stimulated scholars like Yu Yingshi, Chen Lai and others to reevaluate *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* and criticize Huang Zongxi for not using primary sources when writing on Yan

⁹³ Those disciples were Xu Ai 徐愛 (1487–1517), Xue Kan 薛侃 (1486–1545) and Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1496–1574). *Chuanxi Lu*, which is found in *The Collected Works by Wang Yangming* (*Wang Yangming quaiji*) is translated by Wing-tsit Chan as *Instructions for Practical Living in Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming* (1963). I however prefer to translate it as *The Record of Transmitting Moral Education*. *Chuan* means 'to transmit' and *xi* means 'to practice' or 'to repeat'. The latter word is central in Confucianism, and goes back to the first line in the *Analects* which says that "To study and now and then repeat/practice it (that is what you study or have learnt), isn't that happiness? (*Xue er shi xi zhi, bu yi yue hu?* 學而時習之，不亦說乎). It was probably not Wang Yangming, who chose the title but the editors, and in their view their master Wang Yangming was a transmitter of a praxis linked to the Confucian tradition. Practice does not refer to practical work such as house construction, but moral self-cultivation, that is, transmission of an ethical tradition and the application of a system of thought.

⁹⁴ Xinzhai is the styled name of Wang Gen.

⁹⁵ And a second preface written in 1615. Wu Zhen argues that Zhou Rudeng ought to be placed in the Zhezhong School as a disciple of Wang Ji. (Wu 2009: 3)

Jun. Huang Xuanmin received texts written by Yan Jun from Yan Xueshu 顏學恕 and Yan Yukai 顏煜開, who belonged to the twelfth and thirteenth generation descendants of Yan Jun.⁹⁶ One problem with this volume, however, is that the original texts are not stored in any of the accessible libraries, so I have not been able to doublecheck the texts by Yan Jun with the original in this edition, as I could do with the gazetteer texts and *Mingshi* texts in the same volume. I share this situation with prominent professors in China, Taiwan and Japan, who also rely on this edition.⁹⁷ Another question regarding their authenticity is: How reliable are texts handed down within a family clan? From the time of Wang Shizhen up to our time and Wu Zhen, scholars have complained about Yan Jun's way of writing. Huang Xuanmin discusses in the foreword to *Yan Jun Ji*, whether the editors made a mess of Yan Jun's autobiography or if he had become senile at the time he wrote it. However, Yan Jun as a person, whose strong side was his direct contact with disciples and performance, expressed himself in language which might have been difficult for an erudite scholar like Wang Shizhen to understand, not to mention modern scholars studying intellectuals of past times.

As for the writings of He Xinyin and Luo Rufang, I have relied mostly on two modern reprints. The Collected Works by He Xinyin *He Xinyin Ji* (1981) is edited and punctuated by Rong Zhaozu. It contains essays and letters by He Xinyin as well as letters to He Xinyin from his friends. There we also find critical essays written by his antagonists Wang Shizhen 王士禎⁹⁸ and Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣,⁹⁹ the magistrate who wrote his verdict.

The Collected Works by Luo Rufang *Luo Rufang Ji* (2007), published in two volumes, contains his sayings and philosophical writings, his letters and poems. In the appendixes, there are several texts by his disciple Yang Qiuyan 楊起元 (1547–1599), but also by Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596), Geng Dingli 耿定理 (1534–1584), Li Zhi, Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 (1547–1629) and others. There we also find a modern chronological biography compiled by Fang Zuyou 方祖猶.

Sources

It is not self-evident what should be defined as a primary source. For me, a primary source is a text which is produced by the subjects of my investigation,

⁹⁶ YJJ: 100.

⁹⁷ Wang Fansen 1999 and Wu 2009a.

⁹⁸ This person, who is the son of Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣, should not be mixed up with the well-known scholar and writer Wang Shizhen 王世貞.

⁹⁹ It should be noted that there is another Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣, who is a grandson of Wang Gen.

so it consists of texts written by or attributed to the Taizhou practitioners. That means that the primary sources are texts by the insiders of this movement. However, I have limited the period of my investigation to the sixteenth century, so Taizhou practitioners active in the seventeenth century do not appear in my investigation although they are insiders too. Furthermore, during the sixteenth century, there were many critical voices of the Taizhou movement. In my analysis, as outsiders they would not be counted as sources, but I still place them under the heading “Primary sources”, since they belong to the same period. There are also several scholars who are not usually seen as belonging to the Taizhou movement but were friends with the Taizhou practitioners and wrote letters to them. Since I argue that the Taizhou practitioners did not form a school, and that the lines between them and other Neo-Confucians were porous, the works of those scholars are also placed among the primary sources.

The easiest way to avoid these difficulties would have been to divide the bibliography into two sections: first, sources in Classical Chinese and secondly, other sources. This is how Wu Zhen structures his bibliography in *Research on the Taizhou School* (*Taizhou xuepai yanjiu* 泰州学派研究), but I think my way is more in congruency with the demarcation of my study, and how I relate to the sources and literature used.

The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning

The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning by Huang Zongxi (1610–1695) is a natural point of departure when studying branches of the Wang Yangming School.¹⁰⁰ The aim of this work is to describe all Confucian schools during the Ming period. Huang recognizes seventeen schools, and besides descriptions of the schools he also provides a great number of biographies of individual thinkers as well as texts written by those he found most important. Thus, as a rule, he also described those whom he disliked or disagreed with something he mentions in his preface.¹⁰¹ An exception is possibly Li Zhi, who is omitted in Huang’s work.¹⁰² Huang reported that he had finished *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* in 1676, and the first edition was published in 1693.

The famous philosopher and reformist Liang Qichao (1873–1929) praised *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* and the historiography of

¹⁰⁰ The work was partially translated and printed in 1987 in the volume *The Records of Ming Scholars*, A selected translation, Julia Ching ed. with the collaboration of Chaoying Fang.

¹⁰¹ MRXA. “Introduction”: 15/xv.

¹⁰² We cannot, however, be one hundred percent sure that he did not write about him, and that the editors or censors later cut out Li Zhi’s case from Huang’s work.

Huang Zongxi as the beginning of modern intellectual history in China. However, although the *xuean* (learning case) genre,¹⁰³ gives the reader an opportunity to make independent evaluations, Huang still had his own agenda. This agenda will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The most important part of *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* for the present thesis is the section called “The Records of Taizhou Learning” (*Taizhou Xuean* 泰州學案), which depicts those men whom Huang Zongxi categorized as members of the Taizhou School. In this section, he has an entry on Wang Gen, where Wang Gen’s *Recorded Conversations* (*Yulu* 語錄) are quoted. To investigate the degree of partiality of Huang’s work, I compared them with *Recorded Conversations* in Wang Gen’s Complete Works: *Chongjuan Xinzhai Wang Xiansheng Quanj*. I found that some sayings were missing, but the sayings quoted by Huang Zongxi were in most cases identical with the original. The conclusion must be that he treated at least Wang Gen in an impartial way.

Is *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* a primary source or a secondary source? If the object of the study is the Taizhou practitioners, *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* is obviously a secondary source. This work was written more than 50 years later, and Huang Zongxi does not belong to an offshoot of their group. Furthermore, the aim of his work is to create a survey of the whole Ming dynasty and its intellectual history. On the other hand, I must admit that my work is in part a study of Huang Zongxi in his own right, through his description of the Taizhou practitioners, and one secondary purpose of my study is to shed some light on Huang Zongxi, his agenda and his stance at the beginning of the Qing dynasty. Thus Huang Zongxi becomes a borderline case, but since my main objective is to study the Taizhou practitioners, I have nevertheless decided to place Huang among the secondary sources under the heading “literature”. However, I would like to point out the problem of defining primary and secondary sources, and that there is a gliding scale of closeness to the subject of study.

Local Gazetteers

Gazetteer texts belong to the early sources. Some of them are from the Ming dynasty and therefore older than both *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* and the official history of the Ming dynasty, the *Mingshi*, which, like *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* was compiled during the

¹⁰³ Lynn A. Struve argues that the genre *xuean* was not an invention of Huang’s, see Struve 1988: 480–481. She refers to Qian Mu, who pointed out that the term was used by Chan Buddhist writers. See Qian 1973.

following Manchu Qing dynasty, with the implications that the restrictions of a non-Han government entail.¹⁰⁴ I have used the Taizhou Gazetteer from 1633. Due to administrative reform and amalgamation of counties during the Qing, the information on Taizhou County from the Qing dynasty is found in *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* (1817). Biographical notes on Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Luo Rufang are found in gazetteers from the Jiangxi Province (*Ji'an Fu Gazetteer* 1660, *Yongxin Gazetteer* 1874).

Previous research

In China, a new interest in the Taizhou movement started when the May Fourth Movement became a real force in the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars later labelled as “New Confucians”¹⁰⁵ were inspired by Western philosophy, Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism from the Song and the Ming dynasties.¹⁰⁶ Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988), sometimes regarded as a New Confucian, was a Buddhist who held the first professorial chair in Indian philosophy at Beijing University. He became attracted to Confucianism after having read Wang Yangming and especially Wang Gen. At the same time, Liang admired William James and John Dewey, the latter also teaching at

¹⁰⁴ Gazetteers are publications produced at different levels of administration such as county, prefecture and national level. There are also gazetteers for temples, important sites, and so on. It has been very useful for scholars doing research on local history to use county gazetteers. They were written to help a new magistrate taking up his post in a certain county, who did not have any previous knowledge of the area. Sometimes gazetteers only repeat earlier editions. For a discussion on their advantages and shortcomings see Pierre-Etienne Will’s article “Local Gazetteers as a Source for the Study of Long-term Economic Change in China: Opportunities and Problems”, *Hanxue Yanjiu*, No. 3. (民國 74 年 12 月). There is also a newly published work which discusses gazetteers. See Dennis 2015.

¹⁰⁵ The term “New Confucian” is used for Confucians of the 20th Century. They are inspired by the Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties as well as Western philosophers like Immanuel Kant.

¹⁰⁶ There were Qian Mu (1895–1990), Xiong Shili (1885–1968) and Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang 1886–1969). Qian Mu has written extensively on Chinese intellectual, cultural and philosophical history. Some works focus specifically on Neo-Confucianism. See for instance *Song Ming Lixue Gaishu* [An Outline History of School of Principle of Song and Ming], reprinted in 2010. Yu-ying Shih, who was a student of Qian Mu, has argued that Qian Mu never was a New Confucian, see Makeham 2008: 150. Xiong Shili was originally a student of Buddhism and was invited to Beijing University to teach Buddhist logic and Yogacara Buddhism. However, he re-evaluated the earlier Yogacara Masters Vasubandhu and Asanga, as well as Dharmapala and Xuanzang, and became the thinker that is regarded as seminal in the revival of Confucianism. Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang), studied in Japan and Germany and became a spokesman for German social democracy. Dissatisfied with both Chinese Communism in the PRC and the regime of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, Zhang moved to the USA in 1949. He is the author of *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, 1957.

Beijing University during 1919–1920. Liang claimed that Western pragmatism was the “completion” of the Western attitude, and he drew parallels between the Western pragmatics’ view of action and knowledge and the philosophy of Wang Yangming and Wang Gen.¹⁰⁷

The radical scholar Ji Wenfu 嵇文甫 (1895–1963) was seminal in using the term “left-wing of the Wang Yangming School”, choosing it as a title for his work *Zuopai Wangxue* [The Left Wing of the Wang Yangming School] (1934).¹⁰⁸ In this work he introduces a political terminology describing Wang Ji and Wang Gen as the main figures of the “left wing”.¹⁰⁹ This label focuses on their political radicalism, which to a certain extent is there, but misses the broader picture including their spirituality and view of human beings, *Dao* and how human beings are related to each other and to the cosmos. What is symptomatic is that Ji Wenfu never defines the labels “leftist” and “rightist”. In his *Intellectual History of the Late Ming* he says:

Longxi [Wang Ji] and Xinzhai [Wang Gen] often went beyond the teaching of their masters’ learning and took the tide of the contemporary emancipation of thought to its extreme, forming the left wing of the Wang Yangming teaching; and furthermore, they shaped the spirit of the followers, propagating the ideas of Yangming everywhere, so that with enthusiasm and inspiration it spread with the wind to all corners of the country. This is a fact that cannot be denied.¹¹⁰

Ji Wenfu shares with Huang Zongxi the observation that they were extreme. The Taizhou practitioners, according to Ji Wenfu, are ‘crazy’ or ‘wild’ (*kuang* 狂).¹¹¹ Probably quite early on this characterization was used for people who believed in sudden enlightenment, that is, who belonged to the subitist tradition with deep roots in early Daoism and Chan Buddhism.¹¹² This tradition also focuses on emptiness or nothingness, which is related to the idea of sudden insight.

In Ji Wenfu’s writings, the word *kuang* is linked to the accusation of the two Wang’s as “wild Chanists”; thus in his case the division of left and right wing becomes a parallel to the sudden and gradual paths of the Chan Buddhists. The terminology of leftist and rightist introduced by Ji Wenfu has been used by scholars after him in a rather unreflected manner. In the view of Ji Wenfu, the two Wangs catch the spirit of Wang Yangming’s teaching,

¹⁰⁷ Alitto 1986: 111–112.

¹⁰⁸ Before this work he had published *Wanming sixiangshi lun* [Discussion on the History of late Ming Thought] (1933).

¹⁰⁹ Ji 1996 (1943): 16.

¹¹⁰ Ji 1966 (1943):16–17.

¹¹¹ Interestingly, the term sometimes is used for the opposite group, i.e. those who are extremely ardent. It becomes a circle where those who are most wild and those who are most ardent meet, like leftist and rightist extremists.

¹¹² D mi ville 1956: 23. The concept of subitism comes from the French word ‘subit’. See also D mi ville 1973: 119.

which according to him is in its essence “kuang”.¹¹³ At the same time, he tries to distance himself from the label “wild Chan” by talking about “the *so-called* wild Chan followers”¹¹⁴ (my italics). Ji Wenfu has the same idea as Huang Zongxi, namely that the ideas of the Taizhou practitioners before Yan Jun and He Xinyin were within mainstream Neo-Confucian teaching, but that from Yan Jun on they were not so any longer.¹¹⁵ The difference is that Ji does not condemn them as Huang does, but appreciates them. He furthermore regards them as forerunners of Li Zhi. At the end of Ming, the ideas of “wild chanism” spread to intellectuals in general. The critics of the Taizhou practitioners used the label *kuang* derogatorily, but the term was taken up by those accused with pride. Wang Ji is one example. He talks of *kuang* in a positive way as opposed to *juan* 絹, a word usually translated as ‘ardent’.¹¹⁶

Following Ji Wenfu, several scholars with a political leftist view have been interested in Wang Gen and the Taizhou movement, for example Hou Wailu.¹¹⁷ Li Zhi, who was inspired by Wang Gen and knew several of the Taizhou practitioners, was also rediscovered at the time of the May Fourth Movement by Wu Yu 吳虞 (1872–1949), who wrote his biography. Li’s works were re-edited during the 1950s and 1960s, and his criticism of Confucianism was used by those who attacked Confucianism during the Cultural Revolution.¹¹⁸ Whether they understood him properly is another question.

Western research on the Taizhou movement was augmented by William Theodore de Bary in his seminal article “Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought”¹¹⁹, which inspired some of his students at Columbia University and other American universities to write PhD theses on various Taizhou practitioners. Ronald G. Dimberg published a monograph of He Xinyin in 1974, Edward T. Ch’ien one about Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1547–1629) in 1986, and Lee Sheng-kuang wrote a PhD thesis on Wang Gen in 1990.¹²⁰ In Europe, Jean-Francois Billeter published his thesis on *Li Zhi, philosophe maudit (1527–1602)* in 1979, and Monika Übelhör wrote a monograph of Wang Gen in 1986.¹²¹ After this, not much was done until 1996, when Yu-yin

¹¹³ Ji 1934 : 1.

¹¹⁴ Ji 1996 (1933): 50.

¹¹⁵ Ji 1996 (1933): 50.

¹¹⁶ Ji 1996 (1933): 51.

¹¹⁷ For instance, Gong Jie 龚杰, who was a student of Hou Wailu. Gong comes, however, to a different conclusion than Hou about the similarities with the Western Enlightenment. Gong argues that the Western Enlightenment and the Taizhou movement were two different forms of intellectual currents. He argues that the egalitarian strivings and other ideas of Wang Gen were never generalized. This came first with Huang Zongxi, who argued for a reformation of the legal system on a national level. See Gong 2001: 305.

¹¹⁸ Billeter 1979: 11.

¹¹⁹ de Bary 1970: 145–248.

¹²⁰ Dimberg 1974. Ch’ien 1986. Lee 1990.

¹²¹ Übelhör 1986.

Cheng completed a thesis which analyses the social background of the Taizhou practitioners and describes their organizations. Her title *Sagehood and the Common Man; T'ai-chou Confucianism in Late Ming Society* echoes the title of Lee Sheng-kuang's thesis *Commoner and Sagehood; Wang Ken and the T'ai-chou School in Late Ming Society*. Cheng and Lee are both interested in the social situation of the Taizhou practitioners, with the difference that Cheng is more ambitious and covers He Xinyin and Luo Rufang beside Wang Gen, while Lee Sheng-kuang focuses on Wang Gen only. However, Cheng does not have much information on Yan Jun, since her thesis was written before the publication of *Yan Jun Ji* in 1996. Of these works, Billeter is still read among scholars interested in the spectacular fate and ideas of Li Zhi. Edward T. Ch'ien's work on Jiao Hong made Yü-ying Shih publish a long (42 pages) review of his book,¹²² criticizing him for using German phenomenology and French structuralism to create arguments "tortuously labored"¹²³ and accusing Ch'ien of utilizing Jiao Hong "to play his own 'game'"¹²⁴. This provocation by Ch'ien made Yü revisit the world of Jiao Hong, and gave him an opportunity to attack what he claimed were malpractices within phenomenology and structuralism. However, I believe that the reason for Yü to attack Ch'ien is not only his use of Western phenomenology and structuralism, but that Ch'ien argues that Jiao Hong combined Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist ideas, and that this mix could be attributed to the whole Neo-Confucian movement. None of the other PhD theses on Wang Gen and the Taizhou School have stirred up a similar discussion.

There has been a lack of research on Yan Jun in Western research. Except for a short comment on Yan Jun's "seven-day confinement" by Masaya Mabuchi,¹²⁵ the *Collected Works of Yan Jun* is not discussed in Western scholarship.

There are also several important Japanese scholars who have made contributions to this field of research, for example Okada Takehiko (1909–2004), a specialist on the Wang Yangming School.¹²⁶ Like Ji Wenfu, Okada divides the followers of Wang Yangming into three branches. First, the left wing or the existentialist school *xiancheng pai*; second the right wing or the quietist school *guiji pai*; and finally, the orthodox school or the cultivation school *xiucheng pai*.¹²⁷ He takes a step forward in his attempt to change the political terminology of Ji Wenfu.

Other Japanese scholars with interests close to the Taizhou movement are Araki Kengo (1917–), who has explored that which he calls "the Confucian-

¹²² Yü 1988: 24–66.

¹²³ Yü 1988: 25.

¹²⁴ Yü 1988: 24.

¹²⁵ Mabuchi 2016: 216.

¹²⁶ Okada has written about Wang Ji and existentialism. See Okada 1970.

¹²⁷ Okada 1970: 121–144.

Buddhist syncretism” in late Ming, and Shimada Kenji (1917–2000), who has written on philosophical concepts like “function”.¹²⁸

Recently, publications on Song Ming Neo-Confucianism in general and on the Taizhou practitioners specifically, have exploded in the People’s Republic of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Well-known scholars like Chen Lai, Ge Zhaoguang, Yü Ying-shih and Wang Fan-sen have re-evaluated the Taizhou practitioners, inspiring their students to make studies on related aspects. Different disciplines and angles of approach, spanning from intellectual history, philosophy, literature and religion, to sociology, history and political science have shown interest in the movement. It has become an impossible task to read everything that is published in Chinese on different aspects of the Taizhou movement. To generalize, one might say that the political interest for Neo-Confucianism and the Taizhou movement has made way for increased interest in religious and spiritual approaches. Chen Lai compares Neo-Confucianism with the mysticism of Western tradition, and Wang Fan-sen discusses the “religionization” *zongjiaohua* of Confucianism in relation to the Taizhou practitioners. Criticism of earlier scholarship is sometimes hard. As mentioned above, many scholars are at present critical of Huang Zongxi. Wu Zhen (b. 1957), Professor of Philosophy at Fudan University, Shanghai, has written extensively on a great number of Taizhou practitioners. He criticizes Huang’s criteria for those who ought to be counted among the so-called Taizhou School, and in line with his arguments, Wu rewrites the map of the Ming scholars in the *Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*. In this way, he comes close to establishing himself as a “new Huang Zongxi” of the twenty-first century. However, there are no scholars who criticize the concept of ‘school’ in a fundamental way. Wu Zhen questions that Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 (1508–1576) should be regarded as a Taizhou practitioner, without explaining why. According to Huang Xuanmin, Zhao Zhenji was a disciple of Yan Jun. He mentions that they travelled together to Guangxi in 1551,¹²⁹ when Zhao Zhenji had been degraded for a post in Lipu 荔浦. If this is true it indicates a close relationship between Yan and Zhao. Zhao Zhenji is like Jiao Hong, one of those who are very open about his link to Buddhism. Wu Zhen probably has a definition of the Taizhou practitioners as *Ruists* or Confucians, and since Zhao Zhenji cannot be defined as a *Ru*, he must be taken off the map. Instead of creating a theory from reality, the real Taizhou practitioners must be adapted to categories which are “pre-existing” in the scholarly theory. I suppose this is a similar problem as Yü Ying-Shih had with Edward Ch’ien and Jiao Hong.

One might speculate about the reasons for the renewed interest in the Taizhou movement. Lynn A. Struve argues in her article “Modern China’s Liberal Muse: The Late Ming” that Chinese scholars and public intellectuals

¹²⁸ Araki 2008: *passim*. Shimada 2010: *passim*.

¹²⁹ Huang 1996: 2 (Huang Xuanmin’s introduction in YJJ).

have seen “an indigenous potential for liberal modern development “in the late Ming period.¹³⁰ This might be true in relation to economic history, but the interest in Neo-Confucianism and the Taizhou movement does not only have to do with a wish to find precursors of a liberal attitude; it is also linked to a yearning to understand ones cultural identity, and the ideas of Neo-Confucianism and the Taizhou practitioners are itching and irritating. They are Confucian, but at the same time they are not. They are Chinese, but at the same time there is an Indian influence hidden within the transformed Buddhism that blended with indigenous Chinese tradition. They deal with this world but do not always fit into it, and they sometimes affirm desires to stay free from desires, yearning for a state of mind characterized by stable calmness and joy.

Something that earlier research has neglected is the intricate relationship within the Taizhou movement between meditation practices and social activism. In my view, the Taizhou practitioners worked hard like other Neo-Confucians to reach the desired a state of mind, but they also saw the societal obstacles to their goal, and that it was necessary to transform society to create a situation which enabled them to reach this goal. The spiritual freedom, with absence of dogmas, which they inherited from Wang Yangming, and the belief that everyone ultimately is a sage, creates a kind of crisis, according to Wu Zhen. Diligent work on self-cultivation is not required, and then people might get lost in total freedom without rules of praxis. The answer the Taizhou practitioners provided to this problem was to organize themselves on the local and popular level to create a habit of engaging in practices of various kinds.

¹³⁰ Struve 2011: 38–68.

3. Ming society and its religious milieu

In this chapter, I will present the societal and cultural background of the Taizhou movement. I will focus on those aspects that are important for the understanding of the emergence and development of this movement. The most important periods for my thesis are the Jiajing (1522–1566) and the Wanli (1567–1620) reigns. It was during these two reigns that the Taizhou movement took form and the first five generations of Taizhou leaders were active. Taizhou, a prefecture in the Province of South Zhili, was an area known for its salt production and linked to the salt trade. The initiator of the Taizhou movement, Wang Gen, came from a salt-producing family and was a dealer in the salt trade, so it is also necessary to say a few words about this business. Since Wang Gen was teaching intensively and on a large scale, his teaching quickly spread to areas far from Taizhou reaching almost all the corners of China. However, Jiangxi Province would soon become a new centre for the Taizhou activities, although there were still activities in Taizhou. Some vigorous Taizhou leaders of the second and third generation were born in different counties of Jiangxi. One question is why the Taizhou learning became so strong in Jiangxi.

A new aspect of the Taizhou movement was that the literati scholars were no longer the sole category studying the Classics and developing their interpretations of them. From the beginning of the Taizhou movement people of different social backgrounds took part in the learned discussions, developing ideas about ethical concepts usually regarded as typical Confucian learning. With self-confidence people of merchant or even more humble origin believed they had something to contribute. They did not believe in the civil service examinations and preferred to engage in the activities of the academies and lineage organizations. Some had been taking examinations, but others had only a few years' education at village schools. Although they worked through local organizations, my hypothesis is that they used local organizations to spread their message on a larger scale.

Some general remarks will be given about Buddhism and Daoism in Ming China to form a background for further discussions in Chapter 8. The Taizhou practitioners' relations to Buddhism and Daoism differed. Some were more open to Buddhist ideas and practices than others. Their openness might be a result of their local roots, but I will argue that in general they were indifferent to theoretical discrepancies between the three traditions of Confucianism,

Buddhism and Daoism as long as they contributed to their goal, which was to reshape society and the human mind.

The Jiajing and the Wanli reigns

The first half of the sixteenth century has been described as a period of growth in many respects: growth of population, economy and textile production, and development of agricultural technology. This, however, did not mean good finances for the state. Fiscal control had declined compared with early Ming, which meant that the state could not benefit from the favourable economic development during this period.¹³¹

At the beginning of the Jiajing reign (1521–1567), the actions of the Jiajing Emperor in the Rite Controversy (*Dayili* 大義禮) of 1524 scared the intellectual world in China.¹³² The Emperor had 180 officials who opposed him beaten; 17 of them died and the others were sent into exile. The conflict arose because the young Emperor elevated his father to Emperor posthumously and his mother was made Dowager Empress.¹³³ The previous Emperor, Zhengde, did not have a son, which made it difficult to choose a legitimate heir apparent. The decision fell on his young cousin Zhu Houcong 朱厚熹 (1507–1567), who was a younger brother of the Hongzhi Emperor. He was favoured by the Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe 陽廷和 (1459–1529) and was only thirteen years old at the time. The boy's father had only been a son of a concubine, and there were several other candidates for the throne. Yang had arranged that on his arrival in Beijing, he would be treated like an heir apparent, but Zhu Houcong disregarded the Grand Secretary and entered the imperial capital through its main ceremonial gates as an emperor would have done, whereupon he issued his own protocols for the enthronement. In this way, he made his way to power. The Rite Controversy was a conflict between two norm systems: legitimate succession in the dynastic line and blood line succession in clan law. The grand secretaries argued for a posthumous adoption to protect the dynastic line unbroken. In this case the new emperor would have been forced to treat his real father and mother as uncle and aunt in the rituals,¹³⁴ which must have made him feel insulted, especially since his mother was still alive. Subsequently, he did not follow their advice but forced the government to elevate his father posthumously and

¹³¹ Geiss 1988: 508.

¹³² This Rite Controversy should not be mixed up with the Rite Controversy which involved Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits in China, who wanted to allow the Chinese convertites to perform ancestor rituals, something the Vatican did not approve.

¹³³ DMB: 315.

¹³⁴ Geiss 1988: 444–5.

make his mother retroactively elevated to Empress Dowager, something which was in accordance with clan law. By his action in the Rite Controversy the Jiajing Emperor sent a clear message to the officials not to go against him.

One of the Jiajing Emperor's most influential grand secretaries was Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480–1567), who controlled the grand secretariat from 1549–1562. He was a skilled politician, who knew how to manipulate the Emperor and blame others for different problems and crises of the state. Furthermore, he wisely avoided overseeing difficult issues such as protecting the borders as well as tax and revenue responsibilities. He never had the positions of Minister of War or Minister of Revenue.¹³⁵ Protecting the borders was not an easy task. There were acute threats to the Ming dynasty like the frequent Mongol horse raids. The worst episode was in 1550 when Altan Khan's forces reached Tongzhou and the imperial tombs were endangered. China also suffered from attacks from Japanese and other pirates, especially in the lower Yangzi area in the late 1550s and in Fujian and Guangdong in the 1560s.¹³⁶

The Taizhou practitioner He Xinyin (1517–1579) is said to have been involved in a plot against Yan Song in 1561. According to those rumours, He Xinyin joined a Daoist master, who tried to discredit Yan Song in the eyes of the ruler. And perhaps this strategy succeeded, because Yan Song fell from power in 1562. However, his clique continued to seek revenge on He Xinyin and this was one reason why he had to flee from place to place for several months during 1564 and 1565.¹³⁷

Of the grand secretaries during the sixteenth century, Xu Jie 徐階 (1503–1583) was the only one who, if not directly favouring the Taizhou practitioners, at least did not persecute them. He rose to power at the same time as Yan Song's power declined. Some of Xu's best friends were students of Wang Yangming,¹³⁸ and Xu Jie was himself influenced by Wang's teaching. Academies flourished during Xu's time as grand secretary, but this came to an abrupt end when his student Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582) came to power.¹³⁹ It is an irony of history that Zhang was promoted by Xu Jie.

Zhang Juzheng was grand secretary and a leading minister during the Longqing reign (1567–1572) and the first years of the Wanli reign. He had a military background and was an efficient and hardworking ruler. One of his most significant contributions was the Single Whip method for taxation, which meant that different taxes were paid on one occasion, in silver and not in grain as before.¹⁴⁰ Zhang Juzheng was not only supported by his mentor Xu Jie but also by the Neo-Confucian scholars Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563) and

¹³⁵ Geiss 1988: 484.

¹³⁶ DMB: 319–21.

¹³⁷ Dimberg 1974: 49.

¹³⁸ Such as Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563) and Ouyang De 歐陽德 (1496–1554), both attributed to the Jiangyou school by Huang Zongxi.

¹³⁹ DMB: 575.

¹⁴⁰ Geiss 1988: 525.

Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–96). The latter was counted as a Taizhou practitioner by the influential historian Huang Zongxi (1610–1695). With such connections, how is it that Zhang Juzheng became the hardest persecutor of the free academies and the discussion meetings?¹⁴¹ A further study will show that those who Huang Zongxi placed within the Taizhou School in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* did not form a homogeneous group. Compared with He Xinyin, Geng was a conservative man. It is difficult to understand why he should be regarded as a Taizhou practitioner at all. Geng became a presented scholar in 1556 and slowly rose to the position of Minister of Revenue in 1589.¹⁴² Geng and the iconoclast Li Zhi had a dispute on ideological grounds, which became personal when Li accused Geng of indirectly having caused the death of He Xinyin by not protecting him. Zhang Juzheng, on his part, had his own agenda. He wanted to make Ming a strong legalist state,¹⁴³ and in such a state there was no room for free discussions. The argument between Geng and Li, and the question whether Zhang laid behind the killing of He Xinyin will be discussed in Chapter 9.

The Wanli Emperor ruled for 48 years (1572–1620) which was the longest reign period during the Ming dynasty. His personal name was Zhu Yijun 朱翊鈞 and he was born in 1563, which means that he ascended the throne at nine years old.¹⁴⁴ He is described as a passive ruler, who was locked in his own palace as a prisoner.¹⁴⁵ He was hostile to another branch of the Wang Yangming movement, the Donglin group, but it was not until the following reign of Tianqi (1520–1527) that the Donglin movement was destroyed in a bloody repression.¹⁴⁶ The Donglin group was much more conservative than the Taizhou practitioners, criticizing the Emperor and influential politicians from an ethical perspective. Chapter 9 will deal with the question why the Donglin group was repressed harder than the Taizhou practitioners. At the time of the suppression of the Donglin faction, the Ming Empire were soon to be overthrown by the Manchus. The father of Huang Zongxi, Huang Zunsu, belonged to the Donglin group and was arrested after having impeached the

¹⁴¹ Geiss says that Zhang Juzheng “at one time contemplated taking up the type of Confucian utilitarianism promoted by the iconoclast Wang Gen (1483–1541). Wang Gen held that altruism was no more than an act of self-preservation, like trading one’s own room for that of another/.../But somewhere along the line Zhang must have concluded that his own patronage of a specific school of thought would inevitable establish a bad precedent. In the end he became the man who ordered the closing of all the private academies in the empire.” See Geiss 1988: 551. It is however unclear how Geiss knows that Zhang Juzheng was attracted by the teachings of Wang Gen.

¹⁴² DMB: 719.

¹⁴³ Crawford 1970: 367–414. Meskill does not explain why Zhang Juzheng was hostile to the academies. See Meskill 1982: 138.

¹⁴⁴ DMB: 324.

¹⁴⁵ Geiss 1988: 517.

¹⁴⁶ Dardess 2002: *passim*.

eunuch Wei Zhongxian. Huang Zunsu died in prison in 1626.¹⁴⁷ With such a background, it is natural that Huang Zongxi did not give a thoroughly unbiased picture of the Taizhou movement. The whole school of Wang Yangming had been accused of being conducive to the collapse of the Ming, which could easily cause conflict among his late followers. It has been argued that Taizhou practitioners became Huang's scape goats to save the main part of the Wang Yangming School.¹⁴⁸

The lower Yangzi area

The Taizhou movement started in an area called Jiangnan, or the lower Yangzi region. This was a large area covering the main parts of Jiangsu, Anhui and Zhejiang Provinces. (At the time, the area was divided into the provinces Nan Zhili 南直隸 and Zhejiang. Nan Zhili approximately covered today's Jiangsu and Anhui Provinces as well as Shanghai City.) Jiangnan was a culturally and economically rich area thanks to a network of rivers and canals suitable for both agriculture and trade. It was one of China's best place for growing rice, tea and fruit. Commercialization and urbanization went hand in hand. Important cities in the area were Suzhou, Nanjing, Yangzhou and Hangzhou. Suzhou was a centre for textile production, and its silk and cotton products were for both domestic trade and export. Yangzhou became one of the most important trading centres for grain, salt and textiles. The city was favourably located at the junction of the Grand Canal, the Yangzi and Huai rivers. It contained the Lianghuai Salt Administration, which was the most important of China's salt administrations.¹⁴⁹

Taizhou teaching spread to the whole country, but after Wang Gen died the main centre of its activities was Jiangxi, apart from Taizhou. Xu Yue came from Guixi, Yan Jun from Yongxin, He Xiyin from Yongfeng and Luo Rufang from Nancheng County. Yan Jun and He Xinyin both came from the same prefecture (Ji'an).

Jiangxi province is framed by the Yangzi River in the north and mountain ranges in the west, south and east. The tributary river of the Yangzi, Gan, crosses the province northward and serves as a water route and water supply for the paddy rice fields.¹⁵⁰ Thus the area is an ideal place for rice cultivation (two crops annually) but is also famous for its Jingdezhen 景德鎮 porcelain, cotton and silver mining. Compared with North Zhili, Jiangxi lacked salt

¹⁴⁷ MRXA: 1490.

¹⁴⁸ Zhao 1995: 192–194.

¹⁴⁹ Elman 1984: 9–12.

¹⁵⁰ Gerritsen 2007: 21.

manufacturing and depended entirely on imports from neighbouring provinces. The scholarly elite in the Ji'an prefecture had close ties with the founder of the Ming dynasty and the province was rebuilt during early Ming after the war which ended the Yuan dynasty. The population grew during late Ming. With many surviving sons the competition of land grew harder and the result was that many Jiangxi peasants did not have land for cultivation but had to turn to other occupations or leave their home villages. They migrated to Huguang and other provinces, went into business or became tenants on large landlord estates. Thus Jiangxi became a region of large estates and mercantile activity.¹⁵¹

Jiangxi was also a centre of cultural and intellectual activities. Ji'an produced the highest number of metropolitan degree holders of all prefectures during the Ming dynasty.¹⁵² Two important academies were located in Jiangxi Province: the Bailu dong 白鹿洞 (in today's Jiujiang city) and the Bailu Zhou 白鷺洲 academies (the latter in Ji'an). Jiangxi was the heart of the movement of free discussions located in academies, but also the heart of the whole movement of Wang Yangming. Wang Yangming was active in Jiangxi from 1510. In 1381, the first emperor of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398), had imposed the *lijia* 里甲 system, which made all household in the Empire register for taxation. Ten households made up one *jia* 甲 (tithing), and ten *jia* made up one *li* 里 (hundred).¹⁵³ Wang Yangming, following this system, set up a mutual security system (*baojia* 保甲) also based on groups of 10 families. In 1516, he was appointed Grand Coordinator for the Southern Gan region (parts of Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangdong and Fujian) to fight against the rebels in the area,¹⁵⁴ and his pacification campaign turned out to be very successful, which strengthened his position. In 1518–1522, he established community compacts (*xiangyue* 鄉約) for mutual moral improvement as well as community schools in Jiangxi.¹⁵⁵

After Wang Yangming left Jiangxi but before the Taizhou movement became active in this province, there was another group within the Wang Yangming movement located in the area, namely the Jiangyou group. Some of the members were direct disciples of Wang Yangming.¹⁵⁶ Another interesting fact is that Xu Jie had been appointed vice surveillance commissioner in charge of education in Jiangxi 1536. John Meskill, who has made a study of academies in Ming China noticed that the academies arose “from a bird's eye view in clusters, not scattered across the countryside,

¹⁵¹ Gerritsen 2007: 155.

¹⁵² Dimberg 1974: 38–39. Gerritsen 2007: 9.

¹⁵³ The system was imposed in 1381, see Brook 2010: 48.

¹⁵⁴ Meskill 1982: 70.

¹⁵⁵ Schneewind 2006: 101.

¹⁵⁶ There was Nie Bao (1487–1563), who came from Yongfeng County like He Xinyin, Zou Shouyi (1491–1562) from Anfu, Ouyang De (1496–1554) from Taihe, and Luo Hongxian (1504–1564) from Jishui. For the Jiangyou group. See Hauf 1987: *passim*.

ringing certain district and prefectural towns which themselves lay on a network of riverways.¹⁵⁷ In Yongfeng County, for instance, no less than nine academies were actively used during the Ming dynasty. In Nanchang, the province capital, there was an even greater number.¹⁵⁸ We can see that the tradition of discussion meetings in academies and community compact meetings already formed a part of the life in Jiangxi before the Taizhou movement became dominant in the region. At the same time, the Taizhou practitioners also reacted against earlier followers of Wang Yangming.

Talking of different places as centres is only possible if we also remember that the Taizhou practitioners travelled a great deal for various reasons such as business, spreading their message, or in He Xinyin's case, to avoid being arrested. Even though He Xinyin came from Jiangxi, he travelled constantly for twelve years in the south-central area of China, conducting public lectures. The area he covered stretched from Fujian in the east to the inner regions of Sichuan in the West.¹⁵⁹ The Taizhou practitioners were certainly not part of a localist turn, but rather an empire-wide movement.

Salt production and trade

The state monopoly of salt has a long history in China; as early the seventh century BC salt provided a good tax revenue. Scholars have claimed that a third to half of the imperial revenue was derived from the salt tax during the Ming dynasty.¹⁶⁰ This is very difficult to verify, and it is not easy to understand how the salt monopoly and the salt trade worked in practice. Ray Huang claims that even the administrators of the monopoly did not know "how much of its revenue was derived from the excise tax and how much from governmental control over production."¹⁶¹ The reason for the salt monopoly was not only to create revenue for the state but also to organize food supplies for the military at the borders. The salt merchants had to transport grain to the frontier posts at the northern border in exchange for governmental-issued salt tickets. The merchants then received government-monopolized salt, which they could sell.¹⁶² A great change came in 1492, when the exchange for salt certificates was monetarized, which meant that they were paid in silver.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Meskill 1982: 117.

¹⁵⁸ Meskill 1982: 118. Map of academies along the Gan River.

¹⁵⁹ Dimberg 1974: 50.

¹⁶⁰ Chiang 1975: 93. For a more recent study, see Zuo Bofu 佐伯富 *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究, 190. (In: Wu 2009a: 42)

¹⁶¹ Huang 2014 (1975): 189.

¹⁶² Ho 1954: 136.

¹⁶³ Brook 1999: xx.

The Ming government tried to control both the production and the sale of salt. The salt workers in the lower Yangzi had rebelled together with boatmen and salt smugglers in the transition from Yuan to Ming. They were led by Zhang Shicheng 张士诚 (1321–1367), a rival to Zhu Yuanzhang, who would soon become the first emperor of the Ming. Zhang's rebellion was extended to seamen and pirates off the coast of Zhejiang¹⁶⁴. The Ming government had reason to be watchful. To control productive labour, it was decided that the saltern households, from the moment they became officially registered, remained so in perpetuity. At least this was how it worked in theory. Every male was assessed as a salterner (*ding* 丁) and had to provide a certain amount of salt per year, and then he was paid in rice. The social status of salt producers was very low, not much better than ordinary criminals, and desertions from the ranks were a common problem for the government, which had to replace the deserters.¹⁶⁵ The saltern households were exempted from ordinary service levy and were allowed to gather fuel from especially reserved grass lands.¹⁶⁶ This is the background of Wang Gen's text "Proposal on equal distribution of grass land" (*Jun fen caodang yi* 均分草蕩議).¹⁶⁷ About 100 or 120 households formed one group (*tuan* 團), which made it similar to the ordinary *lijia* structure.¹⁶⁸ The salt fields on the coast were cut off from the surrounding populated area by canals and creeks, forming a restricted zone, and the branch office of the commission acted as a kind of local government maintaining law and order in the territory.¹⁶⁹

However, the situation of salt producers and salt merchants during the Ming dynasty was subject to change. Already from the fifteenth century the producers could sell surplus salt directly to licensed merchants. The saltern households were also allowed to reclaim public land. Many left the coast or converted their grass land allocation into rice paddies. Thanks to the permission to sell surplus salt, it became possible for skilled households to grow rich from this business, and thus a new entrepreneurial group emerged from the saltern households. The salt monopoly weakened over time and some labourers could change their status and become rather independent owners of salt factories, while others became hired workers and fell into poverty.¹⁷⁰ Wang Gen most likely belonged to those who changed their financial situation for the better. It was even possible for some of them to study for the civil examinations. One example was Gao Hongtu, who was successful and became

¹⁶⁴ ter Haar 1992: 116–117.

¹⁶⁵ Hou Wailu 2005 (1987): 418. Lee 1990: 60.

¹⁶⁶ Huang 1975: 192.

¹⁶⁷ XZW, Ch. 4: 50a–51a.

¹⁶⁸ Huang 1975 (2014): 193.

¹⁶⁹ Huang 1975 (2014): 192.

¹⁷⁰ Lee 1990: 59–61.

a presented scholar. Later he reached as high a position as Minister of Revenue.¹⁷¹

The private salt business, which was prohibited by the Ming law, could in the worst cases lead to capital punishment. However, it seems as if the control slackened over time, and by the Zhengde reign (1505–1521), traders did not fear the authorities.¹⁷²

It was the Ministry of Revenue that supervised the salt monopoly. As for the distribution of salt, the salt distribution commissions tried hard to control it, but without convincing success. There were six salt-distribution commissions and the jurisdiction of the Liang-Zhe commission operated in the largest area, which included Zhejiang and South Zhili. The Liang-Huai region produced by far the largest revenue for the government. A salt-control censor was established in Yangzhou to devise the operating procedures for the salt administration. However, the operating agencies had no transportation facilities for salt distribution, and it is here that the salt merchants came into the picture. The stock of the salt administration was sold to wholesale dealers or to salt merchants engaged in barter trade. As already mentioned, they transported grain to the frontier army post and were paid in salt, that is, they received a granary receipt from the frontier military governor which they brought back to the salt distribution office. To get payment, the merchants had to present a salt license. The license was called *yin* (引), which was also a unit of weight. One *yin* authorized the merchant to transport one *yin* of salt. Without licence, any transportation was regarded as contraband. Punishment for smuggling salt was severe. According to the law those engaged in salt smuggling would receive one hundred strokes of the bamboo and be exiled for three years.¹⁷³ A hundred bamboo strokes was a tough punishment which in many cases resulted in death.

The distribution followed a plan for exactly how many *yin* of salt would be consumed by the population of each prefecture.¹⁷⁴ Taking into account that the population was growing rapidly during late Ming, it is understandable that this plan did not work out in practice. The licences were personal and those who purchased them became the real monopolists. The high tax on salt made smuggling profitable, and due to the proximity of salt fields and consumers smuggling was easy.¹⁷⁵ According to Huang Bian, route book author in the Ming, it was dangerous to travel north of Yangzhou on the Grand Canal at night since the salt smugglers controlled this route.¹⁷⁶ It was in this region Wang Gen travelled.

¹⁷¹ Huang 1975 (2014): 195–197.

¹⁷² Wu 2009a: 46–47.

¹⁷³ Daminglü, Ch. 1:3. (In: Wu 2009a: 43)

¹⁷⁴ Huang 1975 (2014): 189–194.

¹⁷⁵ Chiang 1975: 102.

¹⁷⁶ Brook 1999: 179.

As far as the sources tell, Wang Gen never went to the northern borders for barter. At the time, he was engaged in trading salt, this trade had probably already changed. In his chronological biography, it is said that Wang Gen went to Shandong province several times.¹⁷⁷ One possible reason why Wang Gen encountered the disciples of Wang Yangming would have been that he went to Jiangxi for salt trade. He probably did not do that, since Wang Yangming, as governor of Jiangxi, continued an earlier policy to import salt from nearby Guangdong, instead of the more remote Liang Huai.¹⁷⁸

Ideological control through schooling and examinations

The Ming state tried to impose ideological control on people through community schools and the civil examinations. Several historians are today sceptical about the success of the state to control people through schooling and examinations.¹⁷⁹ The intention behind the community schools was to train young boys in ritual and moral behaviour as well as to prevent disorder on the local level. The Ming founder ordered his officials to set up community schools in every village, but his policy failed. The county schools and Buddhist temples were more successful. Rich people preferred the county schools, which were more advanced compared to the community schools. The successors to Zhu Yuanzhang changed the curriculum and made community schools the lowest rung of the state school system, which meant a route to public office. It was not only the state that controlled people through the community school; people could also use them for their own purposes. Some officials used them to propagate Neo-Confucianism and to attack Buddhism and Daoism. The schools were often built on the sites of temples, and tiles and bricks of demolished temples were used as building material. Other people used the schools to strengthen their own positions in different ways. Pupils became literate and could learn how to win law suits, pass examinations, do business and the like. Everyone tried to utilize the community schools in their own way.¹⁸⁰

Neo-Confucian aims are visible in the names and mottos of the community schools. The curricula were built on the Classics, and the school buildings housed shrines to Confucius and other Confucian worthies. Loyalty and filial piety were stressed in accordance with the teaching of Zhu Xi and his *Family*

¹⁷⁷ XZW, Ch. 2: 2a, 2b, 3a.

¹⁷⁸ Cheng 1996: 304.

¹⁷⁹ Schneewind 2006, Elman 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Schneewind 2006: 164–165.

Rituals.¹⁸¹ When Wang Yangming established community schools, he also regarded them as tools for controlling society, but he criticized rigid discipline and urged the teachers to utilize the children's play as a way to learn.¹⁸² In this respect he heralded Wang Gen's praise of learning as joy, and joy as learning.¹⁸³ The community schools not only housed shrines to Confucius and later Confucians; the Ming dynasty was also a period when local officials built a great number of school libraries.¹⁸⁴ For example, three school libraries were built in Yangzhou, South Zhili, in 1438, 1522 and 1578, and in Jiangxi two libraries were built in Nanchang in 1453 and 1533, and two in Ji'an in 1539 and 1546.¹⁸⁵

The most efficient way to control people, however, was the examination system. At the lowest level a student received a government stipend and was called a 'Government Student' (*shengyuan* 生员). If he was successful, he would take the provincial examination and become a 'Provincial Graduate' (*juren* 举人). The highest level he was called a 'Presented Scholar' (*jinshi* 进士), who successfully had passed the palace examination.¹⁸⁶ It was a system for selecting officials impartially and making them publicly legitimate. How far the system increased social mobility is still an open question,¹⁸⁷ but the language requirements eliminated the lower social levels from the selection process and women were not allowed to take part in the examinations at all.¹⁸⁸ Competitiveness increased during the Ming due to population growth. In the Ming, 14 per cent of the government students passed the provincial examination, and less than 4.8 per cent of the government students achieved the status of presented scholar.¹⁸⁹ Government students never appointed to a position could become a local security problem, which made officials afraid of overproducing them. The main audiences for Wang Yangming were such government students, who were critical of ChengZhu learning as well as the examination system.¹⁹⁰ Later in the Qing, the rulers saw a correlation between the high numbers of government students and the fall of the Ming dynasty.¹⁹¹

The effectiveness of the examination system as a method for social control is now questioned by leading scholars. Elman warns us against over-

¹⁸¹ Ebrey 1991: *passim*.

¹⁸² Schneewind 2006: 100.

¹⁸³ XZW, Ch. 4: 25 a–b.

¹⁸⁴ Brook 1996.

¹⁸⁵ See Brook 1996, Table 1.

¹⁸⁶ I will use Huckers terminology. He translates *shengyuan* as 'Government Student', *juren* as 'Provincial Graduate' and *jinshi* as 'Presented Scholar'. See the entries in Hucker 1985. Elman translates *shengyuan* as 'licentiate', *juren* as 'graduate' and *jinshi* as 'palace graduate'. See Elman 2013: *passim*.

¹⁸⁷ Ho 1962: *passim*.

¹⁸⁸ Elman 2013: xxix.

¹⁸⁹ Elman 2000: 141.

¹⁹⁰ Lu 1997: see Chapter 1.

¹⁹¹ Elman 2000: 130.

interpreting the possibility of the examiners “to impose orthodoxy from above”.¹⁹² The great number of candidates on all levels, who wrote long essays, was of course time consuming for the examiners, and they were themselves aware of the difficulties of making objective and correct evaluations.¹⁹³

In the palace examination of 1529, the disciples of Wang Yangming took the top three places, with Luo Hongxian ranking number one and Zou Shouyi number two.¹⁹⁴ Wang Gen knew them both, and correspondence between him and these two men is still available.¹⁹⁵ This proves that there were officials working for the Wang Yangming disciples on a higher level, and that Wang Gen had such connections. Later during the period when Xu Jie was influential as grand secretary, a period of fifteen years between 1552 and 1567, the Yangming School and the academies flourished. Xu Jie himself lectured at the Lingji Temple in Beijing attracting a large number of participants.¹⁹⁶

The academies and community compacts

Wang Yangming saw the private academies (*shuyuan* 書院) as a complement to governmental schooling, but to a certain extent they were a reaction against it. A rather common view since the time of Zhu Xi (1130–1200) was that learning for “the sake of oneself” (*zide* 自得) was superior to the competitive examinations. Wang Gen, for example, did not let his sons take the examinations, even though they were recommended by others to do so. The academies mushroomed in the wake of the Wang Yangming movement. The translation of *shuyuan* to academy goes back to the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, who stayed in Nanchang in 1595, the capital of Jiangxi province, where he visited the famous Bailu Dong Academy. In his writings, he called it “una Accademia di letterati”.¹⁹⁷ For Wang Yangming the academies were a way to counteract the bad tendencies that he saw in the government schooling. He disliked the unreflective memorization and writing of “flowery compositions”, that is, their focus on literary skills.¹⁹⁸

Ricci had received his education in Aristotelian philosophy at the Academy of Florence, so for him the word ‘academy’ was the best word to describe the

¹⁹² Elman 2013: 74.

¹⁹³ Elman 2013: 77.

¹⁹⁴ Meskill 1982: 89. The third one was Cheng Wende.

¹⁹⁵ XZW, Juan 4: 25b–26b.

¹⁹⁶ Meskill 1982: 131.

¹⁹⁷ Meskill 1982: x. The Bailu Dong Academy has a long history going back to the Tang dynasty (618–907). In the Song, it was rebuilt and enlarged by Zhu Xi (1130–1200).

¹⁹⁸ Meskill 1982: 69.

Chinese *shuyuan*. In the Academy of Florence, a candle burnt day and night in front of the bust of Plato.¹⁹⁹ This underscores the argumentation in the introductory chapter that ancient Greek philosophy and even later Western philosophy were not only a cognitive activity but also had a broader sense of ethical lifestyle with religious sentiments. The Chinese academies focused on moral and spiritual improvement and the ethical ideals were connected to a community compact. Wang Yangming's disciple Zou Shouyi, of the Jiangyou group, wrote about the importance of signing a contract and urged its members to keep records of their own deeds and wrongs.²⁰⁰ He said:

As a rule, on the days of locality meetings, let a tablet of the Master [Confucius] be set up in the hall, incense burned, and bows made [to the tablet]. Members should then take their seats in order. With minds emptied, let them conscientiously examine themselves to see whether they really have been able to be respectful in their private lives, reverential in the performance of their duties and loyal in their dealings with other men. Those who live up to this fully will have a virtuous achievement. When there is a virtuous achievement, let it be written explicitly into the record to be shown as encouragement. When there is error, let it be written tactfully into the record to be shown as a warning.

Those who join the association will personally write [in the register] their surname, given name, and their literary name, and their birth date. Below, they will note the words, "I willingly comply with the compact."²⁰¹

We can see that the activities in the academies dealt not only with intellectual discussions; they also had a broader meaning of self-cultivation. Chapter 5 will describe how the Taizhou practitioners organized such compacts and their motivation for them.

Buildings used for compact meetings were not necessarily academy buildings. Wang Yangming also used Buddhist and Daoist temples. There might also be a fluid border between the academy buildings and lineage shrines. It is uncertain if the *Hall of Joyous Learning* and the *Taodong Retreat* used by Wang Gen were lineage shrines or buildings especially built for the community members. In the Ming sources, there are pictures of these shrines as well as ritual objects and sacrificial vessels used.

John Meskill briefly discusses a question which is important for my thesis, namely if the academies were connected to each other on a national scale. Meskill talks of cells of reform but cannot prove a national organization. "To speak of a movement is not to imply any national organization. There were, rather, a number of local organizations, some of which were in touch with one another, many with ties to officials of varying authority and prominence."²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Meskill 1982: xi.

²⁰⁰ Most likely the community members did not have individual contracts but signed the same contracts as other members of the community.

²⁰¹ Quote in Meskill 1982: 121.

²⁰² Meskill 1982: 87.

My impression is that the Taizhou practitioners worked very hard to establish a nationwide organization and would probably have succeeded if the Manchus had not subdued the Ming dynasty. A question still to be examined is if the Taizhou aim was consistent with the rest of the Wang Yangming movement, or if they had a different and more aggressive aim. They at least reached a large part of the Ming Empire, with practitioners in almost all provinces except those in North China.

Commercial publishing

The Taizhou practitioners would not have gone down in history if their followers had not read published works, published their own writings and commented on them in printed works. Comments and biographies of the Taizhou practitioners are found in local gazetteers, in essays, prefaces and case histories. In late Ming, commercial publishing boomed.²⁰³ Beijing, Nanjing and Jiangxi became regional printing centres.²⁰⁴ There was a great need for books among the urban population, and especially the candidates for the civil examinations needed essay anthologies and other kinds of examinations aids.²⁰⁵ Families, lineages and religious groups also contributed to the expansion of publishing.²⁰⁶ The compilation of the Daoist Canon *Daozang* was a historical event that took place at the beginning of the Ming dynasty.²⁰⁷ Smaller enterprises such as the printing of so-called “precious scrolls” (*baojuan* 寶卷) became common in mid and late Ming. The founder of the Luo religion, Luo Qing 羅清 (1443–1527) had his “Five texts in six volumes” (*Wubu liuce* 五部六冊) printed many times during his life time.²⁰⁸ Another common genre was the morality book (*shanshu* 善書), which can be traced back to the Song dynasty, when they originated in the Daoist tradition. Later, it was used in Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian tradition.

It appears printed books were affordable for most people, despite a costly process of production. Besides paper, carving of the woodblocks was a cost for publishers. The followers of the founder of the Three Teachings, Lin Zhao'en, hired carvers between 1628 and 1630 for three hundred *taels*. They carved fifteen hundred blocks and over three thousand folio pages for Lin's complete writings. This was cheaper than the carving costs during the Jiajing period. Book prices certainly differed, depending on the kind of book: if it was a rare hand- copied book made of exclusive *xuanzhi* (宣紙) rice paper from

²⁰³ Chow 2004: 19.

²⁰⁴ Dennis 2015: 190

²⁰⁵ Chow 2004: 24.

²⁰⁶ Chow 2004: 22.

²⁰⁷ Berling 1998: 954–955.

²⁰⁸ Siewert 2003: 228.

today's Anhui with multicolored illustrations or woodblock-printed material produced with cheap bamboo paper from Fujian.²⁰⁹ However, many books seem to have been rather cheap and affordable for wide groups of people. The Confucian Classics and examinations text, for instance, were not very expensive.²¹⁰ The Jiajing Emperor is famous for sponsoring palace publications, often published to counter officials' criticism of his decisions.²¹¹ Wang Gen, who was forced to leave his village school at the age of eleven, had obtained the Confucian *Analects*, *The Book of Filial Piety* and *The Book of Mencius*, which he put in his sleeves when going on business trips. It is difficult to say whether he bought them himself, inherited them or received them from the village school.

An important factor for the possibilities of publishing for the Taizhou practitioners must have been the fact that unlike the requirements of the Song and Yuan governments, it was not necessary to ask the Ming government for permission to print, and the Ming government did not have a censorship unit, which made it possible for anyone with enough resources to publish almost anything.²¹² The Ming government, however, had a limit to its leniency, and this is obvious in the case of Li Zhi, who almost begged for censorship and persecution by publishing his works *A Book to Hide* and *A Book to Burn*. Li Zhi was one of the best-selling authors of the late Ming. He was inspired by the Taizhou practitioners and wrote about them. Huang Zongxi, who disliked him, was to a high degree influenced by his writings. One reason might have been that Li Zhi's works were an important source of the Taizhou practitioners, and that Huang relied on him due to lack of other sources.

The three traditions

It is difficult or even impossible to summarize large traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. To avoid a simplified essentialism, I will only focus on a few aspects important for understanding the Taizhou movement. First, I will discuss the bureaucratization of the religions in the Ming dynasty. Thereafter, the three traditions will be introduced and finally the phenomenon of syncretism or hybridization will be shortly discussed.

²⁰⁹ Chow 2004: 19–56. There is more data on prices of paper than of books, see Chow 2004: 34.

²¹⁰ Chow 2004: 38.

²¹¹ Brook 1996: 104.

²¹² Chow 2004: 21.

Bureaucratization of religion

The Ming government tried to control and regulate all religious activities in the country. This was supposed to be done by organs administratively placed under the Ministry of Rites (*Libu* 禮部), a ministry with an ancient history. The Bureau of Sacrifices and the Court of Imperial Sacrifices were two organs responsible for official sacrifices. Other organs had to control ordinations of various kinds, such as Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. Furthermore, there were organs for the control of temple building. Official religion was defined by their sacrificial statutes. As I have discussed in the introductory chapter, the Chinese government in imperial China decided over areas we today would regard as religious. The government was quick to crack down on religious activities that went beyond the regulations of Daoism, Buddhism and official religion, if necessary.²¹³

Bureaucratization was not a new phenomenon in the Ming dynasty, but it became more systematized with the Ming founder. At the beginning of his reign he stipulated a number of regulations for religious specialists and religious life, and established a broad spectrum of institutions, whose aim was to control and supervise the religious specialists and the religious activities.²¹⁴ The first Ming Emperor, who himself had been a Buddhist novice and spent eight years at a temple in today's Anhui Province, forced the monks and nuns to take examinations on Buddhist texts, and those who failed were laicized.²¹⁵ The monks had to write essays in "the eight-legged" style used in the civil examinations. During the late Ming period, abbots of great monasteries were chosen based on these examinations.²¹⁶ The Central Buddhist Registry, instituted in 1383, had the authority of the whole sangha, and its monk officials were responsible for appointing and dismissing abbots as well as punishing monks who had committed crimes. This institution was divided between the right and the left patriarchs. The right patriarchs supervised the examination of monks and officials in charge of the registry, whereas the left patriarchs supervised meditation and the study of gong'an cases (Jap. Koan).²¹⁷ The bureaucratization of Chinese Buddhism and the development of a hierarchy is also seen in the ranking of sacred mountains.²¹⁸

As with the Buddhist institutions, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty established Daoist equivalents. The Central Daoist Registry controlled the number and conditions of the ordination of Daoist priests. Similar to the attitude against Buddhism, only one official Daoist temple was allowed in

²¹³ Taylor 1998: 841–842.

²¹⁴ Schneewind 2001: 346.

²¹⁵ Yü 1998: 894.

²¹⁶ Yü 1998: 931.

²¹⁷ Yü 1998: 905–906.

²¹⁸ Yü 1998: 929.

each county.²¹⁹ However, many researchers have pointed out that the government control was not very effective. The policy of the first Ming emperor towards Buddhist and Daoist clergy reflected “his recognition of their power in society, his efforts to ally with that power for his own ends, his attempts to limit that power, and his failure to do so” to put it in Sarah Schneewinds words.²²⁰ During mid and late Ming the control became even less effective. During a period of about fifty years before 1579, there seems to have been astonishingly free room for both religious activities and teaching discussion meetings. It was during this period that the first, second and third generations of Taizhou practitioners were active. In 1579, when Zhang Juzheng forbade the academies, the situation became completely different.

Confucianism

In the introductory chapter, the *Ru* concept was discussed. Here I will discuss developments and aspects of Confucianism which are central for understanding the ideas of the Taizhou practitioners. Differences between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming often emphasized in the scholarly debate will be discussed, and a few Confucian classics important for Wang Gen and his followers will be briefly presented. The aim is to show that the religiousness of Confucianism was not a totally new phenomenon with Wang Gen and the Taizhou movement but had deep roots in tradition.

Confucianism has always been closely linked with moral philosophy and self-cultivation. It has also stayed close to political and social philosophy. As for religious and metaphysical aspects, it has very often been emphasized that Confucianism is this-worldly. It is quite common to point out that Confucius expresses an attitude of non-involvement with metaphysical questions in *The Analects*, such as questions about death and spirits, but nowhere in the text is it said that Confucius did not believe in the existence of the spirits. What is noteworthy is that Confucius’ interest in *The Book of Changes* (Zhouyi 周易) is mentioned. Confucius said: “If some years were added to my life, and I had another 50 years to study *The Book of Changes*, then perhaps I could avoid great errors.”²²¹ It could be discussed if this is just an interest in how to relate to different kind of changes, or if it reveals a belief in forces which are supernatural. Be that as it may, as early as in the Western Han dynasty (206 BC – 25 AD), Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–104 BC) combined *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) theories with Confucian political philosophy, and the Song Confucians were deeply engaged in mechanisms of nature and the universe.

²¹⁹ Berling 1998: 960-962.

²²⁰ Schneewind 2001: 346.

²²¹ *The Analects*, “Shuer”:17. This is according to the Guwen version. See Burton Watsons translation of “The Analects of Confucius”.

They developed elaborate metaphysical theories using concepts like ‘vital energy’ (*qi* 氣), and ‘supreme ultimate’ (*taiji* 太極). They were also very interested in numerology, the five phases and alterations between ‘stillness’ (*jing* 靜) and ‘movement’ (*dong* 動).

Song Neo-Confucianism is often called “the School of Principle” (*lixue* 理學) because the Neo-Confucians of the Song had a deep interest in ‘the principles’ (*li* 理) of things or principles of nature. They started from the external universe, and questions on cosmology, and then moved on to the personal: the nature of human beings and the mind. According to Zhu Xi, it was important to understand the principles of external things to understand oneself. Wang Yangming reacted against this, saying that the only important thing was to understand the mind. That is why Wang Yangming and his school is called “the School of Mind” (*xinxue* 心學). A common argument is that the whole school of Wang Yangming is thereafter more interested in the mind and what they call ‘mind-in-itself’ (*xinti* 心體),²²² but I claim that the differences between the “School of Principle” and the “School of Mind” are exaggerated. Zhu Xi and the other Song Confucians were already deeply interested in the mind and its functioning. As mentioned above, they studied the alterations between stillness and movement of the mind, and they not only had theories about quiet sitting but also practised it. This has made me regard Neo-Confucianism in general as a movement, with strong focus on achieving a specific state of mind.

According to Zhu Xi, there is principle in everything, and this principle should be investigated.²²³ For him, ‘the investigation of things’ (*gewu* 格物) was the same as to investigate principle. This could be done in several ways through discussion with friends and in handling business affairs.²²⁴ Zhu Xi argued that it is important to discuss things with friends every day and seek their help to reach a better understanding.²²⁵ He further claimed that it is not enough to investigate one thing, although everything is governed by the same principle.²²⁶ To stress the similarities between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming further, it is worth noting that Zhu said that it was important to put the words of the sage into practice,²²⁷ which is usually regarded as a typical stance of Wang Yangming. To be mindful was important not only while meditating and handling affairs but also while reading the Classics. Zhu Xi advocated slow reading,²²⁸ and developed a whole theory on how to read texts, or to be more precise, how to read the Classics. This theory included several stages such as mental attentiveness, thinking about the essentials, deliberating on the text

²²² Ching 1987: 14.

²²³ Chan 1967: 91.

²²⁴ Chan 1967: 92.

²²⁵ Chan 1967: 96.

²²⁶ Chan 1967: 93.

²²⁷ Chan 1967: 101.

²²⁸ Chan 1967: 104.

with an open (or empty) mind (*xuxin* 虛心) and experiencing the text personally.²²⁹ For Zhu Xi, reading the Classics was not an exercise in collecting facts but to meet the text with one's whole personality. Zhu Xi referred to Cheng Hao's way of reading (and explaining) the *Book of Poetry*. He never explained line by line, but "brood[ed] over the odes leisurely to get the real taste of them, softly chanting them in a rising and falling voice".²³⁰ I find the differences between Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming to be more linked to their relation to politics than to their ideas of self-cultivation. Wang Yangming went more for realpolitik than Zhu Xi, who was demoted and dismissed from positions due to his outspokenness and criticism of rulers and officials. Perhaps it is possible to say that Wang Yangming's strong side was his application of Zhu Xi's ideas about self-cultivation in politics.

For Zhu Xi it was crucial to be attentive and concentrate on one thing.²³¹ This concentration he compared with "having no desires". "In relation to tranquility it means to be vacuous, and in relation to action it means straightforwardness".²³² He also compared the concentrated mind to a mirror,²³³ a trope that Wang Yangming would use later, and which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Zhu Xi makes a distinction between the calmness of the Buddhists and to 'rest' or to 'abide' *zhi* 止 in the sense of Confucius. The difference, according to him, is that to rest is to rest *in one's proper place*.²³⁴ When he discussed meditation with his disciples, he distinguished between being conscious about something and being conscious about one's consciousness. This meta-consciousness he described as a state of tranquility, which still had activity in it. An argument for this was that there is a difference between meditation and sleep. "Concentration on one thing involves both activity and tranquillity".²³⁵ In thought as well as in doing things, it is important to practise being concentrated on one thing, Zhu Xi said.²³⁶ He also referred to Cheng Hao, who urged his students to sit in meditation, because if they do, they could "cultivate their original minds *benxin* 本心 and become calm to some degree".²³⁷ All these examples from the writings of Zhu Xi show that not only Wang Yangming was interested in questions related to a state of being mindful. This applied to Zhu Xi as well.

As pointed out in the introductory chapter, Zhu Xi reduced the preceding body of Confucian Classics, and kept a smaller version called the *Four Books*

²²⁹ Dai 2012: 106.

²³⁰ Chan 1967: 105. Chan's translation.

²³¹ Chan 1967: 123.

²³² Chan 1967: 123. Chan's translation.

²³³ Chan 1967: 123.

²³⁴ Chan 1967: 147.

²³⁵ Chan 1967: 142. Chan's translation.

²³⁶ Chan 1967: 148.

²³⁷ Chan 1967: 151. Chan's translation.

(Sizhu 四書), which included *The Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), *The Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸). The last two texts were originally parts of *The Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) and are two short texts. It was these two texts beside *The Analects* and *The Book of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) that Wang Gen put in his sleeves when travelling on his business trips.²³⁸ The importance of *The Great Learning* lies in the sequence about how to create a harmonious society, and in the argument that the root of everything is self-cultivation.

Filial piety has been a cornerstone in Confucian ethics, although it is a universal phenomenon. A tradition cannot monopolize reverence for parents. Long before Buddhism came to China, the Buddhists showed reverence for their parents as the Chinese did.²³⁹ The Confucian criticism of the Buddhist monk and nun focused on the fact that they did not produce heirs for their parents. To give one's parents grandchildren was something the Confucians regarded as the most fundamental act of filialness. In Confucian discourse, all moral obligations are said to start with being filial to one's parents, but in *The Analects* Confucius in fact sets limits to the children's submissiveness. How Wang Gen elaborates on this idea in *The Analects* will be further discussed in the following chapter.

The Analects, consisting of conversations between Confucius and his disciples, begins with the famous line: "The Master said: 'To learn and practise from time to time what you have learnt, is not that enjoyable?'" followed by: "To have friends coming from afar, is not that a pleasure?" In these first lines, two important themes appear which came to be used frequently in the Taizhou discourse. The first is that studying, or learning must be enjoyable to be true learning, and the second is the importance of friendship.

The Book of Mencius was a controversial text at the beginning of the Ming dynasty. When the first emperor of the Ming read the passage where Mencius justified the overthrowing of an unjust ruler, he was so angry that he suspended the sacrifices to Mencius in the Confucian temple.²⁴⁰ *The Book of Mencius* would become important for the whole Wang Yangming movement, but the fact that Zhu Xi chose it as one of *The Four books* shows that it was already crucial in Song Confucianism. For the Taizhou practitioners, not only the Mencian belief in the goodness of human nature made Mencius central for them, but also his affirmative view of feelings and desires, as well as his criticism of tyrants. Mencius discussed the Way of the King (Wangdao 王道), and it is not a coincidence that Wang Gen wrote an essay entitled *Essay on the Kingly Way* (*Wang Dao Lun* 王道論). This text was his political testament and indicated the strong position Mencius had in the thought of Wang Gen. In this

²³⁸ MRXA: 709.

²³⁹ Schopen 1984: 110–126.

²⁴⁰ Lodén 2006: 59.

essay Wang Gen expressed idealistic ideas on the King's good example for people to follow, and that education would ameliorate the life of people. These ideas were important not only for Wang Gen and the Taizhou movement but also for Wang Yangming and his precursors in the Song.

Daoism

It is difficult to reach a good understanding of “Ming Daoism”. Not much is written on Daoism of this period; historical surveys of the Daoist traditions often omit what happened in the Ming dynasty.²⁴¹

There were no new schools of Daoism established and no remarkable Daoist thinkers appeared on the scene – at least that is what it looks like according to the scarce secondary literature on this topic. Traditions of earlier dynasties were continued in many ways. According to Judith Berling, the School of Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi* 正) dominated during the Ming.²⁴² The leadership of this tradition resided at the Longhu Mountain in Jiangxi, and many masters from this school married into the imperial family.²⁴³ Another tradition, called Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen* 全真) was divided between a northern branch, stressing prolongation of life through cultivation of ‘the life endowment’ (*ming* 命), and a southern branch which showed stronger Buddhist influences. Scholars argue that the followers of the Complete Perfection Daoism, were influenced by Chan Buddhism, and adopted a monastic life. They realized the concepts of ‘movement’ and ‘stillness’ in a concrete way. According to Yao Tao-chung, they performed something which they called ‘sitting with the bowl’ (*zuobo* 坐钵) usually lasting for one hundred days. During the meditation sessions they used a sign with the character for ‘movement’ (*dong* 動) when they were allowed to move, and a sign for ‘stillness’ (*jing* 靜) when they should sit absolutely still.²⁴⁴ Through the cultivation of ‘human nature’ (*xing* 性) and ‘spirit’ (*shen* 神), the followers of Quanzhen Daoism tried to develop wisdom and reach enlightenment.²⁴⁵ “The Way of pure illumination, loyalty, and filiality” (*Jingming zhongxiao dao* 净明忠孝道), in short called “Pure Illumination” (*Jingming* 净明) stressed Confucian values like loyalty, filialness, sincerity and ‘rectification

²⁴¹ Robinet 1997: *passim*. This work describes the development of the Daoist religion from the Warring States up to the Yuan dynasty. Kohn 2009: *passim*. Kohn discusses the schools of the Middle Ages, then turns to different aspects of Daoism such as panteon, ethics, and praxis in the second part of her work, but nothing specific is said about the Ming before she turns to Daoism in the modern era.

²⁴² Berling 1998: 956.

²⁴³ de Bruyn 2004: 611.

²⁴⁴ Yao 2004: 589.

²⁴⁵ Berling 1998: 957.

of the will' (*chengyi* 诚意) and at the same time adopted certain Daoist and Buddhist techniques to reach the desired state of mind which they called "Pure Illumination". Their Daoist techniques were close to those of the Daoist Lingbao tradition, which in its turn had combined Daoist and Buddhist ideas and praxis.²⁴⁶ Practitioners of Lingbao Daoism, for instance, believed in reincarnation and karma. Nota bene, the character for Pure (*jing* 淨) is the same as for the Buddhist Pure Land tradition (*Jingtu* 淨土). Pure illumination ideas had similarities with those of several Neo-Confucians, for example the Taizhou practitioner Luo Rufang 罗汝芳 (1515–88).²⁴⁷ They adopted ethical values which were close to Confucianism but still regarded Laozi as their ancestor. It was not only Luo Rufang that held their ideas in high esteem; other Neo-Confucians and merchants in Jiangxi also did. This "school" is a good example of how complicated the divisions of schools and traditions were in the Ming.

Despite the lack of great changes in Daoist schools (or lack of information), Daoist ideas and practices seems to have had a great impact on Ming society. Liu Ts'un-yan claims that there was "an indelible Taoist tinge" in Ming Confucianism which, according to him, was even deeper than it was in the Song.²⁴⁸ He argues that the Ming scholars were to such a degree accustomed to Daoist ideas that they did not even think of them as being contrary to Confucianism – perhaps they were not. Liu even regards Luo Hongxian 罗洪先 (1504–1564) and Luo Rufang as eccentric Daoists who dabbled in various traditions.²⁴⁹ I will return to Luo Hongxian in Chapter 4 and say more about Luo Rufang in Chapter 8.

Daoist text-production was strong and lively during the Ming period. The *Daoist Canon* (*Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏) was printed in 1445 during the Yongle reign, since Daoists books had been burned during the Mongol rule. In 1598, a supplement was produced *Continuation of the Daoist Canon* (*Xu Daozang* 續道藏). One of the later Taizhou practitioners, Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620) (Huang Zongxi counted him among the second-generation Taizhou practitioner as a disciple of Geng Dingxiang), wrote *Wings to the Laozi* (*Laozi yi* 老子翼) and *Wings to Zhuangzi* (*Zhuangzi yi* 莊子翼). Both texts are placed at the end of *Continuation of the Daoist Canon*.²⁵⁰ Despite this, Jiao Hong is more criticized by Confucians for his Buddhist inclinations.

Several Ming emperors relied on Daoist masters for advice on medical matters as well as on government. The Jiajing Emperor's interest in Daoist rituals started with his inability to produce an heir. Thus the Emperor asked the Daoist master Shao Yuanjie 邵元節 (1459–1539) for fertility advice, and

²⁴⁶ *Zongjiao cidian* 2009: 647.

²⁴⁷ Berling, 1998: 979–981. de Bruyn however argues that this school was excluded from official religion during the Ming. See de Bruyn 2004: 612.

²⁴⁸ Liu 1970: 292.

²⁴⁹ Liu 1970: 304.

²⁵⁰ de Bruyn 2004: 604.

when several sons were born after 1533, he believed in the prayers of this master.²⁵¹ This in turn led him to rely on Daoist divinations for matters of the state. During the 1550s another Daoist master Tao Zhongwen 陶仲文 (1481–1560), suggested techniques for longevity and immortality to the Emperor, which included both internal and external alchemy. The external alchemy comprised plants and minerals, which would eventually poison him and lead to his death. The internal alchemy was believed to strengthen his *yang* or life element, and to do so he was recommended to have intercourse with virgin girls. In 1552, for this purpose they selected 800 girls between eight and fourteen years, and in 1555, 180 girls, all under ten. Some officials were critical, but it was a rather common practice among wealthy men at the time, so the criticism did not lead to a change of practice.²⁵² Tao Zhongwen became Minister of Rites, and was promoted to Junior Mentor, Junior Guardian and Junior Preceptor in 1544. After 1542, when the Jiajing Emperor did not actively rule any more, Tao was the only one who had regular contact with him,²⁵³ so he must have been a very influential person.

Several Daoist priests were appointed to ministerial posts in the Ming.²⁵⁴ A Daoist advisor of the Jiajing Emperor Lan Daoxing 蘭道行 criticized the Grand Secretary Yan Song, which resulted in him being dismissed. It did not take long, however, before Yan was rehabilitated.²⁵⁵ Lan might have had some relationship to the Taizhou practitioner He Xinyin, who is also said to have been involved in a plot against Yan Song.

Daoism not only influenced emperors but also eunuchs at the court, and even leading Ming Confucians showed such influence. In Chapter 9, I will discuss the circumstances of an influential literati scholar who became a disciple of a young teenage girl and claimed she was a Daoist immortal.

Wang Yangming admitted that he had been interested in Daoism for thirty years, and it would be surprising if Daoism did not play a significant role in his thoughts.²⁵⁶ Although he did not believe in the Daoist promise of immortality, Daoist mental cultivation remained a factor in his ideas and practices.²⁵⁷ Important Daoist concepts occur in the writings of Wang Yangming as well as in the writings of the Taizhou practitioners. Among those concepts are vital energy, and ‘sperm’ (*jing* 精), as well as the trigrams from *The Book of Changes* (*Zhou yi* 周易). Important hexagrams are *bo* 剝 and *fu* 復. *Bo* has one unbroken *yang* line as its last line (that is at the top) while the remaining five lines are broken *yin* lines. (The hexagrams should be read from the bottom up.) This means that it occurs just before *yin* has reached its climax,

²⁵¹ Geiss 1988: 479.

²⁵² Geiss 1988: 481.

²⁵³ de Bruyn 2004: 602.

²⁵⁴ Liu 1970: 291.

²⁵⁵ de Bruyn 2004: 603.

²⁵⁶ Liu 1970: 310.

²⁵⁷ Liu 1970: 316.

and in relation to the lunar calendar, it means just before the winter solstice. *Fu* has one *yang* line as its first line (that is at the bottom) and all the rest are broken *yin* lines, which means that the *yin* force is preparing to yield to the *yang*. It is not a coincidence that the Taizhou leader Yan Jun begins his text about the seven-day meditation with the sentence “The master experienced the sun of the Winter solstice, it was very little of life, when the trigram of *bo*²⁵⁸ comes to its utmost, [the trigram of *fu* will come.]”²⁵⁹ Similarly, his text on the community compact of Yangcheng concludes with the sentence “Yan Shannong then bequeathed [this] document in 1545, on the day of the Summer Solstice”. The meditation period starts when the *yang* force is at its minimum, and the community compact is signed when it reaches its maximum. The two activities are interrelated, the latter being dependent on the former. This underscores my hypothesis that the Taizhou practitioners never gave up the idea that the enlightenment experience was a prerequisite for later organizational and societal activities.

However, the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* are not exclusively Daoist. I agree with Liu Ts’un-yan that these ideas were not regarded as contradictory to Confucian thought. They were rather regarded as a kind of common knowledge, as science today recognized by everyone. Ideas about *yin* and *yang* belonged to this common Chinese thought which everyone accepted regardless of affiliation with a specific tradition or school within a tradition. In the view of Yan Jun, the learning of the sages (*sheng jiao* 聖教) was original. Later, different traditions took shape and became elaborate since “persons of extraordinary abilities acted on their own authority”.²⁶⁰ In this view, *The Book of Changes* belonged to a time before the sages died and the other self-made authorities entered the scene. The seven-day meditation described by Yan Jun has, nevertheless, strong similarities to Daoist inner alchemy.²⁶¹

Buddhism

In the sixteenth century, Buddhism had been a part of Chinese culture for about 1500 years. Thus it is difficult to separate it from Confucian and Chinese culture in general. The idea of karma and reincarnation, for instance, had become a rather common belief among the Chinese.

²⁵⁸ Reference to the *Book of Changes*. 剝: 不利有攸往. In Legge’s transl.: “*Bo* indicates that (in the state which it symbolizes) it will not be advantageous to make a movement in any direction whatever.”

²⁵⁹ YJJ: 37.

²⁶⁰ YJJ: 16.

²⁶¹ YJJ: 37.

The historical description of Chinese Buddhism has often described the Ming dynasty as a period of decline, mainly because no new sutras were translated, and no new schools were formed. The idea of decline was also something the Buddhists themselves talked about as *mofa* 末法, that is, as an age of decay of the Buddhist Dharma or law.²⁶² It is said that the two dominant schools, Chan and Pure Land, were more interested in religious cultivation than in philosophical discourse, so there seems to have been a relatively stronger emphasis on praxis than on doctrine, which can explain the opinion of decline.²⁶³ There are however scholars who argue that this is not the case and that the reason for a lack of studies on Ming Buddhism is that the philosophies of Huayan and Tiantai are complex and vast.²⁶⁴ Jonathan C. Cleary raises the question of quality, and the difficulty of talking of decline or golden age at all.²⁶⁵ Other scholars such as Catherine Bell, and Beverly Foulks McGuire are critical to the bifurcation of thought and action. The latter has written on the Buddhist monk Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599–1655) and his view of karma.²⁶⁶ Zhixu belonged to four influential Buddhist masters living in late Ming and referred to as “dragons and elephants”.²⁶⁷ Three of them lived during the sixteenth century. They were Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535–1615), Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1544–1604) and Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623). Ouyi Zhixu was born at the very end of the sixteenth century and is therefore of less value for my thesis.²⁶⁸ He was a disciple of Hanshan Deqing.

Zhuhong’s teaching is regarded as the culmination of the dual practice of Chan and Pure Land. For him, ‘recitation of the name of Buddha’ (*nian fo* 念佛) is the highest form of concentration, thus overcoming the contradiction between recitation and meditation. Through such recitation one is able to identify one’s nature with Amithaba Buddha, and one’s mind with the Pure Land.²⁶⁹ Recitation has been described as a suitable way for unlearned people who do not understand intellectual subtleties, that is, a popular religious praxis, in contrast to meditation, which has been regarded as elitist. In the view of Zhuhong, invocation of Buddha Amithaba’s name makes the practitioner reach the mental state of no thought (*wu nian* 無念) so even those with “dull wits” can reach the state of *samādhi*.²⁷⁰ Zhuhong was also interested in vitalizing the monastic life and created a monastic code for his monastery Yunqi, located at Mount Yunqi in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. He wrote a

²⁶² Yü 1981: 225.

²⁶³ Yü 1981: 4–6.

²⁶⁴ Ma 2011: 7

²⁶⁵ Cleary 1985: “Introduction” 1–16.

²⁶⁶ McGuire 2014: 4.

²⁶⁷ Yü 1998: 931.

²⁶⁸ Yü 1998: 931–946.

²⁶⁹ Yü 1998: 931–932.

²⁷⁰ Yü 1998: 932–933.

subcommentary on the Tiantai master Zhiyi's commentary on the *Sūtra of Brahma's net*.²⁷¹ He furthermore standardized Buddhist rituals, wrote works with directions for “the ritual of the plenary mass of water and land” (*shuilu dahui* 水路大會) as well as “the ritual of bestowing food on hungry ghosts with flaming mouths” (*yuqie yankou* 瑜伽焰口). The ritual of the plenary mass of water and land was performed for seven days and nights for the liberation of suffering souls.²⁷² The first emperor of Ming, divided Buddhist monasteries into three kinds: meditation (*chan* 禪), expository (*jiang* 講), and teaching (*jiao* 教). “Teaching” monasteries specialized in rituals, and to become a monk in such a monastery one had to pass a test on the rules for the ritual of bestowing food on hungry ghosts with flaming mouths, but even in “meditation” and “expository” monasteries this ritual was performed.²⁷³ In those rituals dhāraṇīs and mudrās were used, and the monk performing the ritual went into a state of trance. These rituals are categorized as *yuqie* 瑜伽, which is sometimes translated as ‘tantric’. It could also be translated as ‘yoga’.²⁷⁴

Zibo Zhenke (1544–1604) is mostly regarded as a Chan master, but he studied several texts such as *The Yogācāra Treatise*, *The Consciousness Only Treatise*, *Avataṃsaka Sūtra (The Huayan Sūtra)* *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and considered the teachings of Buddhist schools such as Tiantai, Huayan and Yogacara completely compatible. He argued that the diseases are countless, and therefore the medicins are also countless.²⁷⁵

Like Zhuhong and Zhenke, Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623) was a kind of systematizer. They all tried to make people understand that the different Buddhist practices corresponded to differences among the practitioners such as their levels of understanding and karmic situation. For example, people of lower understanding regard the Western Paradise *Jingtu* 淨土 as a place, whereas people of higher understanding regard it as a mental state, according to Hanshan.²⁷⁶ Like Zhuhong, Hanshan said that Buddha recitation is a *gong'an* exercise.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, they argued that combinations of practices were effective. For the Buddhist leaders, the doctrinal differences between Buddhist schools were probably not as important as developing effective praxis for monks and laymen.

Whether or not Wang Yangming was influenced by Chan Buddhism has been a topic of scholarly discussion.²⁷⁸ That he did not befriend Buddhist monks did not mean that he was not influenced by them. Several Neo-

²⁷¹ Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597).

²⁷² Robsson 2010: 81.

²⁷³ Lye 2011: 561–567.

²⁷⁴ Yü 1981:184–185.

²⁷⁵ Cleary 198: 135.

²⁷⁶ Hsu 1979:132–133.

²⁷⁷ Hsu 1979: 134.

²⁷⁸ Chan 1962, Kengo 2008.

Confucians, including Wang Yangming, Wang Gen, Wang Ji and Luo Rufang, had enlightenment experiences. Wang Yangming argues in his *Moral Education* (Instructions for Practical Living) for a gradual approach, like the Northern Chan School, but he also criticizes the Buddhist and Daoists for not being able to realize their ideas in practice.²⁷⁹ According to him, “the Daoists are attached to the desire for nourishing everlasting life and the Buddhist to the desire for escaping the torments of the world.”²⁸⁰ It is questionable if the Buddhist metaphors used by Wang Yangming prove that there were Buddhist influences on his thoughts or if it was merely a common way of verbal expression at the time. This question and some of his metaphors will be discussed in Chapter 8. Wang Yangming had gone through not only a Daoist phase, but also a Buddhist phase in his early life, something he later regretted. During the Ming dynasty, the literati scholars were interested in Buddhism and Daoism, but writers of the time also ridiculed the hypocrites and the conventional understanding of these traditions. The avaricious and licentious monk, for instance, is a common figure in novels and dramas.

The question of syncretism

Although the people in the Ming, did not have a modern concept of religion, and to a certain extent did not distinguish secular from sacred, they had a notion of what a ritual was.²⁸¹ They made a difference between different religious traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism or “the three teachings of *Ru*, Laozi and Buddha, often shortened as the three traditions *sanjiao* 三教. The problem for us doing research on these traditions is to understand how people of earlier times perceived them. What did they regard as typically Confucian, Daoist or Buddhist? Reading primary sources of the Ming, it is obvious that our modern views of what that might be are not the same as theirs. Our understanding is to a high degree coloured by our prejudices.

The situation in Ming China differed from the situation in Europe. In Europe, the Christian church had a much stronger position than Confucianism had in China. In China, the religious conviction of the emperors and the highest officials shifted between Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism,

²⁷⁹ WYMJ: 106.

²⁸⁰ WYMJ: 106.

²⁸¹ There are different emic words for ‘ritual’ in Chinese. The most frequent in Confucianism is *li* 禮, which however has much broader connotations than ‘ritual’. For a survey of emic (or generic) words in Chinese for ‘ritual’, see Joachim Gentz’s section “Chinese” in Stausbergs article ‘Ritual’: A lexicographic survey of some related terms from an emic perspective”, Gentz 2006: 63–67.

although Confucianism was strong among officials. Confucianism, however, did not have a monopoly.

The “Three teachings” of *Ru*, Laozi and Buddha had already influenced each other in countless ways for centuries at the time when the Taizhou practitioners started their movement. The teaching of *Ru* and Laozi had a common background. They became more distinct traditions after the time when the Classical texts were formulated. When Buddhism arrived in China around the beginning of our era, similarities between Buddhism and Daoism paved the way for borrowings of ideas and concepts in both directions. The translators were aware of these similarities, frequently using Daoist terms when translating the Buddhist Sanskrit terms. During the Tang period (618–997), the three traditions became close and there were conscious efforts to harmonize them. The Daoist schools of “The Way of Filial Piety” (*Xiaodao* 孝道) and “The Pure and Bright Way” (*Jingming dao* 淨明道) adopted Confucian values of filial piety and loyalty.²⁸² Furthermore, the Daoists supported the printing of Confucian morality books.²⁸³ Perhaps people at the local level were not concerned at all about the differences between the Daoist and Confucian tradition. By the Ming dynasty, borrowings between all three traditions had been going on for a very long time, and new constellations had been created continuously. This dynamic is one of the most difficult to deal with in a study like mine, and probably is one reason why there are few studies on Ming religion. Studying Ming material, it becomes clear that what scholars in the twenty-first century and non-specialists in Chinese religions tend to regard as, for instance, typically Daoistic is not the same as what people in the Ming regarded as typically Daoistic. It is important to unlearn during the process. The Ming thinkers and Qing thinkers like Huang Zongxi were highly concerned with this problem too and tried to solve it in their own way.

Wang Yangming argued, however, that the underlying aim of the three traditions was originally the same. He tells his disciple Zhu Dezhi 朱得之 (b.1485) the following parable:

Originally there was one compound building. Later, sons and grandsons began to live apart, and the building was divided in a central hall and wing buildings. Eventually, they started to build fences, although it was still possible for members of the various branches of the family to help each another. As time passed by, they began to compare and quarrel and even became hostile towards each other. In the beginning, they all belonged to one large family. If they removed the fences, they would still be same old family. The division of the three traditions is likewise.²⁸⁴

²⁸² Robinet 2008: 21. See also Robinet 1997: 215.

²⁸³ Barrett 2008: 140.

²⁸⁴ MRXA: 587. Huang Zongxi placed Zhu Dezhi in the Nanzhong School. In the entry on Zhu Dezhi Wang Yangming also discussed joy. He says: “Joy is the essence of knowledge of the good.” See MRXA: 586. They also discuss “The golden pill” and other questions related to inner alchemy, see MRXA: 587.

According to the description of the three traditions made by Yan Jun, which I will return to in Chapter 8, the three traditions are described both in a negative and in a positive way. In his view, it is possible both to use them and to misuse them.

As in the cases of the Confucians, who had periods of Buddhist and Daoist studies, the Buddhists also went through phases of Confucian studies, and tried to evaluate, combine and reconcile different Buddhist doctrines. There were simply no certain answers to which was the best way to follow. The four great masters of Buddhism in late Ming all displayed meandering ways between Buddhism and Confucianism in their search for the truth, very much in the same way as the Neo-Confucians.

Yunqi Zhuhong started his life as a Confucian literatus, passing the lowest level of civil service examination at seventeen, a background which made him positive to Confucian morality.²⁸⁵ Hanshan Deqing applied a Buddhist interpretation to the Confucian Classics *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Great Learning* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, but also to the Daoist Classics *Dao De Jing* and *Zhuangzi*. He classified Confucianism and Daoism below the level of Hīnayāna, but at the same time he recognized them as the “path of living in the world” (Confucianism), the “path of forgetting the world” (Daoism) which he regarded as preparing steps for the “path of leaving the world”, namely, Buddhism.²⁸⁶ The three traditions offered different methods for overcoming ‘self-attachment’ (*wozhi* 我執).²⁸⁷ Deqing made comparisons between the Confucian “five constants” (*wuchang* 五常); humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and truthfulness with the five Buddhist precepts of not killing, stealing, and committing sexual offences; not hurting others with words, and not drinking alcohol. Ouyi Zhixu was born in a Buddhist family, but studied Confucianism and for a period wrote texts criticizing Buddhism and Daoism. After reading a text by Zhuhong, however, he changed his mind, and burned all those writings.²⁸⁸ However, while reading *The Analects*, he experienced something he calls an enlightenment. When his father died he heard *The Sūtra of Original Vows of Dizang*, and that made him yearn to leave the world, and when he read a passage in *The Śūramgama sūtra*, which says that the world resides in emptiness, and that emptiness gives rise to awakening, he decided to become a monk.²⁸⁹ Zhixu wrote not only many commentaries on Buddhist sutras but also a Chan explanation of the *Book of Changes*, that is, using Buddhist hermeneutics in interpreting non-Buddhist texts.²⁹⁰ These writings on Confucian classics by Zhuhong, Deqing and Zhixu

²⁸⁵ Yü 1998: 931.

²⁸⁶ Hsu 1979: 151.

²⁸⁷ Hsu 1979: 152–153.

²⁸⁸ McGuire 2014: 133–134. (Appendix 1.)

²⁸⁹ McGuire 2014: 134.

²⁹⁰ McGuire 2014: 137.

are examples of what has been called a commentarial relationship between the three teachings.²⁹¹

Chün-fang Yü argues that if we examine the thoughts and careers of Zhuhong, Zhenke and Deqing “we find that all advocated some kind of syncretism both within Buddhist schools and between Buddhism and Confucianism.”²⁹² Timothy Brook, does not agree with this statement. In his opinion, the term ‘syncretism’ is overused in the Chinese context. For him, syncretism requires some sort of reconciliation which, according to him, rarely occurs.²⁹³ Brook follows the reasoning of Gavin D’Costa that it is necessary to distinguish syncretism from ecumenism, inclusivism and compartmentalism.²⁹⁴ In his view, Hanshan Deqing, for instance, used a compartmentalist model to explain his own career. Every phase in his life corresponded to different areas of reality and different aspects of truth. All aspects and the three teachings complement each other. However, I would like to point out that Deqing describes his study as progressive, starting from the lower levels of Confucianism and Daoism and finally reaching the highest level of Buddhism. In my view, this is more a hierarchical model, also used by Tiantai and Huayan masters in their “classification of Buddhist doctrines” (*panjiao* 判教). In such classifications, some doctrines are believed to reveal a higher insight than others.²⁹⁵ Brook prefers to call the interaction of the three teachings a condominium. “The term condominium connotes that the Three Teachings lived together in late-imperial China with a considerable degree of harmony: equal in principle, equally available to worshippers, and free to associate and interact in multitude ways.”²⁹⁶ Brook’s research shows that joint worship of the Buddha, Laozi, and Confucius was common by the mid-Ming. There are several cases of non-Buddhist deities placed in Buddhist temples and monasteries, and this did not seem to disturb ordinary believers or the clergy in the monastery; it only disturbed the representatives of the state, or those who had an interest in arguing for a certain tradition. The so-called ‘Three Teaching Halls’ (*San jiao tang* 三教堂) had images of Confucius, Laozi and Buddha side by side. These halls were spread over the whole country and were not only linked to the teaching of Lin Zhaoen 林兆恩 (1517–1598), who might be the best-known example of joint worship. Yet, even this joint worship Brook does not want to label as syncretism but as condominium. He suggests that the three teachings did not merge or reconcile but lived together side by side as distinct entities. I agree to a certain extent, because otherwise the recurring discussions on *Ru*, *Lao* and *Fo* would not appear in my material. It was also the wish of the Ming founder and other emperors that

²⁹¹ Gentz 2011: 542.

²⁹² Yü 1981: 223.

²⁹³ Brook 1993a: 13–44.

²⁹⁴ D’Costa 1986: Chapter 3 and 4.

²⁹⁵ On the term *panjiao* see for instance Yü 1981: 224.

²⁹⁶ Brook 1993a: 15.

there would be such distinct categories. I have elsewhere called it Zhu Yuanzhang's "way of establishing equilibrium of terror balance".²⁹⁷ This idea could also be put more softly as "a regulated pluralism",²⁹⁸ and to describe the situation as a "struggle for predominance rather than a monopoly".²⁹⁹ The distinction existed in Zhu Yuanzhang's organization of the three religions within and under the Ministry of Rites and in the societal structure. An interesting point, however, is that the bureaucratic organs of Daoism and Buddhism were subordinated to the Ministry of Rites, whereas Confucianism was the Ministry of Rites. I claim, however, that it is necessary to have double vision, which means that two opposite tendencies can exist simultaneously. At the same time as there are divisions between the three traditions in society, in organization and in people's minds, there were also individuals who were not instrumental in their thought and argumentation. They sought a truth about themselves in relation to different traditions. Their aim was perhaps sometimes to strengthen their religious identity and religious capital, but not always. Posterity evaluates them with the result in hand. Wang Yangming was a Confucian when he died, so he has become a Confucian. But if he had died earlier, perhaps we would regard him as a Buddhist or a Daoist. And if Zhixu died while reading *The Analects*, he might have gone down in history as a Confucian.

As discussed by Fritz Graf, religions or traditions could be regarded as systems. Critics of the syncretist concept argue that an underlying assumption is that there are "pure" religions and that the mix, or adoption of alien elements is something bad, which means that "syncretism" is a pejorative term. Instead a new concept of "hybridization" has been suggested, a term that has been imported into religious studies from the natural sciences. This term would, in their view, better describe the fact that no system can ever be autonomous, and that elements will flow between different traditions on a global scale, or more precisely be part of one global system.³⁰⁰ In my view, the concept of hybridization has not improved our understanding of how the different religions or traditions relate to each other. If we have a normative view, we can easily take it over to the new concept, and we can use the old concept of syncretism without adding any norms to it as well. Therefore, I agree with Graf that the change from syncretism to hybridization "is more one of political correctness, than of scholarly gain".³⁰¹

To return to the question of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, they are three different systems, but of course not autonomous.

²⁹⁷ Lidén 2011: 178.

²⁹⁸ Gentz 2011: 537.

²⁹⁹ Gentz 2011: 537.

³⁰⁰ Graf 2005: 8934–8938.

³⁰¹ Graf 2005: 8936.

4. Wang Gen initiates a social movement

This chapter deals with the initial process of the Taizhou movement, and how a commoner and salt peddler like Wang Gen could become a charismatic leader of this dynamic movement in the middle and late Ming dynasty. The focus will be on his ideas and the kind of praxis he was engaged in, and the main question is if his ideas and praxis were unique within the larger Neo-Confucian movement. Of special interest is the question of his social activism and its relation to the praxis of meditation and strivings for a specific state of mind.

Wang Gen as a charismatic religious leader

As mentioned in the introduction, Wang Gen (1483–1541) came from Taizhou,³⁰² a prefecture situated in the modern Jiangsu province, close to the place where the Huai River meets the East China Sea. This is the reason why he is also sometimes called Taizhou. This name was probably first used among the other disciples of Wang Yangming to talk about the disciple, who came from the coastal area in the Ming province of North Zhili. Huang Zongxi also used Taizhou, when talking of the person Wang Gen. Wang Gen himself took a studio name (*hao* 號), Xinzhai 心齋, which means the ‘Fasting of the mind’ and which is also the name of a studio he built for practising meditation.³⁰³ Fasting of the mind is a notion which has to do with self-cultivation, refraining from nourishing the mind with the stimuli of the so-called six emotions and avoiding being disturbed by impressions, thoughts and ideas.³⁰⁴ The term

³⁰² Taizhou county 泰州縣 was later fused with Dongtai County 東臺縣, under the name Dongtai. It was located in Yangzhou Prefecture. Today it is called Taizhou City. It should not be mistaken for Taizhou 台州 in Zhejiang Province.

³⁰³ The origin of the term is *Zhuangzi*, Inner chapters, Human beings in the world (人間世). In the allegory of Zhuangzi, Confucius talks to Yan Hui about fasting of the mind. In Burton Watson's translation: “Confucius said, ‘Make your will one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with you mind, but listen with your spirit. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with recognition, but spirit is empty and waits on all things. The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.’” See Watson 1968: 57–58.

³⁰⁴ I will return to the idea of the six emotions: joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, love and hate later in this chapter under the subtitle “Some Neo-Confucian key concepts in Taizhou discourse.”

originates with Zhuangzi, but most likely Wang Gen was not directly inspired by Zhuangzi but by Mencius, who also discusses the six emotions. The name *Xinzhai* is used in many titles of Wang Gen's works and is common in the primary sources. His original name, Yin 銀 'Silver', occurs only in texts introducing him and his historical background. Gen 艮 is the name used most frequently in scholarly works about Wang Gen in China today. After studies of Ming primary sources, I have discovered that this name cannot have been given to him by Wang Yangming, something which is taken for granted after Huang Zongxi. It must have been given to him by his father.

Wang Gen was born in a family of salt producers and his father was a salt merchant. To be a salt producer meant to have a hereditary status called *zaohu* 灶戶 and to be obliged to do corvée labour for the state. The genealogy of Wang Gen, recorded in his *Chronological Biography*, starts seven generations earlier with his forefather Wang Guoxiang 王國祥 (dates unknown), who lived in Suzhou.³⁰⁵ The *Chronological Biography* does not give the reason why the family moved to the much poorer area of Taizhou and settled in Anfeng Chang, located in the Lianghuai area. Anfeng Chang was the largest place for salt production in this area. It belonged to the Lianghuai Salt Administration, and the head office of the Lianghuai Salt Administration was situated in Yangzhou, at the junction of the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal.³⁰⁶ The water communication network made it suitable for salt trading.³⁰⁷ As mentioned in the introductory chapter, some salt producers fell into poverty while others became rich and independent salt traders.

Before going into detail about how Wang Gen's life is described in *The Chronological Biography*, we need to consider the function of this specific genre. This kind of biography is hagiographical and must be dealt with as such. The authors usually want to eulogize the persons they describe. Despite this, the genre contains useful information.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ XZW: Ch. 2: 1a.

³⁰⁶ For more detailed information on how the salt monopoly worked and was organized see 'Salt trade' in the Introduction.

³⁰⁷ Wu 2009a: 42 and Lee 1990: 55.

³⁰⁸ An edition of "The table of transmissions from masters to disciples of Wang Xinzhai [‘s learning]" (*Wang Xinzhai dizi shichengbiao* 王心齋弟子師承表) is edited by Yuan Chengye (1866–1928). Wu Zhen does not always believe in Yuan Chengye, arguing that he is writing from a local patriotic stance. (Wu 2009: 21). It is said that a disciple of Wang Gen, Dong Sui, edited his *nianpu*, and that Yuan Chengye used this for his edition, but I have not been able to verify this. Yuan Chengye argues that Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596) was a disciple of Wang Bi, but Wu does not believe in this and says he was a disciple of Wang Ji. (Wu 2009: 21) This is interesting, since Wang Bi (1511–1587) and Wang Ji (1498–1583) were also close. It might not be a contradiction at all, but that they all were close.

In the case of Wang Gen, there are descriptions of him as an extremely tall person (nine feet)³⁰⁹ with “high cheek bones and an archaic look” (*gu chan mao gu* 骨嶮貌古)³¹⁰.



3. Portrait of Wang Gen (*XZW*, Ch. 1: 16a)

³⁰⁹ The actual length of a foot *chi* 遲 during the time of Wang Gen is uncertain.

³¹⁰ *XZW*, Ch. 2: 1b.

Furthermore, *The Chronological Biography* mentions auspicious signs on his body, namely two fleshy warts in his palms, one in his left and one in his right “as if divided in *yin* and *yang*”.³¹¹ I will return to this in Chapter 5, discussing *The Chronological Biography* of his second son Wang Bi, who had warts behind his ears, which was considered even better.³¹² It is said about Wang Gen’s personal mental constitution that he was incessantly fluctuating, as if his *qi* was rising and falling. The conclusion about him is that he was an extraordinary person, which is rather common in hagiographic literature.³¹³

As already mentioned, Wang Gen’s original name was Yin ‘silver’. This is an indication that his parents harboured a wish that their child would change their financial situation for the better, a wish that later came true. Wang Gen is said to have risen from poor circumstances but that he eventually became rather prosperous.³¹⁴ He has been described as a commoner,³¹⁵ which is true, but this gives the modern Western reader a wrong impression. His social background did not imply that he was poor and without means, either socially, politically or economically. Commoners were all men (women were not counted) below the ruling officials, that is, those who were classified as ‘the four categories of people’ (*simin* 四民). These were ‘scholars’ in general (*shi* 仕), those engaged in agriculture (*nong* 農), artisans and craftsmen (*gong* 工), and merchants and tradesmen (*shang* 商).³¹⁶ Commoners could thus have a very different social and economic status in society. In Wang Gen’s *Recorded Conversations*, a commoner is called “the hundred family names”, *baixing* 百姓.³¹⁷ Another word used is “a commoner scholar” (*buyi xuezhe* 布衣學者). *Buyi* means a person wearing cotton cloths, that is, not silk clothes like those the officials wore.

It is important to keep in mind that the social stratification in China has always been very complicated, not least in Ming times. Even within the *zaohu* category there were huge differences.³¹⁸ Six and five generations back on Wang Gen’s paternal side, Wang Guoxiang 王國祥 and Wang Zhongren 王仲仁 were “head of hundred men” (*baifuzhang* 百夫長), which meant that

³¹¹ XZW, Ch. 2: 1b.

³¹² Wang Bi 1611 (1545): 1a–2b.

³¹³ XZW, Ch. 2: 1b.

³¹⁴ There certainly was a change in his financial situation, although we do not have to accept Hou Wailu’s Marxist analysis that Wang Gen’s journey from salt producer to salt merchant was a change “from worker to oppressor”, see Hou 2005 (1987): 420. For a discussion on the concept of “commoner” see the chapter “Ming Society and its religious milieu”.

³¹⁵ Lee 1990 and Cheng 1996 have this perspective.

³¹⁶ Ho 1962: 18, but I have understood it to mean all people without a degree from the civil service exams.

³¹⁷ HXW, Ch. 3: 11b.

³¹⁸ Hou 2005 (1987): 418.

they belonged to the upper strata of the salt producers. Wang Gen's grandfather, Wang Wengui 王文貴, accumulated considerable wealth due to the salt trade. It seems that the father of Wang Gen, Wang Hong 王珙 (1445–1536),³¹⁹ was less successful, perhaps due to his taste for pleasures. (For his portrait see Figure 4.) It is said that he was fond of hunting and idling.³²⁰

That people in the Taizhou area often enjoyed an easy life style is mentioned in *The Dongtai County Gazetteer*.³²¹ Wang Gen wrestled with the problem of what to do when parents and elder brothers were unvirtuous and gave unvirtuous orders. A discussion of the issue lies behind a passage in *The Analects* where Confucius says: “In serving his parents, a son may remonstrate with them, but gently; when he sees that they do not incline to follow his advice, he shows an increased degree of reverence, but does not abandon his purpose; and should they punish him, he does not allow himself to murmur.”³²² Wang Gen's suggestion about what to do if one's father and elder brothers fall into unrighteousness is quite similar. He says that one must think about it repeatedly, and then in detail discuss the principles with them, using analogies to describe the real facts. Wang Gen concludes by saying that transgressions by fathers and elder brothers are the responsibility of the sons and younger brothers.³²³

How virtuous was Wang Gen himself? The compilers of Wang Gen's *Chronological Biography* do not explicitly mention that Wang Gen was in the salt trade. It says he went with his father to Shandong on business, but not what kind of business. Perhaps they did not want to write explicitly that it was the salt trade, since unauthorized trading salt was illegal. The author's aim was to build a heroic picture of him. If he was engaged in contraband trading, the authors of his *Chronological Biography* might have good reason to suppress this information. The first person to mention that he was a salt peddler is Li Yong 禮頤 (1627–1705).³²⁴

According to *The Chronological Biography*, Wang Gen dropped out of school at eleven because of poverty.³²⁵ This probably meant that his father preferred that he helped him in business instead of having expenses for his (useless) studies. But after the age of 30, he could spend time studying the Classics.³²⁶ At that time he had become independent and affluent enough to follow his own wishes. *The Chronological Biography* further tells that Wang Gen visited Shangdong Province three times. First, at 19, he travelled around in the province on business trips. The second time, when he was 21, he fell ill.

³¹⁹ Wang Shouan 王守庵 was his studio name, *hao*.

³²⁰ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817.

³²¹ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817, Ch. 5, fengsu 風俗.

³²² *The Analects* 4:18.

³²³ XZW, Ch. 4: 24b–25a (Admonition of filial piety and brotherliness).

³²⁴ Wu 2009a: 48. Wu calls this man “a Qing Ruist”.

³²⁵ XZW, Ch. 2: 2a.

³²⁶ XZW, Ch. 2.: 4b.

明儒王心齋先生父守菴公遺像



4. Portrait of Wang Gen's father Wang Hong

The doctor gave him a treatment called *cangfa* 倉法.³²⁷ The author of *The Chronological Biography* draws the conclusion that the fact that he was cured showed that the disease was related to his mind. The third time, when he was 25, he visited the shrine of Confucius, an experience that made a deep impression on him, inspiring him to be determined to follow the Way. He returned home, put *The Book of Filial Piety*, *The Analects*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean* in his sleeves to be able to ask people he occasionally met on his way about difficult passages.³²⁸ *The Chronological Biography* has the information that he built a small room (ca. 11 sq. m.) in the garden behind his house, where he devoted all his attention to studies.³²⁹ That Wang Gen could afford to spend time on studies did not mean he only read the Classics. Studying had a much broader sense of learning to become a sage and included quiet-sitting. *The Chronological Biography* says that from the age of 27 Wang Gen shut himself up in a room day and night, summer and winter, determined to meditate until he reached enlightenment.³³⁰ This was probably the room mentioned before, which he built in his garden. Most likely it is the studio he called *Xinzhai* (心齋) ‘Studio of the mind’. As mentioned before, this was the name which Wang Gen took for himself.

His meditation technique is said to have resembled that of Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500), a technique rather common during the Ming Dynasty.³³¹ Chen Xianzhang is a forerunner of Wang Yangming striving to find *li* 理 ‘principle’ in himself. In contrast to Zhu Xi, who maintains that principle is above forms, Chen Xianzhang claims that it permeates everything. According to Fung Yu-lan, immanence came into the Neo-Confucian tradition via Chen Xianzhang. Those who came to him for studies were mainly taught quiet-sitting.³³² Chen first studied meditation with Wu Yubi 吳與弼 (1397–1469) and had practised it intensively for a period, but realized it threatened his health. Then he changed to a more varied practice including walking, boating, and fishing. In this way, he could at the same time stay in touch with fellow men and nature.³³³ Wang Gen also adopted a more social approach compared with those who cut the bonds with society.³³⁴

³²⁷ In Chinese medicine, this treatment includes drinking a broth of cooked beef, drinking alcohol and resting. Whether the treatment during the Ming was the same is unclear.

³²⁸ XZW, Ch. 2: 3a.

³²⁹ XZW, Ch. 2: 1b.

³³⁰ XZW, Ch. 2: 3b–4a.

³³¹ de Bary 1970: 158.

³³² Fung 1973: 594.

³³³ Meskill 1982: 67.

³³⁴ The historian Deng Zhifeng said to me, when I visited Fudan University during March and April 2011, that Wang Gen, due to his emphasis on action paid less attention to meditation later in life compared to the beginning, but I have not been able to verify the statement in the literature.



5. Wang Gen in meditation posture

The experience Wang Gen had in Qufu at the shrine of Confucius was a starting point for him, but the enlightenment dream he had four years later at the age of 29 had a deeper impact on his self-awareness as a rescuer of humankind. Wang's enlightenment dream is described in *The Chronological Biography* in the following way:

One night when the Master was dreaming, the Heaven fell on him and pressed him down. Lots of people were screaming for help. The Master raised his arms, held up the Heaven and got up. He saw that the sun and the moon were not in their proper places, and he therefore put them back in their original order with his own hands, whereupon all the people danced happily and expressed their gratefulness. When he woke up, he was bathing in sweat. He suddenly realized that his mind had become completely clear, [he also understood] that the ten thousand things (i.e. the phenomenal world) are one, and that the notion of the universe inside oneself is true and unquestionable. After this, his movements stopped, and his speech silenced, everything was in the middle of an enlightened state. He made notes on the wall and after the dream he wrote it down. [This was done] at Juren in the middle of the third month in the sixth year of Zhengde (1511).³³⁵

The Dongtai County Gazetteer has the explanation that *Juren* (居仁) 'to dwell in humaneness' was his house.³³⁶ *The Chronological Biography* thereafter tells us that this was the beginning of his enlightenment and that in the eleventh month the same year his second son, Wang Bi, was born.³³⁷ Thus Wang Gen had already had an enlightenment experience and a strong self-awareness before being influenced by the thoughts of Wang Yangming. On one occasion, when Wang Gen was explicating *The Analects*, the village teacher Huang Wengang 黄文刚 said to him that his thoughts were close to Wang Yangming's. According to *The Chronological Biography*, this was when Wang Gen was 38. To understand if the observation of Huang Wengang was correct, he travelled to Jiangxi Province and visited Wang Yangming. At the time Wang Yangming was the governor of the province, so the difference in social status between Wang Yangming and Wang Gen was enormous. Wang Gen's behaviour is often described as eccentric. One example of this is his very concrete way to make the sages his model. Since it is said in Mencius that "Can one speak the words of Yao and yet not wear the clothing of Yao?"³³⁸ Wang Gen made himself an outfit based on some descriptions in the *Book of Rites*. According to Wang Gen's *Chronological Biography*, Wang Gen waited in this odd dress in the courtyard for Wang Yangming to come out in person

³³⁵ XZW, Ch. 2: 4a.

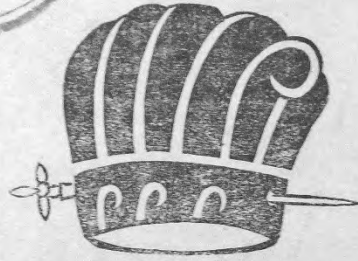
³³⁶ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817: 900.

³³⁷ See also Wu 2009a: 48.

³³⁸ XZW Ch. 2: 11b-12a. *The Book of Mencius*, Gaozi 2: 22.

王心齋先生冠服蒲輪等製圖

五 常 冠



糊紙爲之式高寸許廣
三寸袤四寸上爲五梁
廣如式之袤而長八寸
跨頂前後下着于式屈
其兩端各半寸內外而
黑漆之式之兩旁半寸
之上竅以受笄笄用白
齒骨名五常冠仁義禮
智信皆天德也亦見戴
天之義初冠謁文成公

深 衣 製



袂 袂
衣身二尺二寸
袂緣廣二寸
裳前後共十二幅
裳緣廣寸半與袂同
袂格也尺有二寸圍之則三尺有四寸緣廣寸半
縫合此處謂之續袂鈞邊

王心齋先生冠服蒲輪等製圖



6. Wang Gen's hat and dress (XZW, Ch. 1: 20b-21a)

and escort him in, and then he bluntly took the seat of honour. After a while, however, he surrendered it and made his submission as a disciple of Wang Yangming. Although Wang Gen's behaviour was shocking, when he put himself on a par with the well-known and distinguished governor, Wang Yangming stated that he was deeply moved by Wang Gen.³³⁹ This narrative might not be true, but he must at least have had close relations with Wang Yangming's main disciples. A second well-known example of Wang Gen's eccentricities is his trip to the capital in 1522. He decided to travel to Beijing to spread Wang Yangming's idea of the extension of the innate knowledge of the good. He expressed his intention to teach this idea to all people, not only recluses and literati but also to "ignorant people at the market places" (*Guo shijing qifa yumeng* 過市井啟發愚蒙).³⁴⁰ He constructed a carriage, like the one Confucius had used, he believed, and wore his special costume mentioned above.³⁴¹ On his arrival in Beijing, his odd dress and carriage attracted people's attention and provoked criticism from learned scholars. Wang Yangming's other disciples in Beijing urged Wang Gen to leave the capital, and Wang Yangming sent him a letter reprimanding him. Wang Gen then finally left Beijing, his *Chronological Biography* states.

In the *Chronological Biography* it is said that Wang Yangming changed Wang Gen's original name Yin 'silver' to Gen 艮 from *The Book of Changes* and that he gave him the styled name Ruzhi 汝止 'you stop', 'you halt', which also has the meaning of 'rest'.³⁴² It sounds plausible that Wang Yangming wanted to stop this kind of indulgent behaviour and eccentricity. The concept of *zhi* 止 with the meaning of 'rest', 'abide in', and 'stay at' had been discussed since the time of Zhu Xi, if not longer. In the Ming material, there are pictures of Wang Gen's brothers; their names are Rucheng 汝成, Ruquan 汝全, Ruliang 汝良 and Rusheng 汝勝.³⁴³ This means that it was not Wang Yangming, who gave the styled name Ruzhi to Wang Gen and subsequently he most probably did not change his name from *yin* 'silver' to *gen* 'stop', 'rest' either, a name with the same meaning as Ruzhi. The person who did so must

³³⁹ This is mentioned by Huang Zongxi in MRXA: 709. It is also mentioned in XZW, Ch. 2: 10b, but I have not found this utterance in *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming* (WYMQJ). In WYMQJ Wang Gen is mentioned five times, and his second son Wang Bi once.

³⁴⁰ XZW, Ch. 2: 12b.

³⁴¹ The story is rendered by Huang Zongxi in MRXA: 710 but does not occur in *The Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen. It would have occurred the year when Wang Gen was 39, but *The Chronological Biography* does not mention anything from this year, only the year when he was 38 and visited Wang Yangming and when he was 40. The year in between, that is, 1522 would have been 武宗正德辛巳.

³⁴² XZW, Ch. 2: 10b–11a. For a discussion on the meaning of Wang Gen's name Ruzhi and Gen, see Wu 2009a: 53. Wu is correct in his discussion of the link to *The Book of Changes*, but he still believes in the information given by *The Chronological Biography*. To change Wang Gen's original name Yin 銀 'silver' to Gen 艮, which in *The Book of Changes* also means 'stop', 'rest', like the meaning of Ruzhi, was easily done by removing the metal radical.

³⁴³ 明傳王東壩東隅東日天真四先生殘稿。

先生謁文成公後有周流天下之志故製此車標題于上曰天下一個萬物一體入山林求會隱逸過市井啟發愚蒙遵聖道天地弗違致良知鬼神莫測欲同天下人爲善無此招搖做不通知我者其惟此行乎罪我者其惟此行乎車成乃有鯀鱓賦等作觀此則先生兼善之志概可見矣

蒲 輪 製



御此者以騾驅代之輕且疾也升下俱門輔之

7. Wang Gen's chariot

have been his father Wang Hong, also depicted in the same work. The change does not seem to have anything to do with taboo names, so the reason must be something else. My discovery sheds new light on the story about Wang Gen's first meeting with Wang Yangming. It was certainly not Wang Yangming, who was the first to observe that it was necessary to hold back Wang Gen or to teach him to hold himself back. The one who came up with this idea was Wang Hong. Although not a very rich man, he might have had some knowledge of Neo-Confucian discourse, and he must have had knowledge of his son, who was a dynamic person, and whom a parent would need to teach the habit of 'stopping' and thinking twice before acting. It might be possible that Wang Yangming came to a similar conclusion as Wang Hong, and even gave him the name Gen, but initially it was Wang Gen's father who gave him the name Ruzhi. This man, who is described as an epicurean, might not have been as immoral as people have tended to describe him. For him, self-cultivation must have been something desirable, otherwise he would not have chosen Ruzhi as a name for his son. Furthermore, this error in *The Chronological Biography* gives us good reason to be cautious regarding the rest of its information. How certain is the information in Wang Gen's *Chronological Biography* about Wang Gen meeting Wang Yangming in person? Wang Gen obviously met and corresponded with his disciples. Wang Gen is furthermore mentioned in Wang Yangming's writings, so I am still convinced that they met, but the description of their meeting in Wang Gen's *Chronological Biography* might be rather legendary.

Early in life, Wang Gen left the narrow world of Taizhou on business trips, but after about 1520, the year *The Chronological Biography* says he met Wang Yangming for the first time, and the following years until the death of Wang Yangming in 1528, he made more acquaintances with leading scholars of the Wang Yangming movement. When a local famine occurred in 1523, he borrowed grain from the rich and asked officials to help the poor.³⁴⁵ During the same period, he wrote the "Rhapsody of the Loach and the Eels".³⁴⁶ This is the fable of a man who comes across a store at a market. In front of the store, there is a basin full of lifeless eels. Suddenly, he sees a vigorous loach among the eels. When the loach is swimming around among the eels, it gives them energy and makes them regain their spirit. A thunderstorm breaks out and the loach jumps up into the sky into the Milky Way, and then down into the great sea. When it looks back, it sees the trapped eels and feels pity for them. It decides to save them and transforms itself into a dragon and then makes the eels return to the river and the sea. At the end of the narrative, the man looking at the fishes makes the comment: "Although I will not separate myself from things, I will not be bound by things either", which could also be said to be the motto of Wang Gen himself. This fable has a theme like the enlightenment

³⁴⁵ XZW, Ch. 2: 15a–16a.

³⁴⁶ XZW, Ch. 4: 26b–28a. For a complete translation of the story see Lee 1990, Appendix A.

dream of Wang Gen. It shows strong self-confidence and a feeling of commitment to save all trapped beings in the world. During the Ming dynasty, releasing captured animals like fish and birds was a recognized way to earn religious merit in Buddhist practice. In Wang Gen's story of the loach and the eels, it is possible to discern the tension between compassion for living beings and the striving for non-attachment, the same tension as we find in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Although there are certain similarities between Wang Gen's ideas and Buddhism, especially his teaching style,³⁴⁷ *The Chronological Biography* tells us that Wang Gen criticized the Buddhists and the Daoists and removed the Buddhist and Daoist images from the family shrine. He advised his father to establish the family ritual and make sacrifices to four generations of forefathers.³⁴⁸

Wang Gen was early engaged in teaching. He travelled to places far from Taizhou to give lectures. In 1525 (when he was 43), he was invited to the Fuchu Academy 復初書院, founded by Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562) in Guangde, Anhui. The same year he wrote a text “Discourse on Returning to the Beginning” (*Fuchu shuo* 復初說), which was an elaboration on the concept used in the name of the newly founded academy.³⁴⁹ In 1527, he went to Nanjing (Jinling 金陵) and met Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水 (1466–1560), Zou Shouyi and Ouyang De 歐陽德 (1496–1554) at the Xinquan Academy 新泉書院.³⁵⁰ All these scholars were well-known disciples of Wang Yangming. But Wang Gen was not only engaged in teaching. He also worked to improve the daily lives of ordinary people. Before the death of Wang Yangming in 1528, he wrote “Commoner's Daily Practice” (*Baixing riyong* 百姓日用). According to his *Chronological Biography*, Wang Gen went to Tonglu in Yangzhou prefecture to meet the coffin and escort it to Wang Yangming's home when Wang Yangming died, an act a true disciple was expected to do. In line with this, Wang Gen also followed the tradition of disciples observing a period of mourning.

Back in Taizhou he opened a school. The building was called “The Hall of Joyful Learning” (*Le Xue Tang* 樂學堂). (See Figure 9.)

Wang Gen's reputation as a teacher grew after the death of Wang Yangming. He received disciples from all social levels; not only from Taizhou, but also from places afar.³⁵¹ The quotation from *The Analects* “In instruction there is no separation into categories”³⁵² is often understood as “In

³⁴⁷ Übelhör 1986: 118.

³⁴⁸ XZW, Juan 2: 5b. (*Chronological Biography*)

³⁴⁹ XZW, Juan 2: 17a–b. (*Chronological Biography*)

³⁵⁰ XZW, Juan 2: 21a. (*Chronological Biography*)

³⁵¹ Lee 1990: 96.

³⁵² The formulation is taken from D.C. Lau's translation of *you jiao wu lei* 有教無類 (*The Analects*, Wei Ling Gong: 39).

education there should be no class distinction.”³⁵³ In this last sense it was realized by Wang Gen – no matter if it had this meaning in *The Analects*. Among his disciples, there were ordinary workers as well as scholars.

The sources do not tell exactly how the lectures were organized and what the curriculum was, and it is impossible to know for certain what they did in the “Hall of Striving for Humaneness” (*Mianren Tang* 勉仁堂). (See figure 8.) Wang Gen wrote a text entitled *The Principles of Striving for Humaneness* (*Mianren Fang* 勉仁方) in 1536.³⁵⁴ This work has sketches of the hall (*Mianren Tang*). I assume, that there was a tradition to compose a text celebrating the completion of a building construction. The censor Hong Yuan 洪垣 (1532–1590?) established the *Dongtao Retreat* (*Dongtao Jingshe* 東陶精舍)³⁵⁵ the same year, and the *Mianren Hall* might have been a part of it. Furthermore, the community compact was established (uncertain exactly when). Dong Sui 董燧 (dates unknown), who came from Jiangxi (Fuzhou Prefecture, Le’An county) stayed at the academy for studies for three months in 1536. He is later said to be the editor of Wang Gen’s *Chronological Biography*.³⁵⁶ I have not been able to verify this, but at least he wrote a postscript to the Wang Xinzhai Quanjì from 1604. *The Chronological Biography* mentions that Wang Gen paid the cost for his studies in Taizhou, and the same is said of Nie Jing 聶靜.³⁵⁷ Regardless of when the Hall of Striving for Humaneness was built, there is a connection between the text and the hall. The text discusses the innate knowledge of goodness and self-cultivation. It urges people to adhere to Confucian values such as trustworthiness, and the golden rule of reciprocity.³⁵⁸

Eventually, knowledge of Wang Gen’s abilities in administration became widespread and they were recognized by officials. There had been discontentment about the unequal distribution of salt-farming land in Anfeng Chang for a while. A local official asked Wang Gen for assistance, and he drew up a plan which was adopted.³⁵⁹ It is included in the text *Proposal on Equal Distribution of Salt Fields* (*Jun Fen Cao Dang Yi* 均分草蕩議).³⁶⁰ The

³⁵³ The same annotation in Wing Tsit-chan’s translation.

³⁵⁴ XZW, Ch. 3: 33b–37a. The text is mentioned by Wang Dong, but not by Wang Bi. See Wu 2009a: 67.

³⁵⁵ *Jingshe* is a term also used in a Daoist setting. Then it is translated as “purification hall” and referred to buildings placed in connection with altar platforms at Daoist sacred mountains. See Hahn 2004: 686.

³⁵⁶ Lee 1990: 100.

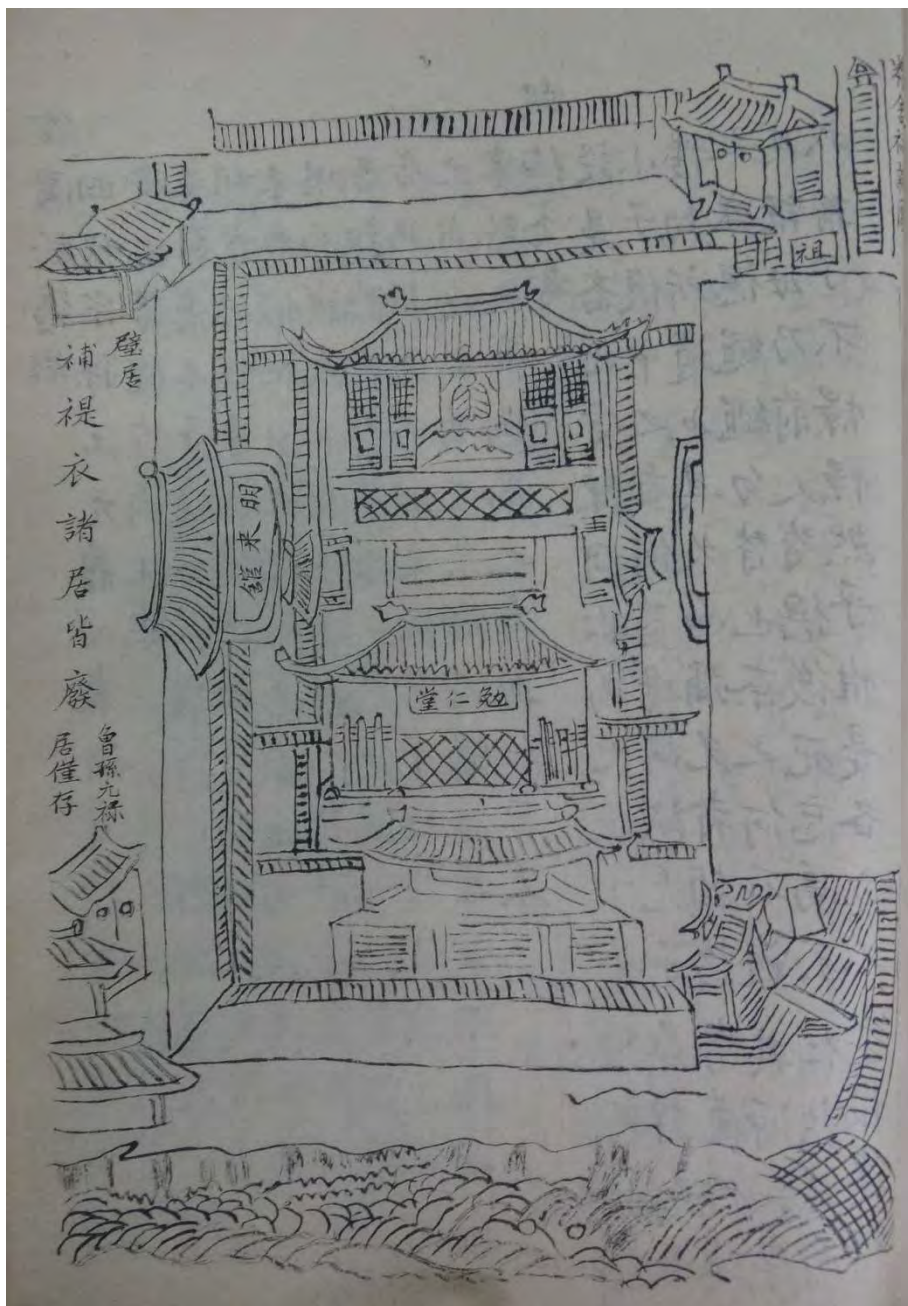
³⁵⁷ He was an adopted nephew of Nie Bao (聶豹 (1487–1563), or to be precise the son of Nie Hong 聶洪 (1479–1541) See Wu 2001: 326. Nie Bao was from Jiangxi like Dong Sui, but from Ji’an Prefecture, Yongfeng County. He is categorized by Huang Zongxi as a member of the Jiangyou School.

³⁵⁸ XZW, Ch. 3: 33b–37a.

³⁵⁹ XZW, Ch. 2: 38a–b.

³⁶⁰ XZW, Ch. 4: 50a–51a.

salt fields included marshland which was important for the salt producers. It was used for planting crops used as fuel in the salt production process.



8. Hall of Striving for Humaneness

In 1540, Wang Gen wrote his last text entitled *Treatise on the Kingly Way* (*Wang Dao Lun* 王道論).³⁶¹ This text and *Proposal on Equal Distribution of Salt Fields* will be discussed in the following section.

In 1541, at the age of 58, Wang Gen passed away attended by his disciples and sons at his deathbed.³⁶²

The ideas of Wang Gen

Wang Gen's ideas inspired many people during the mid and late Ming dynasty and have continued to do so all the way up to today. What is the special quality of his ideas that attracts many people and at the same time repels others? Which of his ideas are unique and what is traditional Confucian and Neo-Confucian thought? Wang Gen was not only unique because he had commoner status; he also interpreted the Classics from his own experience, which led him in a new direction. Wu Zhen has convincingly shown that what made him different from earlier Neo-Confucian thinkers were his ideas of “securing the self and establishing one's root”, as well as “protecting and respecting the self”.³⁶³ I will first present a background of his thoughts, to clarify what he reacted against and what kind of ideas inspired him.

Learning as joy and joy as learning

In a song called “The Song of Joyful Learning” *Lexue Ge* 樂學歌, Wang Gen expressed his view of learning as joy thus:

The mind of human beings is fundamentally joyous in itself,
it becomes tied up by selfish desires.
When the selfish desires germinate,
the knowledge of the good regains its self-awareness.
As soon as awareness arises, selfish desire is eliminated,
the mind returns to its former happiness.
Joy is to enjoy this learning,
learning is to learn this joy.
Not to learn is to be unhappy,
to refrain from learning is not joy.
When one is full of joy, one learns,
When one is full of learning, one is joyful.
Joy is learning,
learning is joy.

³⁶¹ XZW, Ch. 4: 43b–49b.

³⁶² XZW, Ch. 2: 41b.

³⁶³ Wu 2009a: 99–124.

Therefore, the joy in the world is this kind of learning,
the learning in the world is this kind of joy!³⁶⁴

For him, true learning was joyful, compared with studies for civil service examinations, which were painful and an expression of desires for rank and wealth. The human mind in itself is joy, according to Wang Gen, which could be understood as meaning that innate knowledge of the good creates awareness of oneself, and that this knowledge gives man a deep feeling of satisfaction. Earlier Neo-Confucian thinkers also rejected the desire for rank and wealth, and Wang Gen was certainly not the first Neo-Confucian to discard the imperial examinations. What is interesting, however, is that Wang Gen has a positive evaluation of desires as a vehicle for understanding of moral consciousness.

The link between learning and joy is found before Wang Gen in the writings of Wang Yangming. When Chen Jiuquan asks him why it is difficult for him to experience a feeling of security and joy, Wang Yangming answers that he will have such a feeling if he sincerely tries to extend his innate knowledge of the good.³⁶⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 2, the joy of learning is accentuated in the famous first line of *The Analects*. The Master said: “Is it not pleasant to learn and keep practising [what you have learnt]? Is it not joyful to have friends coming from places far away?”³⁶⁶ When Mencius talked about joy, he exemplified it by talking about the ancient rulers who let people enjoy pleasures, and in joining them in the pleasures, the rulers felt joy themselves.³⁶⁷ His idea of the ruler as forming one body with all beings would become a central idea in the thought of Wang Yangming and within the whole Wang Yangming movement. The joyous side of Confucianism had to be rediscovered in the middle of Ming times. A common trait in the thought of Wang Yangming and Wang Gen is the view that the mind is identical with joy. Wang Yangming says: “Joy is characteristic of the original substance of the mind.” And he continues: “Though it is not identical with the joy of the seven feelings, it is not outside it.”³⁶⁸ That is, there is a relation between ordinary happiness in daily life and happiness acquired through self-cultivation. They are not of two different kinds. At the end of the *Moral Education*, Wang Yangming concludes that the realized person has a mind which is joyous. It is a sincere mind with no self-deception.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁴ XZW, Ch. 4:25a–b.

³⁶⁵ WYMJ: 92.

³⁶⁶ *The Analects*, “Xue er”:1.

³⁶⁷ *The Book of Mencius*, “Liang Hui Wang 1”: 2.

³⁶⁸ WYMJ: 69.

³⁶⁹ WYMJ: 143.

To secure the self and establish the root

The concept of *gewu* is usually translated as ‘investigation of things’, and as I mentioned in the introductory chapter, this is a term discussed by Zhu Xi, who argues that it means to investigate the principle (*li* 理) in every thing, something Wang Yangming criticized. Wang Yangming argued that it was enough to investigate one’s mind. To mark that Wang Gen’s notion of *gewu* differs from Zhu Xi’s as well as Wang Yangming’s, his idea has been called “Huainan *gewu*” 淮南格物, since he came from the Huainan area. Wang Gen says that *ge* (格) means ‘standard’ or ‘pattern’ (*geshi* 格式) and could be described as a ‘measuring square’ (*ju* 矩) already mentioned in the latter part of *The Great Learning*. The lines from *The Great Learning* ‘things have their root and branches’ (*wu you ben mo* 物有本末) are important.³⁷⁰ For Wang Gen ‘root’ (*ben* 本) is the self and ‘branch’ (*mo* 末) is ‘the state and the whole world’.³⁷¹ Everything starts from the self. At the same time, ‘Things’ or ‘objects’ in the quotation from *The Great Learning* are both the self and the world as a totality. The self has its origin and its consequences, in the same way as the world has its origin and its consequences.³⁷² Wang Gen regards *The Great Learning* as the most concise of all books. His major ideas in fact evolve from the initial part of *The Great Learning*, which says:

The main idea of *The Great Learning* is to manifest the shining virtue, to be close to the people,³⁷³ and to rest when arriving at the good (*zai zhi yu zhi shan* 在止於至善). When there is knowledge about how to rest,³⁷⁴ it is possible to be determined; when there is determination,³⁷⁵ it is possible to be calm; when there is calmness, it is possible to be peaceful; when there is peace, it is possible to be deliberate; when there are deliberations, it is possible to reach attainment.³⁷⁶ Things have their roots and branches, and affairs have their ends and

³⁷⁰ 物 *wu* can also be translated as ‘object’. The word 萬物 *wanwu* ‘the ten thousand things’ is used in colloquial language, meaning ‘everything’, but as a philosophical term it denotes the phenomenal world.

³⁷¹ WXZQJ: 34.

³⁷² Wu 2009a: 113.

³⁷³ Zhu Xi had changed the word 親 *qin* ‘to be close’ to 新 *xin* ‘to renovate’, but Wang Yangming changed it back to ‘love’ as in the older version. Hence the second guiding principle in the opening verse is expressed as ‘to be close the people’ and not ‘to renovate the people’. Wang Gen follows Wang Yangming in interpreting the second principle as love the people and says that the shining virtue is the root, that is, it comes first, and to be close to the people is a branch, that is, it comes because of the shining virtue.

³⁷⁴ Another common explanation is ‘where to rest’. The text only says rest, so a more literal translation would be “knowledge about resting”.

³⁷⁵ Yan Jun will later talk about meditation as a prerequisite for social activities, since meditation gives the determination for it. See Chapter 5.

³⁷⁶ I.e. to reach the goals strived for.

beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes later is to approach the Way.³⁷⁷

In ancient times, those who wished to manifest the shining virtue in the world first ordered their states; those who wished to order their states first regulated their families;³⁷⁸ those who wished to regulate their families first cultivated themselves; those who wished to cultivate themselves first rectified their minds; those who wanted to rectify their minds first made their intentions sincere; those who wished to make their intentions sincere first extended their knowledge; extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things.

When things are investigated, knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, the intentions will become sincere; when the intentions become sincere, the mind will be rectified; when the mind is rectified, the self will be cultivated; when the self is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; when the state is in order, the whole world will be peaceful. Therefore, everyone – from the son of Heaven to the common people – should regard self-cultivation as the root. It is not possible that the root is in disorder and the branches are in order. And it has never been the case that what is important is taken lightly, and what is insignificant is given great importance.³⁷⁹

Wang Gen's elaboration of 'investigation of things' is an explanation of the quotation from *The Great Learning* above. He follows Wang Yangming, who re-establishes the older version of this text, which was originally a chapter in *The Book of Rites*. The opening lines consist of three guiding principles. The first is to make the shining virtue manifest; the second is to be close to the people and the third is to rest in goodness, or to be mindful of the good. Wang Gen says that the shining virtue is the root, that is, it comes first, and to be close to the people is a branch, that is, it comes because of the shining virtue.³⁸⁰ According to Wang Gen, the aim to rest in goodness and to protect the self were two activities which were mutually supportive. To rest in goodness was the mental state endeavoured, and the protected self the prerequisite. The two aims of "protecting the self" and "calming the mind" are very close, but I assume the reason why Wang Gen regarded the protection of the self as the basis was that he had experienced insecurity and a life-threatening situation, and that such situations made it impossible to meditate and to work for a restful mind. Therefore, for Wang Gen protecting and securing the self had to be realized before trying to calm the mind.

³⁷⁷ A common understanding is that the text here is talking about the Way or Principle of *The Great Learning*.

³⁷⁸ The notion of family is the extended family or the whole clan.

³⁷⁹ *The Great Learning*.

³⁸⁰ Wu Zhen argues that Wang Gen did not believe in the possibility of resting 'in the good' in practice, and this was the reason for introducing the concept of securing the self. See Wu 2009a: 115.

Wang Gen said to Zhou Jihan 周季翰: “To stay in humaneness; to stay in reverence; to stay in compassion, to stay in trustfulness”; if a person does not first understand how “to protect himself”, and then if he tries “to stay in filial piety” it will lead to burning his body and cutting a slice of his thigh; those who try to “stay in reverence”, will die of hunger, and knit the hat strings (*jieying* 結纓).³⁸¹ This mechanism has to be revealed. When the beginning has the right landing (*xialuo* 下落), then it is possible “inwardly, not to lose oneself, and outwardly, not to lose others”. Thus, *The Great Learning* refers to the poem “The oriole”.³⁸² First it refers to this poem, and then it refers to the poem about King Wen, who is described as making sincere efforts, and not taking in water (*wanquan wu shenlou* 完全無滲漏).³⁸³

Here Wang Gen develops the idea that protecting the self is a prerequisite for other Confucian cardinal virtues expressed in *The Great Learning*, like “resting in benevolence, resting in reverence, resting in filial piety, resting in compassion, resting in trustfulness”.³⁸⁴ The quotation shows that Wang Gen’s notion of protecting the self is a protest against the prevailing self-sacrificing morality.

It is important to understand what Wang Gen means by ‘self’. The character for self is originally a pictograph of a man with a big stomach, that is, a physical body. Later, ‘self’ becomes something, which denotes life and the spirit of a man. Huang Zongxi has noted that Wang Gen connected the self not only to the human body but to something, which goes beyond the physical existence of the human being.³⁸⁵ There is an interesting annotation by Wang Gen, where he says: “To secure the self and to calm the mind is the best; not to secure the self but calm the mind comes next; neither to secure the self nor calm the mind is the worst case.”³⁸⁶ Here Wang Gen puts ‘the self’ in contrast to the ‘mind’; and furthermore, the self is regarded as more important than the mind, an idea which is contrary to other Neo-Confucian thinkers. In Wang

³⁸¹ “Knit the hat strings” refers to a passage in *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the Commentary of Zuo, the 15th year under Duke Ai (489 BC). The disciple of Confucius Zigong said. “When a *junzi* dies, one does not take off the hat, but knits the hat strings.” Here I interpret it as “to prepare the funeral dress”.

³⁸² A poem in *The Book of Songs* of a person who is exhausted during a journey and sees an oriole resting on a mound. *The Great Learning* refers to this poem saying that the oriole knows where to rest.

³⁸³ XZW, Ch. 1: 47b. The last description of King Wen uses a boat metaphor with the meaning “not taking in water”, that is, a safe boat, which is seaworthy. Thus King Wen makes sincere efforts, and because of this, his Way works in dynamic life, with high wind and high waves.

³⁸⁴ *The Great Learning* talks of King Wen, and how he is “resting in benevolence, resting in reverence, resting in filial piety, resting in compassion, resting in trustfulness”. (As a sovereign, he rested in humaneness; as a minister, he rested in respect; as a son, he rested in filial piety, as father, he rested in compassion, when communicating with people in his country, he rested in trustfulness. 為人君，止於仁；為人臣，止於敬；為人子，止於孝；為人父，止於慈；與國人交，止於信)

³⁸⁵ Wu 2009a: 152.

³⁸⁶ XZW, Ch. 3: 23b.

Gen's *Recorded Conversations*, 'the self' stands for something basic, and is associated with 'root', so it is more important to secure the self than to calm the mind. Compared with the mind, the self is the ultimate end of the root. It is difficult to know if this understanding of 'self' and 'mind' was an idea Wang Gen figured out for himself or if it was prevalent among commoners during the Ming dynasty, but it was certainly not a common understanding among Neo-Confucian scholars. To understand the meaning of 'self' and 'mind' in the Wang Gen's texts, it is necessary to look at every quotation separately. The quotations come from situations when Wang Gen was talking to his disciples. Wang Gen was not a systematic philosopher who first made a definition of his terminology and then used it accordingly. He used his concepts in teaching situations, so it is plausible to infer that with the word 'self' he referred to the whole person or the life of a person, but on certain occasions he used it for the original mind, which he regards as the root of everything. Below, it will be shown that he probably included the body when talking about protecting the self.

The notion of 'securing the self' was new to Neo-Confucian thought and to Confucianism at large. Neither Zhu Xi nor Wang Yangming had talked about 'loving the self', 'securing the self', and 'protecting the self' or 'respecting the self'. Before Wang Gen, the importance of regulating the self, *xiushen* 修身 had been emphasized, and the conviction that the self should be regulated or rectified had never been questioned.³⁸⁷ Wang Gen equated the self with the Way *Dao*,³⁸⁸ which was perfect and therefore did not need any regulation or rectification. And he not only regarded the self as identical with the Way: everything formed one unity: "Humaneness, is the Way of unifying everything."³⁸⁹

In Wang Gen's view, a person needs to make his mind sincere to reach the ultimate root. In this effort, he comes to an understanding of the first movement of departure from the highest good. The knowledge of the good is the capacity of knowing when this first deviation from the good starts. It requires a return to the beginning, a return to the ultimate root of the self. The self has the position of subject. Wang Gen quotes a few lines from *The Book of Changes* several times: "the authentic person secures himself and thereafter he acts",³⁹⁰ "make uses of his secured self" and "if the self is secure, the state can be protected."³⁹¹

In another text, Wang Gen says that the self is our measuring square, and the world or the nation are the squares to be measured. The idea of the measuring square comes from *The Great Learning*. If the squares are

³⁸⁷ Chen 2008: 276.

³⁸⁸ XZW, Ch. 3: 48a.

³⁸⁹ XZW, Ch. 3: 32a. *Ren ye, wanwu yiti zhi dao.* 仁也萬物一體之道。

³⁹⁰ WXZQJ: 34.

³⁹¹ WXZQJ: 33.

incorrect, then we know that the measuring square is incorrect too. The only thing to do is to correct the measuring square. When this is done, it is possible to apply the measuring square to the external world and reach a correct understanding of it.³⁹² The self is the starting point in Wang Gen's thought, and his emphasis on securing and respecting the self are what makes him different from the other Neo-Confucians, and what gives his thought a special quality. According to Wang Gen, the idea of securing the self is the gist of *The Great Learning*. In the following section, I will return to why he had this idea. He furthermore says that to establish the root is self-cultivation, and self-cultivation is to secure the self.³⁹³ All these aspects are interrelated.

Some Neo-Confucian key concepts in Taizhou discourse

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, a common understanding of Zhu Xi is that one must understand the principle (*li* 理) in every "thing" (*wu* 物). This means engaging in the 'investigation of things'. At least this was how Wang Yangming understood Zhu Xi and why he decided to sit in front of a bamboo until he understood the principle of the bamboo.³⁹⁴ The result, however, was that he fell ill, and this was the starting point of Wang Yangming's re-evaluation of Zhu Xi's ideas. Wang Yangming concluded that what is crucial is 'to extend the knowledge of the good' (*zhi liangzhi* 致良知). Following Mencius, Wang Yangming and the Taizhou practitioners argued that 'knowledge of the good' is a faculty everybody possesses. The crux, in their view, is to be aware of this knowledge already within the human mind.

A question that has been discussed by several scholars is how close the thought of Wang Gen is to that of Wang Yangming.³⁹⁵ Is Wang Gen an independent thinker or should we treat him as in essence a part of the Wang Yangming movement? Some scholars, such as Hou Wailu, argue that his ideas are groundbreaking, so they regard the so-called "Taizhou School" as an independent school of thought.³⁹⁶ Others regard him essentially as a part of the Wang Yangming movement.³⁹⁷

³⁹² XZW, Ch. 3:42a–42b.

³⁹³ XZW, Ch. 3: 40b–41a.

³⁹⁴ It might, however, not have been Zhu Xi's intention that one must investigate the principle of every *thing*. Like Wang Yangming, he also regarded principle in human beings and things as fundamentally the same as the Heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理).

³⁹⁵ Cheng 1996, and Wu 2009a.

³⁹⁶ Hou 2005 (1987), vol. 2: 416. Huang Zongxi is unclear. He treats him in relation to other schools of Wang Yangming, but does not add "Wangmen" 王門 to the title of the "Taizhou School" as he does with the other schools within the Wang Yangming School indicating that the Taizhou practitioners did not belong to it. However, Huang Zongxi did not add "Wangmen" to the "Donglin School" either.

³⁹⁷ Wu 2009a: 426.

As mentioned earlier, it is likely that Wang Yangming and Wang Gen met. This is described in Wang Gen's *Chronological Biography* as well as in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*, although in different ways. Furthermore, the *Moral Education* by Wang Yangming mentions several discussions between Wang Yangming and Wang Gen.

According to *The Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen, Wang Gen and Wang Yangming mainly discussed two topics on the first occasion they met. The first topic was a quotation from *The Analects* which says: "Not even in his thoughts does an authentic person go beyond what is suitable to his position."³⁹⁸ The second topic was 'extension of the knowledge of the good'. However, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter *The Chronological Biography* is not one hundred percent reliable as a source. The information could be correct, but it would be valuable to have an independent source of information that verifies their discussion. Huang Zongxi does not go into detail about the topics of discussion but focuses on the relationship between Wang Yangming and Wang Gen, Wang Gen's stubbornness and his final submission as a disciple of Wang Yangming.³⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the idea of 'knowledge of the good' and 'to extend the knowledge of the good' is a link between Wang Yangming and Wang Gen, whether or not they ever met in real life.

The concept of 'innate knowledge of the good' derives from Mencius. According to him, everyone is endowed with such knowledge. The argument for this is his famous example of our feeling of pity when we see a small child fall into a well and our immediate wish to save it.⁴⁰⁰ Wang Yangming's notion of 'the knowledge of the good' could be summarized as something which is innate in our hearts and constitutes our moral consciousness. It manifests itself directly, growing and developing in our daily lives, and at the same time it exists beyond time and space. It is both transcendent and immanent at the same time.⁴⁰¹ For Wang Yangming, 'knowledge of the good' therefore goes hand in hand with action. He argues that knowledge is not prior to action: they come simultaneously.

The idea that innate knowledge of the good is present and accessible to all is not only an idea in the thought of Wang Yangming but also in those of Wang Ji.⁴⁰² There are different expressions of this immediate existence of the innate knowledge of good such as 'ready-made knowledge of the good' (*xiancheng liangzhi* 現成良知).⁴⁰³ Wang Yangming says it existed in man

³⁹⁸ *The Analects* "Xian wen": 27–28. (*Junzi si bu chu qi wei* 君子思不出其位.)

³⁹⁹ MRXA: 709.

⁴⁰⁰ Mou Zongsan argues that Wang Yangming belongs to the School of Mencius, which hardly any scholar would deny, see Deng 2004: 179.

⁴⁰¹ Wu 2009a: 71.

⁴⁰² For a discussion on Wang Ji's view of 'the knowledge of the good', see Peng 2005: 50–91.

⁴⁰³ For the debate on his concept of 'ready-made knowledge of the good' see Peng 2005: 378–393.

before birth and is sufficient, ‘full and round’ (*yuanman* 圓滿), that is, perfect and complete right from the very beginning. It is ‘perceived immediately’ (*jike dangxia* 即可當下).⁴⁰⁴ This idea is developed by Wang Ji and has given rise to the idea that Wang Ji belongs to an “existentialist school” of Wang Yangming.⁴⁰⁵ I will return to the discussion of different schools within the Wang Yangming movement in the next chapter.

After Wang Yangming, the hardest dispute among his followers was that concerning the notion of ‘knowledge of the good’. The main antagonists were Wang Ji and Luo Hongxian.⁴⁰⁶ The latter is placed in the Jiangyou group by Huang Zongxi. In opposition to Wang Ji, Luo Hongxian denied that ‘knowledge of the good’ was innate. Wang Ji emphasized its immediate perfection, while Luo Hongxian emphasized the necessity of effort.⁴⁰⁷ In this respect, Wang Gen comes closer to Wang Ji than to Luo Hongxian.⁴⁰⁸

Like Wang Yangming, Wang Gen links the notion of ‘knowledge of the good’ with something they call ‘ability to do the good’ (*liangneng* 良能).⁴⁰⁹ He also says that *zhi* (致) in *zhi liangzhi*, usually understood as ‘extend’ and ‘act’, in combination with “experiencing” (*tiren* 體認) means to understand the “Heavenly Principle”.⁴¹⁰ In this statement, he links action with experience, and furthermore connects it with the Heavenly Principle. What is new in Wang Gen’s thoughts compared with Wang Yangming’s is that he connects this to his idea of protecting the self.⁴¹¹ This is not only different from Wang Yangming but also from Wang Ji and Luo Hongxian.

In Confucian thought before Wang Yangming, the project of self-cultivation was to learn how to become a sage through hard work. Wang Yangming believes that we are already sages; the question is how to discover this sagehood within ourselves. However, according to him, this sagehood can fade away if we add things to it which cover the original goodness. The notion that everyone is a sage is a common idea of both Wang Yangming and Wang Gen. However, according to the records made by Chen Jiuchuan 陳九川

⁴⁰⁴ Wu 2009a: 70–87.

⁴⁰⁵ Okada 1970: 121–144.

⁴⁰⁶ His styled name was Nian’an 念庵.

⁴⁰⁷ Wu 2009a: 4. Wu Zhen claims that both Wang Ji and Luo Hongxian belonged to the Jiangyou branch, compared with Huang Zongxi who places Wang Ji in the Zhezong School.

⁴⁰⁸ There is a letter from Wang Gen to Luo Hongxian in XZW, Juan 4: 25b–26b. This letter is entitled “The Song of the Great Accomplishment”. There is also a letter to Wang Ji. It says that Wang Ji wrote to Wang Gen, saying that Luo Hongxian had doubts about going out to teach. Wang Gen says it is a pity not to ask why. Wang Gen writes: “According to the saying: ‘Of those who wish to understand the world, how many know their minds?’ If you do not, who does? You know my mind, and you know our former teacher’s mind [Wang Yangming’s], is it possible that you do not know the mind of Confucius? If one wishes to understand the mind of Confucius, one needs to understand the learning of Confucius, which is enough for a man.”

⁴⁰⁹ XZW, Ch. 3: 31b.

⁴¹⁰ XZW, Ch. 3: 38a.

⁴¹¹ XZW, Ch. 3: 31b.

(1494–1562)⁴¹² in *Moral Education*, Wang Gen is described in a very different way:

One day, Wang Ruzhi (Wang Gen) returned from a leisurely walk. The Master (Wang Yangming) asked him, ‘What did you see on your walk?’ Ruzhi answered, ‘I saw that the people filling the street were all sages.’ The Teacher said, ‘In your view the people filling the streets are all sages, but in their view, you are a sage.’ On another day, Dong Luoshi⁴¹³ returned from a leisurely walk and went to the Master and told him, ‘I saw a strange thing today.’ The Teacher said, ‘What is strange?’ ‘I saw that all the people filling the streets were sages.’ The Teacher said, ‘This is after all a common thing. Why should it be strange?’ Because Ruzhi (Wang Gen) was not quite adjusted to the ordinary people [and deep in his mind did not consider them sages] and because Luoshi’s realization [that sagehood for all was a surprise] was dim, the Master responded differently to the same statement, but in each case, he took the opposite position to help them advance.⁴¹⁴

This comment about Wang Gen is puzzling. How is it that Chen Jiuchuan says that Wang Gen was not adjusted to the ordinary people when Wang Gen was a commoner? Did Chen live with the common knowledge that a commoner was not necessarily an ordinary man, and that Wang Gen was far above ordinary people as a rich businessman? Or at least that at this time in his life he had reached a level far above them and lost contact with their suffering? The latter view would be consistent with the Marxist scholar Hou Wailu’s claim that Wang Gen rose from suppressed to be an oppressor. Another reason would be that Wang Gen harboured a wish to become an omnipotent leader of a mass movement.⁴¹⁵ The latter alternative will be discussed further at the end of this chapter. A third reason would be that there was rivalry among the disciples of Wang Yangming, and that Chen Jiuquan wanted to denigrate Wang Gen, envying his business talent and popularity.

The notion that everyone is a sage entails two consequences. First, it weakens the necessity of self-cultivation and strengthens the idea of spontaneity. All the efforts for self-cultivation, which are also meant to create a society in harmony, are consequently not needed.⁴¹⁶ Second, the dependence on text-based studies diminishes. This is a similarity between the ideas of

⁴¹² Chen Jiuquan. Courtesy name: Weijun, literary name Mingshui. He became a presented scholar in 1514, Minister at the Ministries of Rites, Civil personnel and Military Affairs. See footnote 1 in: *Instructions for Practical Learning*, Chan: 187. He has a section in MRXA: 456–463. Huang places him in the Jiangyou School together with Zou Shouyi Ouyang De, Nie Bao, Luo Hongxian and others.

⁴¹³ Luoshi’s name was Yun (1457–1533). He was a poet without any civil examination. He became Wang Yangming’s disciple at the age of 68.

⁴¹⁴ WYMQJ: 116.

⁴¹⁵ Hou 2005 (1987): 420.

⁴¹⁶ Wu consider this to be the most severe cause of the later crisis of theory in Neo-Confucianism, see Wu 2009a: 71.

Wang Yangming and Chan Buddhism. Wang Gen goes so far as to say about *The Six Classics*⁴¹⁷ that they are “a footnote to my mind”.⁴¹⁸ However, at the same time, he emphasizes learning very much, but his ideas about learning are rather different from the ideas held by those who participated in the civil service examination system.

The sceptical attitude to text-based studies came into Neo-Confucianism already in the Song Dynasty with Lu Xiangshan (1139–1192). Lu was accused of being influenced by Chan Buddhism after a dispute with Zhu Xi, who had the opposite view and said that Lu was a Chan Buddhist in Confucian disguise. Lu Xiangshan’s critical attitude towards texts was further inherited by Chen Xianzhang (1428–1500), Wang Yangming and Wang Gen. I will return to this question in Chapter 5, in the section “‘The Taizhou School’ and the agenda of Huang Zongxi”.

Linked to the concept of ‘extending the innate knowledge of the good’ is another important Neo-Confucian concept discussed by Wang Yangming and his followers, namely “investigation of things”. Wang Yangming’s idea is based on his own experience. Following Zhu Xi and his ideas on investigating the inherent principles of objects, Wang Yangming tried to investigate the principles of bamboo together with a friend in Beijing (probably in 1492). The result of their efforts was that they both fell ill – the friend after three days, Wang Yangming after seven. This made Wang Yangming reconsider Zhu Xi’s system of thought.⁴¹⁹ At the time, Wang Yangming was young, not much older than 20, perhaps even younger. There are reasons to assume that he did not understand the ideas of Zhu Xi in depth. However, Wang Yangming’s main critique of Zhu Xi’s system starts from his notion of ‘investigation of things’, which has been interpreted as if Zhu Xi was engaged in an objective study of external objects. This I regard as a deep misunderstanding of Zhu Xi, who used external objects as meditation objects. It was merely a method of concentration and had nothing to do with objectivity or subjectivity. Zhu Xi believed that principles were general, and that if you understand principles in external objects you understand everything including yourself. Wang Yangming does not discuss the modern contradiction between subjectivity and objectivity either; he argues that principle and mind are identical and concludes that the crucial question is the rectification of the mind. When the mind is rectified, the knowledge obtained must be extended to all phenomena in the world. This is what he calls ‘extension of our knowledge of the good’. Therefore, the epistemology in Wang Yangming’s thought is closely related

⁴¹⁷ *The Six Scriptures* (or Six Classics) usually refer to *The Five Classics of The Books of Songs, Documents, Rites, Changes, and The Annals of Spring and Autumn* as well as *The Book of Music*, which is lost.

⁴¹⁸ XZW, Ch. 2: 11b. *Liu jing zhe, wu xin she zhujiao* 六經者，吾心之註腳 This is what Lu Xiangshan (1139–93) said already in the Song dynasty. *Liu jing jie wo zhujiao* 六經皆我注腳. (《陆九渊集》卷三十五).

⁴¹⁹ Chan 1963: xxii.

to his ethical ideas and to his emphasis on action. Wang Gen's ideas do not differ from Wang Yangming's in this respect.

Wang Gen also follows Wang Yangming declaring that the meaning of 'investigation of things' is to 'rest in goodness' (*zhi zhi shan* 止至善), and a little further on in the same paragraph he concludes: "When we act without attaining what we desire, we must turn inwards and examine ourselves in every aspect. To turn inwards into ourselves is the actual effort of the investigation of things".⁴²⁰

In Wang Gen's thinking, there is a clear stance of proceeding from here and now, and from daily life.⁴²¹ "Someone asked him about riding the six dragons. Wang Gen answered: 'The meaning of this is that the place, where the sages start from, is *this* place (my italics). Thus, this learning, which will become clear when reaching the [inner] world of [the sages] Yao and Shun, is the affairs of daily life."⁴²² Wang Gen also said: "Everything that deviates from this [i.e. daily affairs], is called heterodoxy (*yiduan* 異端)".⁴²³ Wang Gen elaborates on the concept of 'centrality' or 'equilibrium' (*zhong* 中) in the *Doctrine of the Mean*: When the Master (i.e. Confucius) met the Wei Linggong's wife, he talked about centrality *zhong*. Zilu did not like that and talked about [what is] correct (*zheng* 正). However, there is nothing in [the concept] of [staying in] the centre, which is not correct, but correctness is not necessarily central."⁴²⁴ What is important, according to Wang Gen, is to be centered, usually interpreted by the Neo-Confucians as a state of mind before the emotions of joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, love and hate arise.⁴²⁵ Wang Gen furthermore quotes Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500), who said: "Everything will inevitably reach high clarity",⁴²⁶ "to turn inwards and examine yourself"⁴²⁷ and "to take the stem in one's hand",⁴²⁸ that is, to take the power of one's own destiny.⁴²⁹ He explains the quotations from Chen Xianzhang thus: "The universe exists inside myself. Ten thousand

⁴²⁰ XZW, Ch. 3: 1b. (*Fanji shi gewu di gongfu*. 反己是格物底工夫.)

⁴²¹ This is not totally different from the immanence of other religions, for instance Jewish Chassidism. Martin Buber recounts that a Talmud master could see the ways of Heaven beam like the streets in his home town Neharda. "Der Chassidismus kehrt den Spruch um: grosser ist es, wenn einem die Strasser der Heimatstadt erhellt sind wie die Bahnen des Himmels." (Buber 1950: 39)

⁴²² XZW, Ch. 3: 12b.

⁴²³ XZW, Ch. 3: 11b.

⁴²⁴ XZW, Ch. 3: 11b.

⁴²⁵ That is the so-called six emotions mentioned by Xunzi in *Zhengming* in 正名 5, namely *xi* 喜, *nu* 怒, *ai* 哀, *le* 樂, *ai* 愛, *wu* 惡. The difference between *xi* and *le* must be that *xi* is opposed to *nu* anger, whereas *le* is opposed to *ai* grief.

⁴²⁶ Wang Yangming might have said the same.

⁴²⁷ This might be a reference to Mencius.

⁴²⁸ XZW, Ch. 3, 11b.

⁴²⁹ The three references turn up in a quotation from Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500).

transformations give birth to the self.”⁴³⁰ The meaning of the metaphor “riding the six dragons” is to control the (six) emotions. This is what the sage can do according to Wang Gen. Wang Gen offers an optimistic view of the possibilities of all human beings (and everything else): Everything will reach clarity, you must only turn inwards and examine yourself and do like the sages did before you. Take the stem in your hand means to be your own master. With Wang Gen, the common man comes of age.

To protect and respect the self

Wang Yangming is interested in protection of local society but does not give emphasis to self-protection as much as Wang Gen does. The idea of self-respect which is central in Wang Gen’s thought is not discussed by Wang Yangming either.

In 1526, Wang Gen accepted a lectureship at Anding Academy and wrote “Another Account of the Learned Discussion at Anding Academy” (*Anding Shuyuan Jiangxue Biayan* 安定書院講學別言).⁴³¹ This text is a short discussion on the virtue of the teacher. Wang Gen praises the teacher in general, but also the efforts of Yaohu to establish the Anding Academy. Yaohu (dates unknown) was a disciple of Wang Yangming and a guard of Taizhou. His real name was Wang Chen 王臣. Their common teacher Wang Yangming had laid the foundation for both Yaohu and Wang Gen. In this text, Wang Gen describes Yaohu as a transmitter as well as a teacher in his own right.⁴³² The reason for composing this text as well as the text “On Wisdom and Protection of the Self – A Farewell Message for Yaohu’s Departure to the North” (*Mingzhe Baoshen Lun – Zengbie Yaohu Beishan* 明哲保身論 – 贈別瑤湖北上)⁴³³ was that Yaohu had been appointed an official and was about to leave for Beijing. In the text “On Wisdom and Protection of the Self” Wang Gen pursues a circular reasoning. Wang Gen argues that it is important to protect oneself and to preserve oneself like a treasure. He says that if I ‘love myself’ (*aishen* 愛身), I cannot but ‘love others’ (*airen* 愛人) and then they will love

⁴³⁰ XZW, Ch. 3: 11b. (*Yuzhou zai wo, wanhua sheng shen* 宇宙在我，萬化生身).

⁴³¹ XZW, Ch. 3: 30a–31a. Anding Academy was an academy established in Taizhou by Yaohu in honour of the Song Neo-Confucian Hu Yuan 胡瑗 (993 – 1059), also called Master Anding 安定. Anding means “to be calm and stable”, “to be settled in peace”. This concept might have a connection with *jingding* a term used for the highest meditative state in Daoism and Buddhism. See Ch. 6 “Meditation”.

⁴³² The text is translated in Lee 1990, Appendix C, 240–242. Beside Wang Gen, Yao Hu is the only disciple of Wang Yangming who came from Taizhou. One might speculate about why he was not called Taizhou. It is obviously the case that Wang Gen was much greater as a teacher and attracted many disciples. The expression “the two Wangs” (the two kings), referring to Wang Gen and Wang Ji, also indicates that they were the two disciples with the greatest influence among the disciples of Wang Yangming.

⁴³³ XZW, Ch. 3: 31a–33b.

me back and protect me. He further says that if I ‘respect myself’ (*jingshen* 敬身), I cannot but ‘respect others’ (*jingren* 敬人). To respect oneself is consequently to preserve the self like a treasure, and in Wang Gen’s opinion if I do not respect others, they will hate me and harm me, and then I am not able to preserve myself anymore. The reason why people are not able to love others is their material desires.⁴³⁴ This is what distinguishes ordinary people from sages, but the solution for them is learning. Wang Gen closes his circle of reasoning by defining learning as preserving the self.

Wang Gen further discusses the problem of loving others but not the self. It seems as if he rejects this for pragmatic reasons, because if a man does not love his self he is not able to serve his elder brother, his father, his ruler and so on. It is not that one is supposed to love oneself at the expense of others. His self-love has nothing to do with simple egoism, and it appears as if it has nothing to do with rejecting social hierarchies either. What he is criticizing is the very logic of sacrificing oneself for superiors and elder relatives, which was an even harder attack on the prevailing discourse.

“Wisdom and protection of the self” (*mingzhe baoshen* 明哲保身) is mentioned in the ancient classics. This had the meaning of a wise person who did nothing that put himself in danger. The earliest textual example of the expression is found in *The Book of Songs*,⁴³⁵ which says “Clear-sighted and wise, he protected his self”.⁴³⁶ This ode is about Zhong Shan Fu, an official of great virtue, who served his ruler without oppressing the poor or widows. He was both intelligent and wise and he managed to ensure his own safety. The Sui and Tang Confucian Kong Yinda (574–648) understood the expression as a description of persons, who “knew clearly what is good and evil. They could distinguish between right and wrong. Thus they used their clear wisdom to choose safety and get rid of peril, to avoid disaster and defeat.”⁴³⁷ *Mingzhe* has been translated as ‘sagacity’, ‘clear wisdom’, ‘bright wisdom’ and ‘clear-sighted wisdom’.⁴³⁸ The author of *The Great Learning* wants to emphasize clarity, otherwise he would have used other words for wisdom like *zhi* 智 or *hui* 慧.

The mainland scholar Ji Fangtong argues that the concept of *baoshen* has Daoist origin, and refers to Zhuangzi.⁴³⁹ Wang Gen’s notion of protecting the self has certain similarities with Daoist ideas on preserving one’s life. The Jin

⁴³⁴ XZW, ch. 3: 32b.

⁴³⁵ Greater Odes of the Kingdom, the Masses of the People, *Daya, Zhengmin* 大雅, 烝民.

⁴³⁶ 既明且哲、以保其身。

⁴³⁷ HDC. The Jin dynasty Daoist Ge Hong (283–343) explains in the chapter 仁明 of his famous work *Bao Pu Zi* that “Clear wisdom and protecting the self is a change from a bad tradition of the Daya Chapter”.

⁴³⁸ Arthur Waley translates it as “clear-sighed and wise” and Legge as “intelligent is he and wise”.

⁴³⁹ Ji 2005: 63.

dynasty (265–420) Daoist Ge Hong⁴⁴⁰ (283–343) explains in the chapter “Humaneness and clarity” (*renming* 仁) in his famous work *Baopuzi* (抱朴子): “Wisdom and protection of the self is an epoch-making idea of the *Daya* chapter.” I assume his idea is that the “*Daya* chapter” in *The Book of Songs* had as its main theme the discussion of loyalty towards the superiors including the virtue of sacrificing oneself for them. However, the poem “Masses of the People” in the *Daya* chapter goes against the idea of self-sacrifice, something Ge Hong regarded as a turning point in a positive direction.

As explained above, the self denotes not only the physical body in Wang Gen’s writings but also the mind. Therefore, protection of the self is not merely a matter of protecting the body. Huang Zongxi realized this and concluded that (*anshen* 安身) in Wang Gen’s writings also means to calm the mind,⁴⁴¹ a conclusion I find correct. The concept of *anshen*, which Wang Gen developed has this double significance of protecting one’s body and calming the mind. Furthermore, Wang Gen probably not only referred to body and mind when he talked about the self, but also to one’s life in general. As has already been mentioned, the self is related to the Way, and not only related: the self and the Way form one unity, according to Wang Gen.⁴⁴² That is why he says that to give respect to the self is the same as to give respect to the Way. Humaness (*ren* 仁) and the ethics of Wang Gen are based on a belief in this unity.

Wang Gen’s idea of protecting the self might have Daoist origin, but since Wang Gen bases his ideas on *The Book of Changes* a text which precedes the traditions of Confucianism and Daoism, this speculation is not necessary. Wang Gen and the other Taizhou practitioners anchored their ideas in the earliest classics such as *The Book of Changes* or *The Book of Rites* (or at least *The Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning*, which are two short parts of the latter classic), although later works such as *The Analects*, *The Book of Mencius* and *The Book of Filial Piety* were also important for them.⁴⁴³

A generalized comparison between Neo-Confucian thought and Buddhist doctrine reveals a difference regarding the view of existence. The affirmation of the self seems at first sight to be incompatible with the Buddhist concept of

⁴⁴⁰ Ge Hong work *Baopuzi* is an overview of the religious, medical, exorcistic and esoteric practices in the southeastern Jiangnan in the early period of the Six dynasties (222–589). The text describes ‘outer alchemy’ (*waidan* 外丹) and contains recipes using minerals. Ge belonged to the Taiqing (*Great Clarity* 太清) tradition. See Pregadio 2004: 166–167.

⁴⁴¹ MRXA: 710.

⁴⁴² XZW, Ch. 3: 48a. See also Wu 2009a: 156. Wu Zhen uses a Japanese version of *The Collected works of Wang Gen* (和刻本 王心齋全集, Ch. 3, “Annotated quotations”: 79–80), where Wang Gen says: “the self and the Way are original the same” (*shen yu dao yuan shi yijian* 身與道原是一件).

⁴⁴³ According to Deng Zhifeng, Qian Mu regards Confucius as pre-Confucian, that is, that he encompasses both Daoist and Confucian ideas. This is also my own impression when reading *The Analects*.

no-self (Sanskrit: *anātman*). In Neo-Confucianism, there is an affirmation of the self and the world. Since the Neo-Confucians in general had families and duties in society, a rejection of the self and the world might have been difficult to apply in daily life. However, the Buddhists were deeply involved in worldly life and in politics too. Ming Buddhist leaders such as Yuqi Zhuhong did not even regard that as something dubious, claiming that family life and the secular world were necessary areas for spiritual development. In the Ming, the similarities are often more striking than the differences. Like Wang Gen's expression "securing the self" (*anshen* 安身) and his preoccupation with joyful learning, there is a Buddhist expression *shenan xinle* (身安心樂), which means 'the self is secure and the mind joyous.'⁴⁴⁴

Wu Zhen assumes that the idea of protecting the self has a background in the contemporary history of Wang Gen. The text "Wisdom and Protection of the Self" (*Mingzhe baoshen lun* 明哲保身論) was written in 1526.⁴⁴⁵ One year earlier, in 1525 (the third year of the Jiaqing reign), the "Zuoshun Gate incident" occurred (*Zuoshunmen shijian* 左順門事件). More than 230 officials gathered outside the imperial palace at the Zuoshun Gate and knelt in protest against certain changes implemented by the Emperor regarding state offerings and associated honorific titles. The question was whether an honorific title should still be used for one's own father or for the Emperor, a moral conflict between showing respect for the father or for the Emperor, that is, a conflict between two archetypal Confucian values. It was at this occasion the Jiajing Emperor had a great number of officials beaten with bamboo canes with the result that 17 died.⁴⁴⁶ Furthermore, 134 officials were put in prison.⁴⁴⁷ Wang Yangming had already had a bad experience of being beaten with a bamboo cane and exiled to remote areas, and, perhaps wise from his experience, he did not protest to the Emperor but remained silent.⁴⁴⁸ And so did his disciples. Those who suffered in this incident were mainly Confucians belonging to two groups defined by Huang Zongxi as the Gelao School and the Shoujiu or Conservative School. Despite this, Wu Zhen strongly believes that the impact of this incident affected all intellectuals active during this period.⁴⁴⁹ This might be true. However, it still does not explain why it was

⁴⁴⁴ *Anle* is explained in a Buddhist internet dictionary as: "the self is secure, if there are no dangers; and the mind is joyous, if there are no worries. 身無危險故安, 心無憂惱故樂.

⁴⁴⁵ Cheng 1996: 77.

⁴⁴⁶ This has already been mentioned in Chapter 3. The punishment of being beaten by the bamboo was divided into "the light bamboo", which was 50 strokes, and "the heavy bamboo", which was 100 strokes.

⁴⁴⁷ It is unclear if those who were imprisoned were the same as those who were beaten by the bamboo. Those 17 who died at least did not have to be imprisoned.

⁴⁴⁸ For the incident when Wang Yangming was beaten with a bamboo cane and exiled to Guizhou, see the foreword to *Instructions for practical living and other Neo-Confucian writings by Wang Yangming*, translated by Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, xxiv.

⁴⁴⁹ Wu 2009a: 151.

Wang Gen who came up with the idea of protecting and respecting the self, making it the special mark and core of his thought. It would be more reasonable to suppose that someone from the groups who had suffered formed this idea. There are four possible reasons why Wang Gen was the one who did:

1. Wang Gen and his colleagues were more concerned about their friends.
2. Wang Gen was less naïve than people from the Gelao and Shoujiu groups.
3. The Taizhou practitioners belonged to a social stratum that needed more protection.
4. They engaged in activities, which gave them reasons to be more protective.

Regarding the first question, we know that especially the followers of Wang Gen, such as Yan Jun and He Xinyin, were famous for the so called *youxia*-ideal (遊俠) that is, being heroes in protecting friends. Luo Rufang spent money to help Yan Jun out of prison and after the death of He Xinyin one of his disciples, Hu Shitong (dates unknown), took his bones and buried them in the grave of his friend Cheng Xueyan 程學顏 (dates unknown).⁴⁵⁰ This last action was rather unusual and showed that friends were even more important than relatives for these people. Similarly, Yan Jun is said to have travelled to Yunnan to find the remains of Xu Yue's body, who had died on the battle field in 1552. He then took the remains to Taizhou, where he buried them beside the grave of Wang Gen. A strong friendship between Wang Gen and Yaohu is visible in the writings of Wang Gen. "On Wisdom and Protection of the Self – A Farewell Message for Yaohu's Departure to the North" is a letter which proves his concern about Yaohu's safety, and Yaohu expressed his deep feeling of gratitude after the death of Wang Gen, when thinking of the friendly deed by Wang Gen. Writing his letter to Yaohu, Wang Gen was most likely not only concerned about his friend, but he might also have been worried about the movement he had inaugurated. He wanted his future followers to be cautious. He explicitly says in the final sentence of the letter that he told Yaohu of the importance of protecting the self, not because Yaohu did not know it, *but because he should advise later generations* (my italics) everywhere who are parting from friends.⁴⁵¹ Wang Gen made a paraphrase of Mencius: "To

⁴⁵⁰ Hou 2005 (1987): 455. Cheng Xueyan (程後臺) was from Xiaogan, Hubei, and was counselor to Hu Zongxian 胡總制, the supreme commander of Nan Zhili, Zhejiang and Fujian. He advised Hu to order the governor of Jiangxi to free He Xinyin. See MRXA: 704. Cheng Xueyan had a brother Cheng Xuebo 程學博. "任太仆寺丞、學博任重慶知府".

⁴⁵¹ XZW, Ch. 3: 33b.

sacrifice one's life for the Way, not to die as a martyr."⁴⁵² His intention was that it was useless to sacrifice one's life for one's superiors, but to die for the Way is something different. At the time of Wang Gen, there was a requirement to sacrifice oneself for superiors and elders. Wang Gen's argument against it was dangerous, like all criticism of the prevailing order. This led to a need for self-protection.

The second question concerns Wang Gen's pragmatism. As a merchant and a man of action, Wang Gen might have been less naïve than scholars of the Gelao and Shouju groups, who lived more isolated in the world of the literati scholars. He might also have been more aware of common people's suffering because he knew their situation better. An argument against that would be that scholars, who were officials had an overview of the situation in the county thanks to their work in the imperial administration.

The question regarding which social level that needed most protection in Ming society is very difficult to determine. I will below argue that it is often more dangerous to be higher up in the social hierarchy, than on a lower level and the reason why Wang Gen and especially other Taizhou practitioners such as Yan Jun and He Xinin needed self-protection was their provocative ideas. The idea of self-respect challenges those in power. Furthermore, they not only had provocative ideas, they also worked hard to put them into practice. This takes us to the fourth question: Did the Taizhou practitioners engage in activities which forced them to be self-protective?

To take Hou Wailu's idea about Wang Gen becoming an oppressor into consideration, we could argue that he needed to protect himself because he aspired to become "a dragon". In Wang Gen's *Recorded Conversations* there are several annotations about dragons. Wang Gen said: "A visible dragon' is something we can see. 'A dragon hidden under the water' is something we cannot see. It is only man who can see everything; therefore, the Great Man can have the meaning of 'benefit'."⁴⁵³ This quotation refers to the first hexagram in *The Book of Changes*, Qian 乾. This hexagram consists of six unbroken *yang* lines. The commentary on this hexagram: " 'When there appears a dragon in the fields, it is fitting to see a great man' refers to the virtue of a true sovereign."⁴⁵⁴ When a dragon appears on the field, it has come out of the depths of the water, that is, it has abandoned its hiding place and taken up

⁴⁵² Wu 2009a: 149. "以道殉身而不以身殉道". It is a paraphrase of Mencius Jin Xin 1: 42. 孟子曰：「天下有道，以道殉身；天下無道，以身殉道。未聞以道殉乎人者也。」 Mencius said, 'When right principles prevail throughout the kingdom, one's principles must appear along with one's person. When right principles disappear from the kingdom, one's person must vanish along with one's principles. I have not heard of one's principles being dependent for their manifestation on other men.' (Legge' translation.)

⁴⁵³ XZW, Ch. 3: 2b.

⁴⁵⁴ *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* 1994: 133. John Lynn's translation.

a position on land.⁴⁵⁵ However, the dragon, besides being a sovereign or ruler, could also be a metaphor for the saviour. In the case of Wang Gen, it is probably a combination. He is talking of a good ruler who is regarded as the saviour of humankind.

Wang Gen also said: “The sage, although he ‘now and then rode six dragons to Heaven’⁴⁵⁶, nevertheless had to ‘see the dragon.’⁴⁵⁷ The commentary in *The Book of Changes* (Wang Bi) says: “‘When a flying dragon is in the sky’: a great man takes charge.”⁴⁵⁸ And “‘A flying dragon is in the sky’: rule on high prevails. ‘A flying dragon is in the sky’: it now takes a position amid the virtue of Heaven.”⁴⁵⁹

All these quotations give the impression that Wang Gen had very high aspirations, and, as we have seen previously, he turns himself into a dragon in the dream described in the “Rhapsody of the Loach and the Eel”. This leads us to his ideas on politics.

Wang Gen’s political ideas

On many occasions Wang Gen expressed a wish to stay out of politics: “It is not the case that the people in the country have not studied it, but *to take politics as the subject of study* (my italics) is most difficult.⁴⁶⁰ I have not conformed to this, nor have I gone into politics afterwards.”⁴⁶¹ In this latter quotation, he is probably talking about politics in the sense of having a career as an official. To be the leader of a popular movement was something different, and that kind of responsibility was something he willingly accepted.

Already in 1517, Wang Gen seems to have been concerned about inequality, desiring more equal distribution of property to create more harmonious relations within the clan. Wang Gen’s *Chronological Biography* states:

All the younger brothers of Wang Gen broke up from their marriages, and the dowries of their wives were good and bad [i.e. they differed in size]. The clan was in uproar, so Wang Gen one day asked the relatives to come to the family shrine. He had incense burned, took his seat in front of them and warned all the confused younger brothers, saying: “The reason family members part is that the property is not distributed equally.” He ordered everyone to bring all they had

⁴⁵⁵ *The Classic of Changes*, 1994: 133. John Lynn’s translation.

⁴⁵⁶ That is, used political power.

⁴⁵⁷ “To see the dragon” means to engage in scholarly inquiries. Here Wang Gen refers to the *Book of Changes*. Quotation from XZW, Ch. 3: 3a.

⁴⁵⁸ *The Classic of Changes* 1994: 137. John Lynn’s translation.

⁴⁵⁹ *The Classic of Changes* 1994: 137. John Lynn’s translation.

⁴⁶⁰ The words in italics are in the original: *yi zheng wei xue* 以政為學.

⁴⁶¹ XZW, Ch. 3: 11a.

and place it in the hall. He then made new shares and returned them to them, whereupon the clan members became calm and peaceful.⁴⁶²

Wang Gen developed his ideas on equality in his *Treatise on the Kingly Way*,⁴⁶³ which can be regarded as his political testament. It was written in 1540, one year before his death. The ideas in this treatise are on the surface idealistic. Wang Gen looks back on an ancient utopia, when the sage rulers Yao, Shun and the Duke of Zhou ruled the world. He says:

In ancient times, there was an established order of land (property), and the occupations of people were ordered; there was equal division without errors, from top to bottom there was regularity (經), so the will of the people was unified, and the customs were pure and simple. All people were working with agriculture, vagrant people living on others were not tolerated in the world.⁴⁶⁴

Wang Gen compares this to the contemporary situation. “Today the land is not fixed and the vagrant people numerous, there is no economizing and customs are extravagant.” He further complains:

One person cultivates the land and ten persons eat the crops. One person raises the silkworms and one hundred persons are clothed [by the silk produced]. [In this way], people will inevitably suffer from hunger and cold. Since hunger and cold are painful (literally ‘slice the body’ *qieshen* 切身), you cannot expect but that people will do evil things.”⁴⁶⁵

Surprisingly, Wang Gen, who himself was a merchant, argues in this text for agriculture as the basis and sees business as secondary in relation to agriculture. He says that if land was distributed equally, people would not leave agriculture and choose the way of vagrant life. If there was equal distribution of land, there would be enough food and clothing for people to eat and dress. Enjoying equal distribution of land, people would behave in a moral way. Later, in the same text, he develops the idea of the election of officials instead of the meritocratic system with officials chosen according to their merits in civil service examinations. Wang Gen’s idea is a kind of rudimentary representative democracy:

...when everyone has become ethical in behaviour and has learnt a skill, one must look at the bonds between people in their daily lives. When there is trust between people within one village and there is an election of people from their village, they will report [the result] from the election to the *lū* 閭 (unit of 25 households), the *lū* will report to the *zu* 族 (unit of 100 households), the *zu* will report to the *dang* 黨 (unit of 500 households) and the *dang* will report to the

⁴⁶² XZW, Ch. 2: 5a–b. Wang Gen is said to have been 34 years old on this occasion.

⁴⁶³ XZW, Ch. 4: 43b–49b.

⁴⁶⁴ XZW, Ch. 4: 44a–44b.

⁴⁶⁵ XZW, Ch. 4: 44b.

zhou 州 (unit of 2500 households). The great men of the village (*xiang dafu* 鄉大夫) will respect this and do not re-examine their (i.e. the villager's) moral behaviour, talents and skills, and then everyone will treat them according to the decorum of respecting the worthies – not as in later ages when [the superiors] became suspicious and jealous, guarding and restricting them.⁴⁶⁶

In 1536, a surveillance commissioner for salt production (御史 censor)⁴⁶⁷ Hong Yuan,⁴⁶⁸ asked Wang Gen to write regulations for the community compact.⁴⁶⁹ Unfortunately, there is no information about how these regulations were formulated. The same year, Hong Yuan constructed “Taodong Retreat” (*Taodong Jingshe* 陶東精舍)⁴⁷⁰ also called the “Lecture Hall of Master Xinzhai” or the “Lecture Hall of Fasting of the Mind” (*Xinzhai Jiangtang* 心齋講堂).⁴⁷¹ Perhaps Hong Yuan was a disciple of Wang Gen, and it could have been Wang Gen who came up with the idea of a community compact, and that Hong Yuan acted on Wang Gen's advice. In 1538, Wang Gen was again given a task by local officials, this time to help them solve disputes among operators of the salt production in Taizhou. Whether it was Hong Yuan again is not explicit in the text. Wang Gen then wrote the text *Proposal for the Equal Distribution of Salt Fields* (*Jun fen caodang yi* 鈞分草蕩議). In this text, his major suggestions are first to draw up strict borders of land for cultivation of marshland, and second to write contracts. If there are no clear borders of land and no contracts, there will be endless conflicts and people will engage in lawsuits, he argues. If the borders are strictly lined up and contracts written, there will be harmonious coexistence forever.⁴⁷² Considering the rapid growth of the population, this optimism sounds unrealistic, but his vision and engagement are unmistakable. Belief in written contracts is later accentuated by Yan Jun, who argues that for the benefit contracts within the community compact. It is too early to verify whether already Wang Gen made use of compact contracts, but it was certainly in agreement with his ideas.

⁴⁶⁶ XZW, Ch. 4: 45b–46a.

⁴⁶⁷ Lee 1990: 97.

⁴⁶⁸ Lee 1990: 97. Lee gives the dates for Hong Yuan (1532–1590), but they cannot be correct. Otherwise it is wrong that he asked Wang Gen for instruction in 1536. Hong Yuan's styled name was Jueshan 覺山. He has a section in MRXA (927–28) and is placed by Huang Zongxi in the Ganquan School, and Huang Zongxi gives 1532 as the year he received his degree as presented scholar. Here again we can see how complicated the situation is. How do we understand it? The Ganquan master Zhan Ruoshui was a disciple of Chen Xianzhang. They emphasized meditation and a life in seclusion. How was it then that a person in their circle asks Wang Gen to organize a community compact? We also know that the Taizhou practitioner held Chen Xianzhang in high esteem. The conclusion must be that the demarcation lines between these schools were rather transparent.

⁴⁶⁹ XZW Ch. 2: 30b.

⁴⁷⁰ XZW, Ch. 2: 30b.

⁴⁷¹ Lee 1990: 97.

⁴⁷² XZW, Ch. 4: 50a–51a.

Wang Gen's view of the five bonds

In Wang Gen's thoughts, it is possible to discern an initial change of the traditional interpretation of the teaching on the five bonds.⁴⁷³ It has been shown above that there is a change in the view of how to be a good subject. There is not much discussion about the relationship between husband and wife in the writings of Wang Gen and the other Taizhou practitioners. That had to wait until Li Zhi to become a real topic. But some relationships were more emphasized among the Taizhou practitioners than others. Friendship was one of the most important. For example, Zhou Rudeng expressed that friendship was more important for him than his relationship with his wife. He said: "It would have been unbearable not to meet with my friends just for one day, but it would have been all right to live separate from my wife for half a year."⁴⁷⁴ He needed his 'friends of the Way' (*daoyou* 道友) and discussions with them to deal with sadness, loneliness and obsessions.⁴⁷⁵ Li Zhi said that He Xinyin regarded friendship as the sole relationship of value, and that he discarded the other four bonds. This is not the case in the thoughts of Wang Gen. In Wang Gen's case, it is rather a kind of questioning of the other relationships, like the respect for superiors and parents. Wang Gen surely fathomed the Confucian idea of filial piety and respect for elder brothers, but he had perhaps had experiences of having a father who failed to live up to the Confucian ideals.

In *The Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen, there are some very strong examples of his filiality, not only in helping his father with hard corvée labour,⁴⁷⁶ but also in the story about Wang Gen sucking his father's hemorrhoids with his own mouth.⁴⁷⁷ These narratives appear in *The Chronological Biography* and it would have occurred when Wang Gen had reached the age of 35. The context shows that Wang Gen is criticizing his father for worshipping Buddhist images in the family shrine. Instead, he urges him to make sacrifices to the ancestors four generations back. Then it is said that his father was fond of hunting, and that Wang Gen urged him to stop it, freed the geese his father had captured (for fun) and burned his nets. Wang Gen's action has rather a Buddhist touch of caring for all living beings. The description of Wang Gen as a son helping his father in different ways ends with his father's exclamation: "How did my son become like this?"⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷³ The five bonds are the relations between superior and subject, parents and children, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, and the relations between friends.

⁴⁷⁴ Quote in Zhao 1995: 96.

⁴⁷⁵ Zhao 1995: 96.

⁴⁷⁶ XZW, Ch. 2: 3b.

⁴⁷⁷ XZW, Ch. 2: 5b–6a.

⁴⁷⁸ XZW, Ch. 2: 6a. When Wang Hong died he said that he had lived so long thanks to the filiality of his son, see Lee 1990: 101. Lee refers to *The Chronological Biography* Ch 2.41b–42a.

Thereafter, it is said that Wang Gen wrote *The Admonition of Filial Piety and Brotherliness* (*Xiaoti Zhen* 孝悌箴). The passage about Wang Gen's filiality serves obviously as a kind of background for his text about filial piety, showing that he lived as he learned.

To summarize, according to the *Chronological Biography*, Wang Gen criticizes his father, urging him to become more moral, and then he himself acts filially although in a rather burlesque manner. It is impossible to know whether the narrative about Wang Gen's filiality is true, but at least one conclusion must be that there were discussions going on in the mid and late Ming how to counteract the immoral behaviour of parents and superiors.

Wang Gen is a precursor of Li Zhi's idea that a master is essentially a friend. Wang Gen talked of "teacher-friend" (*shiyou* 師友). He argued furthermore that anyone on the street could be a teacher.⁴⁷⁹ With Yan Jun and He Xinyin friendship would become a core value with their ideal of being heroes in rescuing friends.⁴⁸⁰

The Confucian ideal of the five bonds was renegotiated during the sixteenth century and the Taizhou practitioners belonged to those who took an active part in the discussions.

Conclusion

No matter whether we regard Wang Gen as a salt producer or as a rich business man, he was not an official like earlier Neo-Confucians. Several Neo-Confucians from the Song and Ming dynasties had rejected the civil service examinations before Wang Gen, so he was not unique in this respect, and he was not unique in regarding learning for oneself as something deeply joyous either. The idea that the mind in its essence is joyous was something he inherited from Wang Yangming. One difference between Wang Yangming and Wang Gen is that the latter expressed it in another format, as a song of praise to the joyous mind. The most important change that came with Wang Gen was that he talked about the necessity of protecting and respecting the self. This was regarded as a prerequisite for a calm and undisturbed mind. The ideas about protecting and respecting the self are not mentioned in earlier Neo-Confucian writings. The meaning of *anshen* (安身) is broad. It means both to protect one's self and to calm the mind. In Wang Gen's thoughts everything is related to everything. The self is identical with the Way (*Dao* 道). The Way, human beings and the phenomenal world form one unity. To harm others will hit back on oneself, and to harm oneself will harm the others as well as the

⁴⁷⁹ Cheng 1996: 88. Wu 2009a: 183ff.

⁴⁸⁰ de Bary 1970: 179.

Way, that is, the totality. This is the theoretical basis for self-respect as formulated by Wang Gen.

Another similarity with LuWang Confucianism was its view of texts and how to read them. It was not the case that they were uninterested in reading the Confucian classics. On the contrary, they paid them much attention, but when reading them they should be understood from their own lived experiences and from their own mind. Lu Xiangshan, Wang Yangming and Wang Gen all say that the classics are footnotes to their mind. This is a similarity with Chan Buddhism, even though both Wang Yangming and Wang Gen criticized Buddhism.

Wang Gen was offered positions within the administration although he did not have any formal degree. His rejection of those offers shows that he had a similar attitude as Luo Hongxian. Wang Gen however still formed ideas about politics and worked to improve life for people in a practical way. Compared with Luo Hongxian, Wang Gen did not choose the life of a recluse.

Although Wang Gen based his ideas on the Confucian classics, especially *The Great Learning* and *The Book of Mencius*, he criticized Confucian ethical values of self-denial and self-sacrifice. For him these ideas did not belong to the original learning but were a misunderstanding of it. Both in his practical work and in his ideas, there are attempts to liberate himself and his fellow-beings from oppressing values and structures. In the texts compiled by his disciples, there is a strong protest against inequality, and his answer to this situation was to inspire people to protect and respect themselves and come together in discussions, no matter whether the discussions concerned daily life or the essence of Confucian learning. For Wang Gen, the teaching of the ancient sages was much freer than that taught among Confucians after the time of Mencius.

From the fact that Wang Gen was preoccupied with the concepts of self-respect, self-protection, peace of mind and joy it is possible to infer that there was a lack of these experiences. Instead, experiences of humiliation, self-humiliation and hate were quite common, and both literati scholars and common men and women suffered from anxiety and depression. I claim this did not have to do only with one particular incident although the Zuoshun Gate incident when many scholars were killed might be a part of it. It had to do with the whole situation in the mid and late Ming, a time of great change in all aspects of life including economy population, occupations, education, social relations and perhaps even climate change.⁴⁸¹

Wang Gen paid much attention to organizing people on the village level and inspiring them to help each other. One assumption is that his emphasis on self-protection is related to a need to protect an organization in growth, which was a real threat to the authorities. He often refers to passages in *The Book of Changes* that mention the dragon, which gives the impression that he regarded

⁴⁸¹ For natural catastrophies and climate change in the Ming dynasty, see Brook 2010: 50–78.

himself as a future ruler and a saviour of humankind. However, he died rather early at the age of 58.

5. The Taizhou network

In this chapter, I will address the question of how the Taizhou network was formed. First, I will discuss the agenda of Huang Zongxi, and what was perceived as orthodox teaching. Second, I will look at different kinds of transmission procedures and analyze them. As pointed out in the introductory chapter, “a school” in the Chinese context is defined by its transmission lines. According to this view, it is essential to prove that acts of transmission are in a straight line between masters and disciples. At this stage, the Taizhou practitioners had not yet become a movement. As I argued in the introductory chapter, they formed a network, but as they grew and became more powerful, it is more appropriate to talk of a movement. The bones of this movement were the network of different individuals working for similar goals.

“The Taizhou School” and the agenda of Huang Zongxi

The impact of Huang Zongxi and *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* on later scholarship is immense. When discussing Confucian scholars from the Ming dynasty, it is impossible to neglect him, whether we agree with him or not. His importance for modern scholarship has already been mentioned in Chapter 2. Here follows a deeper discussion of how his structuring of the Neo-Confucian schools in the Ming dynasty has formed and still shapes contemporary scholars’ view of Ming dynasty Confucianism.

The fact that Huang described both those he liked and disliked, as well as exemplifying many Ming scholars with their own writings, gives an impression of objectivity, but everyone knows that partiality often lies in selection, and that structure can be a factor in subjectivity. The structure of *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* depicts Huang’s construction of the main Confucian schools and their sub-schools, and clearly shows his own standpoint. As in a letter where the most important line comes at the end, the last section of his work describes the Jishan School, where the biography of his teacher Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645) is found. According to Huang, Liu Zongzhou revealed the most refined understanding of Wang Yangming’s teaching. The section preceding the Jishan School describes the Donglin School, where he placed the biography of his father Huang Zunsu (1584–1626). It is noteworthy that Huang Zongxi distinguishes between the

Donglin and the Jishan School, although the ideas of the two schools seem to be very close. Liu Zongzhou and Huang Zunsu were friends and respected each other regarding both theoretical ideas and moral integrity. Huang Zunsu was imprisoned and killed after having denounced the influential eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568 – 1627). After his death, Liu Zongzhou became both the teacher and like a second father for Huang Zongxi. Huang Zongxi, who was very young and shocked by the imprisonment and death of his father, went to Beijing for revenge. However, he discovered on his arrival that Wei Zhongxian was already dead, his followers were punished, and their victims were given posthumous titles. When Huang Zongxi stabbed the jailors who had killed his father, the Emperor refrained from punishing him, referring to Huang Zongxi's act as filial.⁴⁸² In Struve's words, "Huang Zongxi's intent in writing the *Mingru xuean* [The Record of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning]...was clearly not that of a disinterested observer of historical phenomena"⁴⁸³ He had his own agenda and he did not suppress his own criticism of the scholars described in the biographical parts.

Huang Zongxi had three criteria for categorizing the Ming scholars in different schools: first, according to place, second, according to transmissions and finally and for Huang Zongxi most important, according to closeness of thought. After having studied the Taizhou practitioners, I have reached the conclusion that none of these three criteria is convincingly fulfilled in the case of the Taizhou practitioners.⁴⁸⁴

The first criterion of place is very easy to reject. In the section on the Taizhou School, *The Records of Taizhou Learning* (Taizhou Xuean 泰州學案), Huang lists twenty-eight followers, divided into five different "generations". (See Appendix A) The name of this section gives the impression that the Taizhou practitioners all came from Taizhou, which was not the case. Most of them came from Jiangxi province, like Yan Jun, He

⁴⁸² Ching 1987: 6. It must have been the Chongzhen Emperor (reign 1627–1644).

⁴⁸³ Struve 1988: 481.

⁴⁸⁴ Huang Zongxi was aware of the problem of describing a school and the process of transmission as well as how to describe who should be placed where. He uses a quotation from the Tang Poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803–53) to describe this problem: "When a ball rolls around on a game-table it can go from one side to the other or diagonally, circularly or straight. It is impossible to know which way it will go. The only thing you know for sure is that it will not leave the table." And then Huang draws the parallel: "It is the same with the doctrines of the schools." See MRXA "Introduction": 14/xiv. He furthermore touches upon the idea that the teacher is not always necessary for enlightenment. Making a statement about the differences between the Buddhist schools *zong* and the Confucians, he accuses the Buddhists of creating tenuous lineages, and not like the Confucians, stressing what is transmitted. Contrary to the Buddhist schools, Confucius, Zhou Dunyi and Lu Xiangshan did not receive their teaching from any particular teacher, Huang Zongxi argues. The important thing is to discover the truth within oneself - although he admits that the Buddhists also wanted their students to make their own discoveries. Huang was painstakingly aware of the difficulties in dividing different thinkers into categories. See MRXA "Introduction": 15/xv.

Xinyin and Luo Rufang, but there were also those who came from other provinces such as Guangdong and Sichuan. There is reason to believe that Huang Zongxi did not regard Taizhou as a place but used it when referring to Wang Gen. The disciples of Wang Yangming probably used the names of their native places as nick-names, indicating a strong relation between native place and identity.⁴⁸⁵ However, the names of other Confucian groups often contain place-names, so for the titles in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* Taizhou still had the meaning of place. As I already mentioned, Huang Zongxi furthermore declares in his preface that place is one criterion of affiliation to a school. An interesting fact is that Huang does not add the two characters *wangmen* 王門 ‘school of Wang’ after Taizhou as he did with the other sub-schools of Wang Yangming in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*. From this it would be easy to draw the conclusion that he did not regard them as a part of the Wang Yangming movement, or at least hesitated about how to deal with the problem.⁴⁸⁶ However, the fact that Huang Zongxi treats the Taizhou practitioners in the frame of his work on Ming Confucian scholars is an admission – despite his criticism that Wang Ji and Wang Gen added Chan Buddhist elements to the teaching of Wang Yangming – that they belonged first of all to the Confucian tradition, and not to any other tradition. However, Huang clearly declares that when the teaching reached Yan Jun and He Xinyin, it was no longer within the borders of Confucianism.⁴⁸⁷

To proceed to Huang Zongxi’s second criterion, that is, the criterion of transmission from master to disciple, is it possible to say that it was a lineage system within the Taizhou network, and in that case how did it work? And apart from master – disciple relations, what other relationships were important for them? As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the Taizhou practitioners questioned traditional Confucian social relations in various ways, which provoked other more conventional Confucian scholars. Li Zhi claims that He Xinyin discarded the four relations between ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, and elder and younger brother, and only held on to the relation between friends. Li Zhi, who was inspired by Wang Bi and He Xinyin, gives a new interpretation of “the master”. Li Zhi says that fundamentally, the master is a friend. This friend is only a witness and nothing

⁴⁸⁵ The Taizhou practitioner Fang Xuejian 方學漸 (literally ‘studying gradually’), who came from Tongcheng 桐城 in today’s Anhui was called Tongchuan 桐川, another example of using place names when talking of persons.

⁴⁸⁶ The fact that Huang Zongxi did not add “Wangmen” to the title Taizhou School as he did for other sub-schools of the Wang Yangming School is noted by Hou Wailu. Hou argues that Huang regarded the main ideas of the Taizhou School as different from the philosophy of the Wang Yangming School. See Hou 2005 (1987): 416. Wu Zhen has come to a different conclusion about the Taizhou School, arguing that it is basically a school within the Wang Yangming School, as well as within the Confucian tradition at large. See Wu 2009a: 2.

⁴⁸⁷ MRXA: 703.

more. In this statement, he removes the basis of the lineage system, and with such a view it is impossible to uphold the distinction between schools either in the Buddhist or in the Confucian tradition. However, Li Zhi cannot represent the Taizhou movement.

No matter how we regard Li Zhi, Wang Gen already opened the window on new views of the traditional Confucian socio-ethical system of the five bonds.⁴⁸⁸ Nota bene, the master-disciple relationship is not counted in this system, despite its crucial importance for the school and lineage constructions. In the case of the Taizhou practitioners, there were strong master-disciple relations. Wang Gen is said to have had a great impact on people, when meeting them face to face. Luo Rufang was enlightened when he met Yan Jun,⁴⁸⁹ and Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) venerated the portrait of Luo Rufang.⁴⁹⁰ But is it possible to talk about a *straight* line of transmission? Despite these strong relationships, there were also alternatives. Wang Bi regarded Wang Ji as his teacher, although Wang Ji is placed in the Zhezong School by Huang Zongxi. Luo Rufang had at least one enlightenment experience when meeting another master besides Yan Jun,⁴⁹¹ and he studied with one Daoist as well as one Buddhist master.⁴⁹² If the criterion of a “school” is that there is a straight succession line of patriarchs the conclusion must be that there was no Taizhou School.⁴⁹³ The Taizhou practitioners were not interested in a straight line of patriarchs, but in finding the Way on a personal level, and improving people’s lives on a social level. It is not until Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) that we see a serious attempt to create a lineage, and his intentions are criticized by Huang Zongxi and many others with him.⁴⁹⁴

The third criterion of closeness of thought will be discussed in more detail below. There are ideas which inspired others, but since freedom was one of them disparity of ideas within the movement was inevitable.

My criticism of the idea that the Taizhou practitioners did in fact form a “school”, both in the Western and in the Chinese way of using the term,⁴⁹⁵ might well be extended to other Neo-Confucian schools in the Ming dynasty, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

As in the case of Buddhism, there is, among the Taizhou practitioners and the Wang Yangming movement taken as a whole, a belief that everyone is endowed with the capacity of enlightenment. A common Mahāyāna Buddhist

⁴⁸⁸ Simplified, it is spoken of as Sangang 三綱, i.e. the relation between ruler and subject, between father and son and between husband and wife.

⁴⁸⁹ MRXA: 760–61.

⁴⁹⁰ MRXA: 853.

⁴⁹¹ MRXA: 760.

⁴⁹² MRXA 763.

⁴⁹³ Here my conclusion goes against Cheng’s, who argues that “the existence of the school [Taizhou] by the mid-sixteenth century was beyond doubt”. See Cheng 1996: 180.

⁴⁹⁴ MRXA: 14.

⁴⁹⁵ As for my criticism of the Western usage, see the Introduction, “School and lineage”.

argument is that everyone is endowed with Buddha nature, and the texts by Wang Yangming and his followers often state that everyone is a sage. The result was that the master-disciple relationship and the very act of transmission became more important than the ideas and beliefs that were transmitted. The deep understanding of a disciple and his spiritual development was placed in focus, while reading of classics was de-emphasized as a mean of spiritual training. Perhaps paradoxically, the belief that everyone is endowed with the possibility to become a sage increased at the same time as the relationship between master and disciple was more strongly emphasized.

Efforts have been made to create statistics on the proportion of commoners among the Taizhou practitioners, compared to other Neo-Confucian schools during the Ming dynasty.⁴⁹⁶ Although these statistics are very uncertain, they indicate that there were more commoners among the Taizhou practitioners compared to other groups.⁴⁹⁷ One striking feature is that they form a socially heterogeneous network, but they are heterogeneous in many other respects as well, to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to talk of them as a well-defined group. Who should be counted among the ranks of the Taizhou network is a major question. Another problem in defining the social status of the Taizhou practitioners is that social mobility, both upwards and downwards, was increasing during late Ming.⁴⁹⁸ As mentioned above, several scholars have raised doubts about Huang Zongxi's agenda. As early as the eighteenth century the scholar Quan Zuwang 全祖望 (1705–1755) said:

Huang covertly protects the followers of the Yangming School while overtly criticizing them, just as he covertly attacks the School of Xue Xuan, a follower of the ChengZhu School, while making an overt show of approval.⁴⁹⁹

The mainland scholar Wu Zhen finds the whole section in *The Records of Taizhou Learning* chaotic and argues for a total reorganization of the structure in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*.⁵⁰⁰ A rather common assumption about Huang Zongxi is that he was aware of the contemporary criticism of Wang Yangming, and wanted to save the more orthodox schools

⁴⁹⁶ For a discussion on the concept of “commoner”, see Chapter 3.

⁴⁹⁷ According to the statistics collected by Yu-yin Cheng there were more commoners in the ranks of the Taizhou people than in other Neo-Confucian groups in the Ming, although they still were in a minority even within the Taizhou School according to Cheng's statistics. See Cheng 1996: 165–172.

⁴⁹⁸ This is a main theme in Ho 1962.

⁴⁹⁹ Lee 1990: 161. Quan Zuwang was a historian and thinker belonging to the Zhezhong School.

⁵⁰⁰ Wu 2009a: 8. Of the 28 scholars mentioned by Huang Zongxi, including Wang Gen, seven are honoured with short biographies, but without any examples of their own writings or selected sayings (Yan Jun, Deng Huoqu, Cheng Xueyan, Qian Tongwen, Fang Yushi och Guan Zhidao)

by criticizing those who were extreme (*jiduan* 極端) or heretical.⁵⁰¹ This criticism of Wang Yangming included the accusation that the Wang Yangming School facilitated the Manchu takeover and the collapse of the Ming.⁵⁰² Wang Ji and Wang Gen were regarded as extreme by many Ming scholars, but Huang Zongxi modified this, criticizing Yan Jun and He Xinyin more. I believe it is correct to assume that Huang Zongxi strived to save the more orthodox schools of Wang Yangming, and therefore had to find scapegoats; in this regard, the Taizhou practitioners in general, and especially Yan Jun and He Xinyin, were suitable targets. Huang has two sections with miscellaneous scholars whom he could not place in any school. One possibility for Huang would have been to place the Taizhou practitioners there. It is, however, understandable that Huang placed Wang Gen, Wang Bi and Wang Dong in *The Records of Taizhou Learning*, since those thinkers all came from Taizhou. Several modern scholars have questioned the fact that Huang Zongxi placed Geng Dingxiang, Zhao Zhenji, Zhou Rudeng and others in the Taizhou School.⁵⁰³ The most critical of all modern scholars of *The Records of Taizhou Learning* is Wu Zhen, who calls it a “trash box” (*da zahui* 大雜燴).⁵⁰⁴ But none of them questions that it is possible to talk of a Taizhou School at all.

Levels of orthodoxy

The problem for Huang Zongxi was to be able to convincingly describe Wang Yangming’s teaching as orthodox. Orthodoxy was a hotly discussed topic and a question of perspective; the views on what orthodox learning should be have

⁵⁰¹ See, for instance, Zhao 1995: 192–194. Zhao argues that the main problem for Huang was Wang Ji, but since he was a top disciple of Wang Yangming he could not do anything about him but let him be a member of the Zhezong School. Then he fired the hardest criticism at the Taizhou practitioners Yan Jun and He Xinyin.

⁵⁰² Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) blamed them for this.

⁵⁰³ Zhao 1995: 191–192. Zhao argues that Huang Zongxi circumvents the criticism of Wang Yangming, Wang Ji, Luo Rufang and Zhou Rudeng for “promoting the Buddhist infiltration of Confucian learning, by making Zhou Rudeng a disciple of Luo Rufang, which he was not. Zhao argues that Zhou was a disciple of Wang Ji, but since Wang Ji obviously was a disciple of Wang Yangming, he could not cut the line between them, but preferred to make Zhou and Luo scapegoats. As an expert on Wang Ji, Peng Guoxiang has the same idea as Zhao, namely that Zhou was a disciple of Wang Ji. See Peng 2001: 339. Jennifer Eichman follows their view. See Eichman 2014: 127. Wu Zhen argues that Geng Dingxiang, Zhao Zhenji and Li Zhi were not followers of Wang Gen. See Wu 2009a: 10–16; 16–30; 30–38. That Li Zhi did not belong to the Taizhou movement is, however, the most prevailing view. The only scholar who emphasizes the link between the Taizhou practitioners and Li Zhi is Ji Wenfu, nevertheless he does not claim that Li Zhi was a Taizhou practitioner.

⁵⁰⁴ Wu 2009a: 40.

often been contradictory. Zhu Xi's commentaries on the Confucian classics were compulsory reading for the candidates of the civil service examinations. To be pragmatic it is therefore reasonable to argue that, on a higher level, the ChengZhu School was the orthodox Confucianism both during the Ming and when Huang Zongxi wrote *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912).⁵⁰⁵ The whole LuWang School has a lesser degree of orthodoxy despite the fact that it was ordered by imperial decree in 1585, that Wang Yangming should receive sacrifices in the temple of Confucius, which was the highest honour for a scholar.⁵⁰⁶ Huang Zongxi argues that Yan Jun and He Xinyin are outside the border of orthodoxy, and that the Jishan School, represented by his own teacher and godfather Liu Zongzhou, is the school which is most true to the teaching of Wang Yangming. Since Huang is a follower of Wang Yangming, he focuses on orthodoxy within this school. The importance of Wang Yangming in the eyes of Huang lies in his emphasis on action. He says that the doctrine of 'the investigation of things', discussed by Zhu Xi, did not become brilliant until Wang Yangming pointed out the link with action and that the principle of 'the knowledge of the good' was present in everyone. His expression 'to extend the knowledge of the good' is crucial because 'extend' (*zhi* 致), which means 'act', made the ideas of Zhu Xi depart from the abstract quest for the principles of ideas which work in the middle of life. For Huang, this meant the starting point of something new, and he argued that it was important to recognize this difference.

The discussions among the later followers of Wang Yangming evolved around the questions of 'the knowledge of the good' and 'the extension of the knowledge of the good'. Huang Zongxi regrets that Wang Yangming developed his idea about 'the extension of the knowledge of the good' too late in life and sees this as the reason why the followers of Wang Yangming never understood his idea properly and subsequently developed disagreements on the issue.⁵⁰⁷ Wang Yangming expressed his idea of *liangzhi* and the investigation of things in the so-called "Four Maxims":⁵⁰⁸

1. The absence of good and evil is the essence of the mind.

⁵⁰⁵ In recent times, researchers have focused on the LuWang School; thus, a work like Koh from 2011 on Xue Xuan (1389–1464), who came from North China and belonged to the ChengZhu tradition, fills a gap and helps us better understand the levels of orthodoxies.

⁵⁰⁶ Chan 1963b: 654. After his death Wang Yangming was accused of spreading false doctrines opposing Zhu Xi. Not until 1567 was he honoured with the posthumous title Wencheng (Completion of culture). This was 38 years after his death.

⁵⁰⁷ MRXA: 179.

⁵⁰⁸ The Four Beings by Wang Yangming is usually translated as the Four Maxims, but I want to emphasize the antonyms 'beings' (*you* 有) and 'non-beings' (*wu* 無) which in the philosophical debate have been synonymous with Confucianism versus Buddhism.

2. The presence of good and evil characterizes the movements of intention.
3. The knowledge of good and evil is *liangzhi*.
4. The doing of good and ridding of evil is the investigation of things.⁵⁰⁹

Huang argues that people misunderstand this idea and draws the conclusion that human nature is without good and evil, and that good and evil arise only when there is an intention to act. Huang Zongxi says that Wang Ji had explained that the absence of good and evil is related to activity and quiescence and that in quiescence there is no division between them. My assumption is that Huang Zongxi has two levels of understanding human nature: a relative level which incorporates good and evil and an absolute level, where human nature is good in line with the teaching of Mencius. For Huang it is not possible to seek *liangzhi* in activity because the mind is then affected by emotions. In the next section, we will see how Wang Yangming's ideas of the Four Beings are explained by Wang Ji, and how Wang Yangming's orthodoxy turns into the heterodoxy of Wang Ji in the view of Huang Zongxi.

Wang Ji's Buddhist inclinations compared with Wang Gen's

Huang Zongxi laments that the teaching of Wang Gen and Wang Ji spread over the whole country and that they distorted the teaching of Wang Yangming by adding Chan Buddhist elements to it. Although he criticizes both Wang Gen and Wang Ji for adopting Chan Buddhist ideas, he categorizes the two men differently. Wang Ji was one of Wang Yangming's most important disciples. He is not placed in *The Records of Taizhou Learning* but in the section of the Zhezhong School since he came from Zhejiang province (Shanyin County 山陰 Shaoxing Prefecture 紹興). Before Wang Ji in the same section, Huang Zongxi placed Xü Ai (1487–1517) and Qian Dehong (1497–1574). Qian Dehong did not agree with Wang Ji on theoretical matters. There are obvious discrepancies of thought among the members of the Zhezhong group, as well as among the Taizhou practitioners. A tentative suggestion is that the criticism of Huang Zongxi's construction of the Taizhou School might be extended to the Zhezhong School as well.

The Chan Buddhist ideas of Wang Ji are more easily discerned than those of Wang Gen. They become manifest in his theory of the "Four Non-beings", which contains his exploration of the "Four beings" (*you* 有) by Wang Yangming. Wang Ji argued that when a person realizes that the mind is neither good nor evil, he will understand that intention, knowledge, and things are

⁵⁰⁹ MRXA: 237–238.

neither good nor evil as well. Huang Zongxi presents the information that Wang Yangming explained the discrepancy between his own “Four beings” and the “Four Non-beings” by Wang Ji thus:

My method of teaching is originally of two kinds. The teaching of the four non-beings is established for people at a higher level (*shang gen* 上根); the teaching of the four “beings” (*you* 有) is for people at a medium or lower level. I apply the learning of *sudden enlightenment* (my italics) for those at a higher level (*shang gen* 上根) who have their original body (*benti* 本體) as their effort and skill (*gongfu* 工夫). For those at a medium or lower level, who need to be good and get rid of evil, the learning of *gradual enlightenment* (my italics) may help them to regain their original body.⁵¹⁰

Huang Zongxi concludes by saying: “From this it is proved that generally speaking the teaching of the Master (Wang Yangming), goes back to the “Four Non-beings”.”⁵¹¹ It is possible to draw several conclusions from this statement. First, that Wang Ji is inspired by Chan Buddhist sudden enlightenment teaching. Second, that Wang Yangming did not oppose his ideas but integrated them in his own *panjiao* system⁵¹², that is, different levels of teaching, where he placed sudden enlightenment as the way of superior men, and the gradual approach as a way for men of medium or low gifts. A combination of the two conclusions is that both Wang Yangming and Wang Ji were influenced by Chan Buddhist ideas. Third, Huang Zongxi recognizes this, and in doing so ambiguously criticizes Wang Ji for adding Buddhist elements to the teaching of Wang Yangming, and, later in the same work, recognizes that Wang Yangming did not oppose Wang Ji! Here, Huang shows his inconsistency.

Another example showing that Huang Zongxi evaluated those with Chan Buddhist inclinations positively is his description of the Geng brothers. In his entry of Geng Dingli 耿定理 (1534–1584) in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*, Huang Zongxi describes him as a Confucian Hui Neng, the alleged sixth patriarch of Chan Buddhism and legendary forefather of the Chan Buddhist notion of sudden enlightenment.⁵¹³ Geng Dingli was the younger brother of Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596). Huang Zongxi relates that when Dingxiang and Dingli were about to visit Liu Chuquan 劉初泉, who was ill, Dingxiang told Dingli not to tell him that they were brothers but pretend he was a doctor. Dingli only said a few words at the bedside, and then Liu got up and asked Dingxiang “How can the monk Hui Neng be regarded as a bumkin husking rice? He is a man of great visions. I am afraid you cannot call him your younger brother.” It is interesting to note that Huang Zongxi likens Geng Dingli to Hui Neng. The story reveals that Huang admired

⁵¹⁰ MRXA: 238.

⁵¹¹ MRXA: 238.

⁵¹² Different *panjiao* 判教 systems were established by several Chinese Buddhist masters to overcome contradictory ideas in the Buddhist sutras.

⁵¹³ MRXA: 825–826.

both Dingli and Hui Neng. In the narrative of Huang, Dingxiang plays the role of Shenxiu, who competed with Hui Neng for the patriarchal robe.

Huang Zongxi did not express his real conviction in the prefaces of his work. Not until the descriptions of each individual thinker does he become sincere about them. The conclusion is that Huang's ideas are much closer to Wang Ji's, and probably also to Wang Gen's, than he initially admits. One question is whether he supposed that the censors, who had to scan written works, were rather lazy and did not scrutinize all parts of his works.

If we now make a comparison with Wang Gen, the picture is quite different. Wang Gen is not interested in Buddhist theory and never quoted any Buddhist sutra; and according to *The Chronological Biography*, he even removed Buddhist images from the family shrine. I assume Huang Zongxi was aware of the close relation between Wang Gen's second son, Wang Bi, and Wang Ji, and he might subsequently also have been aware of Buddhist influences on the later Taizhou practitioners from Wang Ji via Wang Bi. Huang might have received informal knowledge from his godfather Liu Zongzhou. Furthermore, as already mentioned in Chapter 3, Wang Gen expressed scepticism of texts, talking depreciatorily of the Classics as footnotes to his own mind, as Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming had done before him. This was a Chan-Buddhist strain within the LuWang tradition inherited by Wang Gen. In this respect, the fault made by Huang Zongxi was not that he accused Wang Gen of Chan Buddhist inclinations but that he tried to conceal that they came from Wang Yangming. The unorthodoxy in his view was related to this influence from Chan Buddhism, but if Wang Gen was unorthodox, Wang Yangming was unorthodox as well. As has been said about the teaching of sudden and gradual enlightenment, they were both accepted by Wang Yangming, which means that he embraced two opposing tendencies within Chan Buddhism. Scholars today seem to regard only those Confucians who advocate sudden enlightenment as being influenced by Chan Buddhism, which reveals a shallow understanding of Chan Buddhism.

What has been regarded as heterodox teaching has changed over time. To generalize, it is possible to express it as Peng Guoxiang did: "To talk of Confucianism at the time of Mencius, Yan Zhu and Mo Zi was considered heterodox teaching; from the Tang and Song dynasties, Buddhism and Daoism were regarded as the main heterodox teachings".⁵¹⁴ Wang Ji was bright enough to make a redefinition of orthodoxy, arguing that it was that which was opposed to 'vulgar learning' (*suxue* 俗學). He certainly regarded Buddhism and Daoism as heterodoxy, but he did not regard the threat from Buddhism and Daoism as being as great as the threat from the vulgar tendencies within the Confucian tradition. The proponents of "the vulgar learning" were those

⁵¹⁴ Peng 2005: 481.

who were “weakened in their consciousness” (*ruo yu yishi* 弱于意識) and blackened by desires (*zi yu yuran* 緇于欲染).⁵¹⁵

The relation to the Classics is double in the thought of Wang Gen. On the one hand, he goes back to the Classics and is critical to the traditional interpretations. In this way, the Classics are more important than the later tradition. On the other hand, both Wang Gen and Wang Yangming emphasize the necessity of experiencing and learning by oneself (*zide* 自得). This is related to their focus on action. Enlightenment had to be realized in a personal way, so it was not possible to transmit a fixed set of theories from a master but only an attitude of openness and sincere striving. Wang Gen did not put his efforts into controlling the ideas but into building up a sustainable organization. The same could be said of Wang Yangming.

Growth of a network

According to Huang Zongxi, Wang Gen’s teaching was transmitted to several people and those he mentions as the first-generation disciples are: Lin Chun 林春 (1498–1541), Xu Yue 徐越 (d. 1552), the woodcutter Zhu Shu 朱恕 (dates unknown), Wang Gen’s relative and clan member Wang Dong 王東 (1503–1581)⁵¹⁶, his second son Wang Bi 王襪 (1511–87) and Geng Dingxiang. *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* mentions several “scholars” in the chapter on Ru scholars, who came from the salt production unit in Taizhou, Anfeng 安豐. Those people were disciples of Wang Gen or his son Wang Bi.⁵¹⁷ This implies that local authorities in the sixteenth century recognized commoners as *Ru*.

Lin Chun and Xu Yue were among his earliest disciples but, unfortunately, we do not have much information about them. Lin Chun came from a poor family in Taizhou and worked as a boy servant in Wang Gen’s family. Wang Gen discovered that he had talent and paid for his studies.⁵¹⁸ Lin Chun came out first in the local examinations and was later awarded the degree of presented scholar. Probably before this he had become a disciple of Wang Gen and eventually also became a good friend of Wang Ji. He died in the same year as Wang Gen at the age of 43.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁵ Peng 2005: 484.

⁵¹⁶ For a detailed explanation of how he was related to Wang Dong see Wu 2009a: 219.

⁵¹⁷ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817: 906–917.

⁵¹⁸ Wang Gen also paid for the studies of Nie Jing 聶靜, the nephew and adopted son of Nie Bao 聶豹, who is placed in the Zhezhong School by Wang Yangming. This underscores my hypothesis, that there were no strict boundaries between the different “sub-schools” of the Wang Yangming movement.

⁵¹⁹ MRXA: 744.

Xu Yue came from Guixi, Jiangxi Province. He became presented scholar in 1532 and was sent to Yunnan Province as a Commissioner of the Left Sector⁵²⁰ (*Zuobu Zhengshi* 左布政使).⁵²¹ He died on the battlefield in Guizhou, so an assumption is that in practice he was a middle-ranking military. Most likely he took part in defending the southern border of the Ming Empire. According to Sarah Scheewind, he set up community schools in various places in Guizhou in the 1550s and following Wang Yangming he taught ‘barbarain’ boys Neo-Confucianism, regarding them as equal in capacity of moral and intellectual learning to Han people.⁵²²

After the death of Wang Gen, the Taizhou activities became more vibrant in Jiangxi Province, which turned into a new or a parallel centre of the Taizhou movement from the middle of the sixteenth century. Why did Taizhou learning spread to Jiangxi? As described in the previous chapter on Wang Gen, he travelled to many places, to begin with on business and later for teaching activities. Wang Gen is said to have travelled to Jiangxi where he visited Wang Yangming for the first time, who at the time was a governor of the province. However, there is no information about whether Wang Gen met any of those later Taizhou practitioners at this early date, or any other of Wang Yangming’s disciples on this occasion. According to his *Chronological Biography*, he would have met Wang Yangming in 1520, when he was 38. It is unclear if he returned to Jiangxi later. It might be the case that the narrative about his visit to Wang Yangming is corrupt and that he met some of his disciples instead of Wang Yangming. I assume Wang Gen met Wang Yangming, but that the description in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* is rather legendary. Wang Yangming continued to import salt from Guangdong province, so it seems unlikely that Wang Gen went to Jiangxi on salt business, but we cannot exclude that possibility. The growth of the Taizhou network must have been facilitated by Wang Gen’s business network. His mercantile activities did not mean that he had relations only with salt producers and salt buyers, but with many officials who were involved in the bureaucracy of the salt monopoly. Those activities paved the way for his later organizational endeavours. He used his network in the same way as the miller Menocchio (1532–1599), described by Carlo Ginzburg in *The Cheese and the Worms*,⁵²³ spread his controversial ideas to all those who came to his mill with their grain. It was not only the idea that the cosmos was like a cheese, and human beings like worms in this cheese, but more serious challenges to the Catholic Church, such as claiming that the Virgin Mary could not have been a virgin. If

⁵²⁰ The Left Sector was subordinate to the Ministries of Personnel, Revenues and Rites.

⁵²¹ MRXA: 724.

⁵²² Schneewind 2006: 101. For a description of Wang Yangming’s treatment of the Yao people, see Shin 2006. It is impossible to say at present if Xu Yue participated in a similar slaughter of people in Yunnan, due to the scanty material on him. He probably came to Guizhou after the period when Wang Yangming stayed there.

⁵²³ Ginzburg 1992 (1975): *passim*.

Menocchio had been a peasant, the inquisition would probably not have reacted, but Menocchio as a miller was like a spider in the net, so they felt obliged to do something. The mercantile network of Wang Gen was to his advantage and at the same time a weakness. The imperial authorities certainly had reason to be vigilant on his activities and would crack down on him if they found it necessary.

Another possible transmitter of Taizhou teaching from Taizhou in Nan Zhili to Jiangxi beside Wang Gen is Wang Dong, who came from Taizhou, but later in life was given a position as assistant instructor (*xundao* 訓導) in Nancheng County, Jiangxi.⁵²⁴ A third way of transmission was from Xu Yue to Yan Jun. After having been introduced to Taizhou teaching, Yan Jun went to Taizhou and might have met Wang Gen there in 1539, shortly before Wang Gen died. Yan Jun speaks of Wang Gen as his teacher and of Wang Yangming as his “ancestral teacher” (*zushi* 祖師),⁵²⁵ but there are no other texts verifying that Wang Gen recognized him as a disciple.⁵²⁶ Yan Jun also speaks of Wang Yangming as his teacher, but he probably means “spiritual teacher”.⁵²⁷ A third person, who was from Jiangxi and was engaged in transmitting the teaching of Wang Gen, was Dong Sui 董燧. He is said to have written the *Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen.

Huang Xuanmin, a researcher who worked at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing (d. 2001), claims in *The Chronological Biography* of Yan Jun that he went to Taizhou in 1539,⁵²⁸ two years before Wang Gen died, and that Yan Jun said that he received “the learning of the great accomplishment” (*dacheng zhi xue* 大成之學) directly from Wang Gen.⁵²⁹ Huang Xuanmin furthers claims that Yan Jun left Taizhou in 1540 and went back to Jiangxi, where he published the text *Urgently rescue the burning mind* (*Jijiu huoxin bangwen* 急救心火榜文), or rather put the text in the format of a poster on the city wall in Nanchang, inviting people to attend his lecture. It was on this occasion that Luo Rufang met Yan Jun and became his disciple. This happened approximately at the same time as Wang Gen died in Taizhou. Yan Jun went to Taizhou and stayed there for six years teaching and gathering students. In 1544, Yan Jun went to Beijing together with his elder brother Yan

⁵²⁴ Cheng 1996: 151.

⁵²⁵ In the text “An announcement of rescuing the burning mind”, Yan Jun says that he was enlightened when he heard about the learning of the innate doctrine of the innate knowledge of the good, and that he was lucky enough to follow and study with Master Wang Gen. YJJ 1996: 1.

⁵²⁶ The biography of Yan Jun by He Yisun tells us that Yan Jun met Wang Gen while he (the latter, I suppose) was lecturing at Guangling in Taizhou.

⁵²⁷ YJJ: 29.

⁵²⁸ This biography was written by Huang Xuanmin, and is thus a contemporary one, edited from the information about Yan Jun Huang Xuanmin collected from the material given to him by Yan Jun’s descendants.

⁵²⁹ YJJ: 126.

Yao 顏鑰 (1498–1572), according to Huang Xuanmin. This was the same year as Luo Rufang would have done his palace examination,⁵³⁰ but inspired by Taizhou teaching, he changed his mind and did not go to the examination. Instead, he followed Yan Jun on his travels.⁵³¹ Both Yan Jun’s elder brother and Luo Rufang were important for Yan Jun, but in different ways. His brother gave him a copy of *Moral Education* by Wang Yangming and was thus instrumental in making Yan Jun attracted by the learning of Wang Yangming. They were altogether five brothers,⁵³² but all of them except Yan Yao were commoners. Yan Yao obtained his *juren* degree in 1534 and became an official.⁵³³ He first had a position as an educational instructor in Shandong and was later sent to Hubei. He became one of the transmitters of Wang Yangming learning in North China⁵³⁴ Luo Rufang became the disciple of Yan Jun and developed the ideas of community compact. Luo did not go to the palace examination in 1544 as he first intended to do, but later in 1553. Although Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng worked against him, Luo made a rather smooth career as an official. After he became the disciple of Yan Jun in 1544, they went to Taizhou, where they were engaged in learning discussion activities. It was in the following summer in Yangzhou that Yan Jun wrote the text Compact agreement of the Yangzhou friends (*Yangzhou Tongzhi Huiyue* 揚州同志會約)⁵³⁵, which I will discuss in detail in the following chapter.

The mainland scholar Rong Zhaozu informs us that Yan Jun was one of several disciples who received the Taizhou teaching from Xu Yue.⁵³⁶ Yan Jun must have been very close to him, since he travelled the whole way to Yuanjiang 沅江 in Guizhou (today’s Hunan) to take care of his remains, and then carried them the whole way back to Taizhou, where he buried Xu Yue beside Wang Gen’s grave.⁵³⁷ However, the map of the graves belonging to Wang Gen’s family shows no drawing of Xu Yue’s grave. They might not have had the intention to add this information on a map of their family grave compound, although he was buried there. It might also be the case that Huang Xuanmin’s information about the burial of Xu Yue is incorrect, which would mean that Yan Jun’s autobiography is corrupt.⁵³⁸ The map must have been

⁵³⁰ Exam at the national level.

⁵³¹ YYJ: 131.

⁵³² The eldest brother Qin 欽 (1496–1564) was accused of committing a crime after their father died. Yao was the second brother. The third was Zhu 鑄 (1501–1587), next came Jun as the fourth brother. The fifth was Tang 鏜 (1507–1595).

⁵³³ Exam at the provincial level.

⁵³⁴ Huang 1996: 1. (In: YYJ.)

⁵³⁵ *Tongzhi* 同志, literally people of ‘the same will’.

⁵³⁶ Rong 1989: 335. Rong does not mention where he got this information. Possibly from “The biography of He Xinyin” *He Xinyin Zhuan* 何心隱傳 by Zou Yuanbiao 鄒元標 (梁夫山傳) or from Huang Zongxi.

⁵³⁷ YYJ: 135. Yan Jun’s chronological biography is edited by Huang Xuanmin.

⁵³⁸ Huang Zongxi states that Yan Jun brought the remains of Xu Yue back for burial, but not that he buried them beside Wang Gen. See MRXA 703. Huang Xuanmin adds the information

made after 1589, since the graves of Wang Gen's sons are all there, including Wang Bi who died in 1589. Xu Yue died already in 1552. According to the map of Wang Gen's family grave, Wang Gen is placed between his father and his third son. (See Figure 9.) Like Wang Gen, Yan Jun received many disciples, the most well-known being He Xinyin and Luo Rufang, both from Jiangxi Province. These three men all helped make Jiangxi the centre of the Taizhou movement. Cheng Xueyan 程學顏 (dates unknown) is also a disciple of Yan Jun, which his name indicates (Xueyan means study Yan i.e. Yan Jun). The Donglin scholars Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612) writes that Luo Rufang regarded Yan Jun as a sage; that Yang Qiyuan regarded Luo Rufang as a sage; and that Li Zhi regarded He Xinyin as a sage.⁵³⁹

The most important Taizhou practitioners in Taizhou were relatives of Wang Gen (his sons and Wang Dong). Outside Taizhou there was Pan Shizao 潘士藻 from Wuyuan (婺源), which is close to today's Shanghai, a city which was not much more than a small fishing village in the sixteenth century.⁵⁴⁰ Very important Taizhou practitioners came from Jiangxi, such as Xu Yue, Yan Jun, He Xinyin, and Luo Rufang (and a later Taizhou practitioner Zhu Shilu 祝世祿⁵⁴¹). The Geng brothers Dingxiang and Dingli were from Huguang province (today's Hubei) Jiao Hong 焦竑 was from Nanjing in today's Jiangsu, a province where Taizhou is located. Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 and He Shengxiang 何生祥 came from Sichuan province and Yang Qiyuan 楊起元⁵⁴² was from Guangdong province, Tao Wangling 陶望齡⁵⁴³ and Liu Shengque 劉生埏⁵⁴⁴ were from Zhejiang (Shaoxing/Kuaiji). Fang Xuejian 方學漸 came from Tongcheng (today's Anhui). From this we can draw the conclusion that the Taizhou movement spread to the whole southern part of the Ming Empire.

Estimating the number of participants is more difficult. *The Complete Works of Master Wang Xinzhai* mention 147,⁵⁴⁵ and the disciples of Wang Gen's second son Wang Bi amount to 205.⁵⁴⁶ According to Huang Zongxi, thousands of people became followers of the potter Han Zhen 韓貞, including

that he buried him beside Wang Gen. See YJJ: 135. Huang Xuanmin gets the information from Yan Jun's autobiography. See YYJ: 23.

⁵³⁹ 羅近溪以顏山農為聖人楊復所以羅近溪為聖人李卓吾以何心隱為聖人. In: *Xiao xinzhai zhaji* 小心齋割記.

⁵⁴⁰ *Jinshi* 1583.

⁵⁴¹ Also called Wugong 無功 'without effort and skill'. *Jinshi* 1619.

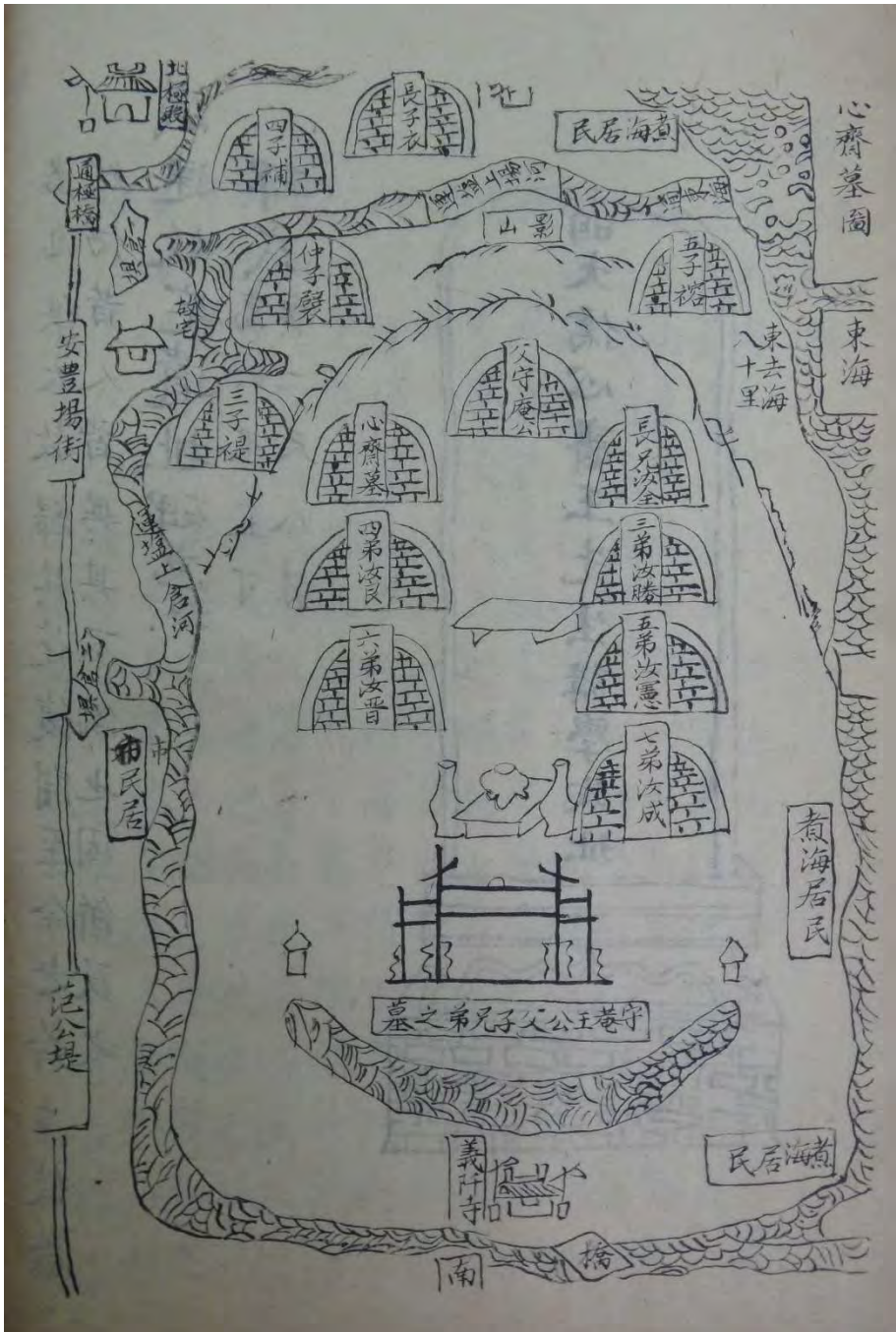
⁵⁴² *Jinshi* 1577.

⁵⁴³ *Jinshi* 1589.

⁵⁴⁴ Also called (Zi) Jingzhu 靜主 'to be firm in stillness'.

⁵⁴⁵ *Table over Master Wang Xinzhai's Disciples (Wang Xinzhai Xiansheng dizi chengbiao* 王心齋先生弟子師程表, XZW, Ch. 5.

⁵⁴⁶ Cheng 1996: 171.



9. Wang Gen's family grave-yard

farmers, artisans and merchants.⁵⁴⁷ If we take into account the difficulty of setting up boundaries between this movement and the Wang Yangming movement, it is even more difficult to estimate the number of Taizhou practitioners; still, it is reasonable to argue that they were a considerable force in Ming society.

The five sons of Wang Gen

Wang Gen had five sons, and he gave them names which were related to clothes, but we do not know why. As in the case of Wang Gen and his brothers, there is a tradition to have a character, which is common to all brothers. As mentioned above, Wang Gen and his brothers all had the character Ru 汝 as the first character in their names. They all had bisyllabic names, that is, two characters with Ru placed first. Wang Gen followed a slightly different pattern. He gave his sons monosyllabic names, that is, one character, and all contained the radical for clothes. The oldest son of Wang Gen simply had the name Yi 衣 ‘clothes’ (1507–1562); the second Bi 襞 ‘gather’ or ‘fold in clothes’ (1511–1587), the third Ti 褹 ‘thick clothes’ (1519–1587), the fourth Bu 補 ‘mend’, ‘patch’ (1523–1571) and the fifth son Rong 裕, which was a kind of jacket used in ancient times (1527–1535).⁵⁴⁸ One reason might be that there was a system for names related to a sequence of radicals in different generations, or that the names relied on divination of *The Book of Changes*. Still another possibility is that the choice of names has a connection to ideas expressed by Yan Jun. In the text “Compact agreement of the Yangzhou friends” he declares: “[The character of] propriety derives its meaning from [its components parts] *li* 豐 sacrificial vessels and *yi* clothes; “sacrificial vessels” refers to the full form, and “clothes” to be extravagantly dressed, a metaphor for people embodying [the Way] deep in their mind, and that they are totally faithful.”⁵⁴⁹ It is not unlikely that Wang Gen wanted his sons to embody the Way and to be faithful to this idea.

The eldest son Wang Yi, also called Wang Dongruan 王東壩, is said to have studied directly under Wang Yangming and his calligraphic style

⁵⁴⁷ MRXA: 720.

⁵⁴⁸ Peng gives the name Rong 裕 to the fifth son. See Peng 2004: 6. *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* from 1817 has the name Yu 裕, which means rich and spacious. The first five sons of Wang Gen had names including the clothes-radical, and this pattern ought to be followed for the fifth son as well. In WZX 1604, Juan 1: 37a the character is written with the cloth radical and 容, a character which is very rare, but mentioned in the Kangxi dictionary, which says that it is pronounced Rong 容, and was a jacket used in ancient times. This son died at the age of 18 and is seldom mentioned in the texts besides poems of his brothers lamenting his death.

⁵⁴⁹ YJJ: 30.

(cursive script) resembled Wang Yangming's.⁵⁵⁰ It is however possible to study a person's calligraphy from someone else or from a piece of writing, so this is not a proof that they met. More reliable information is that Wang Yi was the one who took care of the family finances, and the organization of visiting guests.⁵⁵¹ According to *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* from 1817, Wang Yi advocated his father's ideas about the investigation of things and extending the knowledge of the good.⁵⁵² It is said that he established a family shrine *Chongru ci* 崇儒祠, probably the same as the Gen shrine, *Gen ci* 艮祠, mentioned later in the same gazetteer. Wang Gen's best known and important son was, however, Wang Bi. He is often regarded as the one who inherited the learning of Wang Gen.

Wang Bi

The *Chronological Biography* of Wang Bi does not mention any occasion when Wang Gen transmitted the teaching to him. It simply notes that the year Wang Gen died, Wang Bi began the customary three-year period of mourning, and that he opened a school during this period, and received his own disciples. Three times a month he arranged meetings and lectured at the Taodong Retreat. At that time, Wang Bi was 30 years old.⁵⁵³ However, if the *Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen is not reliable the *Chronological Biography* of Wang Bi is even less so. The later Taizhou practitioner Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) talks about a family tradition of Wang Gen, and that Wang Bi was crucial in spreading Taizhou learning (or Anfeng learning) in Southeast China.⁵⁵⁴ Zhou Rudeng wrote a preface for Wang Bi's collection. In this preface he says: "When Wang Bi had been dead for 24 years, the disciples thought it was impossible to repeat what he had done, and then they gathered and compiled the songs and sayings that were chanted and recited. Thereafter, Mr Cheng Pan crossed the Yangzi River [and visited me in Nanjing] requesting me to write the preface [for the Wang Bi collection]."⁵⁵⁵ Over a period of 24 years certain details might have been forgotten, so there is good reason to treat this *Chronological Biography* with caution, as is the case of the *Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen.

⁵⁵⁰ *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* 1817, in: *Zhonggui Fanzhi Congshu*, Huazhong difang No 27: 904. Peng argues that a poem by Wang Yi gives evidence that Wang Yi met Wang Yangming in person, see Peng 2004: 3.

⁵⁵¹ Wu 2009a: 56, see footnote 4.

⁵⁵² Shortened in *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* as *zhizhi* 致知.

⁵⁵³ WXZQJ: 207 (Wang Bi's *Chronological Biography*).

⁵⁵⁴ WXZQJ: 105. Zhou Rudeng wrote a preface to the *Mingru Wang Dongya xiansheng yiji* 明儒王東厓先生遺集, i.e. the collected works of Wang Bi.

⁵⁵⁵ WXZQJ: 205. Cheng Pan 程泮 might be Cheng Xueyan 程學顏.

There is, however, a complication regarding transmission of the Taizhou learning to Wang Bi, and that is the fact that he also studied for Wang Ji and regarded him as his teacher. Where did Wang Bi take the Taizhou teaching if he was influenced by Wang Ji? Did this mean he became more influenced by Buddhism, than he was before? And if Wang Bi went in a direction towards Buddhism because of Wang Ji, did this disturb Wang Gen? Cheng Yu-yin stresses very much Wang Ji's elitist trait, arguing that he disdained merchants.⁵⁵⁶ Although, she does not explicitly claim that he despised Wang Gen, this is implied in her argumentation. However, in the writings by Wang Gen there is nothing to suggest that there was a conflict between Wang Gen and Wang Ji. On the contrary, they seem to be engaged in the same project. They wrote letters to each other, visited each other and when Wang Gen died, it is said in his *Chronological Biography* that Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562) and Wang Ji mourned him and wept in Nanjing.⁵⁵⁷ This gives the impression that they were two different personalities complementing each other: one intellectual (Wang Ji) and one charismatic and action-oriented (Wang Gen). Wang Bi seems to have combined their qualities.

Transmission procedure

The learning of the Way is said in the Taizhou material to be passed on from the sage rulers Yao, Shun, Yu and Tang, then proceeding to King Wen and Wu, the Duke of Zhou and after this to Confucius.⁵⁵⁸ This is not different from other Neo-Confucian thinkers. What was transmitted was not a set of dogmas, but rather knowledge of how to transform oneself into a sage. This is not an exclusive Taizhou idea either but was understood by all followers of Wang Yangming, and they all agreed that the sage was free from desires. The difference rather lies in the way to rid oneself of desires and to reach the state of mind often called enlightenment, implying a profound knowledge of oneself.

Wang Gen said about the sage rulers Tang and Yu that they were sovereign and subject (*jun chen* 君臣), and this meant that their relationship came close to the relations in learning discussions.⁵⁵⁹ “Yao, Shun and Yu mutually transmitted [to each other]. [They all] taught and received. Therefore, it is said that they ‘kept to their centrality [in an] impartial [manner]’ (*yun zhi*

⁵⁵⁶ Cheng 1996: 140–142.

⁵⁵⁷ XZW, Ch. 2: 42a.

⁵⁵⁸ HXYJ: 18.

⁵⁵⁹ XZW, Ch. 3: 22b.

jue zhong 允執厥中). This is ‘a hundred kings mutually transmitting the tradition’. Confucius also recounted this.’⁵⁶⁰

According to He Xinyin, the sage rulers accumulated learning by “holding fast to the mean and by being discriminating and of singular purpose in it, studying it thus.” He adds: “It was transmitted by discussion and inherited by studying.”⁵⁶¹ However, these ancient sages only passed the learning on from one ruler to another. Confucius passed it on to everyone, making him a teacher of the common people and to all the people in the world.⁵⁶² Here, He Xinyin gives a picture of a rather universalistic and gradual transmission, but how did he receive Taizhou learning himself, and how did he transmit it further to his own disciples? We have only a caricature of how he received the learning from Yan Jun in the writings of the famous Ming scholar Wang Shizhen, who detested both Yan Jun and He Xinyin.⁵⁶³ The text in which Wang criticizes them is translated and discussed in Chapter 8.

Geng Dingli is said to have been a disciple of the Daoist Fang Yushi 方與時 and Deng Huoqu 鄧豁渠⁵⁶⁴ as well as of He Xinyin, but nothing is mentioned of an actual transmission procedure. Geng Dingli is an example of those who studied with different masters like Luo Rufang. Wang Shizhen mentions that Yan Jun had a record of disciples, which indicates that there was in fact a lineage, but Wang Shizhen’s aim is to create a scurrilous picture of Yan Jun. Thus his information is questionable.⁵⁶⁵ Luo Rufang had several teachers during his life. Before Yan Jun, at the age of fifteen he studied for Zhang Xunshui 張洵水. At the age of thirty-four, an old man with the family name Hu 胡 made him realize the truths of *The Book of Changes*. At forty-six an old man at Mount Tai, witnessed his achievements of the Way, and when he was seventy, he received instructions of the mind from Master Wuyi 武夷 (“the Martial barbarian”). All this according to Huang Zongxi.⁵⁶⁶

Yan Jun is said to have received the Taihou learning from Xu Yue in Beijing. This would have happened after the birth of two sons and the death of his mother, but there is no information on how this transmission was performed.⁵⁶⁷ According to Huang Xuanmin, Yan Jun went to Taizhou in 1539, which was two years before the death of Wang Gen. This means that it

⁵⁶⁰ XZW, Ch. 3: 23b

⁵⁶¹ Dimberg 1974: 96. Dimberg’s translation of He Xinyin’s text “Yuan jiang yuan xue” 原講原學.

⁵⁶² Dimberg 1974: 99.

⁵⁶³ HXYJ: 144.

⁵⁶⁴ Also called Deng He 鄧鶴. Both Fang Yushi and Deng Huoqu are mentioned at the beginning of Huang’s *Records of Taizhou Learning*, and are thus counted by him as Taizhou practitioners.

⁵⁶⁵ HXYJ: 143.

⁵⁶⁶ MRXA: 761.

⁵⁶⁷ Huang Xuanmin 1996: 1.

is possible that he met Wang Gen in person.⁵⁶⁸ He did at least call himself a disciple of Wang Gen, and Wang Yangming his “ancestral teacher” (*zushi* 祖師) or “doctrinal ancestor” (*dao zu* 道祖).⁵⁶⁹

As for the transmission of Taizhou learning from Yan Jun to Luo Rufang there is a detailed description in the biography of Yan Jun written by He Yisun 賀貽孫, who must have been a disciple of Yan Jun.⁵⁷⁰ He describes Yan Jun as a powerful religious leader and healer. Since it gives a good picture of Yan Jun’s ideas, I have chosen to translate it in full here:

Those who listened to him increased day by day, and the one who believed in him most sincerely was Luo Rufang. Initially, Luo Rufang was studying for the lowest level of civil service examinations. He admired the learning of the Way seriously, and practised meditation until he became ill. He met Yan Jun in the prefecture of Yuzhang 豫章 (Old name for Nanchang, Jiangxi), where he paid his respects to him. When the Master saw him, he immediately said to him: “You are sick. You have something in your mind, a serious illness. Just get rid of it. You are lucky to have met me, so you can live.” Luo Rufang said: “I have practised becoming clear [in my mind] for several years. I was practising meditation (lit. to sit in front of the mirror) every day, so my mind became one. Today, no thoughts arise when I think of death, life, gains, and losses.” The master said to him again: “This is exactly your sickness. What you are doing is to restrain your desires, not to realize humaneness. The sickness of desire stays in your body, while the sickness of restraining your desires stays in your mind. You will die if you do not cure the sickness of your mind. Have you not heard of the saying about releasing the mind? When a man gets sick, his mind gets dazed, and then he will go to [doctors like] Qin Yueren⁵⁷¹, who will examine his pulse and give him a diagnosis, saying: ‘Release your mind and there will be no problem.’ The man will simply believe in the power of Qin Yueren. The illness will be cured already when he hears the word [of the doctor], he does not have to wait for the needle [of acupuncture]. Once, there was a man who had a debt of a large sum of money, which he owed the official state treasury. He was imprisoned and felt very scared. His son took this amount of money from his business and showed it to his father, saying: ‘Here you have the money; you can set your mind at rest.’ Although his father [was in prison] he believed his son had the money, and even though he had a cangue round his neck and shears and a sickle on his back,⁵⁷² he did not feel heavy but as if his body was light. If there is something that tightens the mind, it will not be released; if it is tightened by something and you try to release it with violence, it will not be released either. Why is it like this? You have not looked at [the problem] enough to break [the cangue around your neck]. The snake charmer is not afraid of snakes; he just believes that the incantation will ward off the

⁵⁶⁸ Huang Xuanmin 1996: 125. (In the “Chronological Biography of Yan Jun” written by Huang Xuanmin in YJJ.)

⁵⁶⁹ YJJ: 29. In his autobiography he calls Wang Gen his “spiritual master” (*xinshi* 心師). See YJJ: 25.

⁵⁷⁰ Dates unknown. Z. 子美. He came from Yongxin County like Yan Jun.

⁵⁷¹ Qin Yueren was a famous doctor from the Warring states period (475–221 BC).

⁵⁷² *Jiao* 鉸 is a pair of shears and *tang* 鐮 a sickle. These objects might have been illegal instruments of torture.

snake. The magician is not afraid of water and fire; he believes that the magic spell will ward off water and fire. If you do not have confidence in your mind, your mind will not be released. If you cannot see your mind yourself, you will not dare to believe in yourself, and then your mind will not be released. When Confucius said: “If I hear the Way in the morning, I can die in the evening”, he released his mind. Mencius said: “The great end of learning is nothing but to strive for releasing the mind”. However, if you release your mind, you will become disorderly as if you have nothing to do. Look at your mind, it surely has no self-confidence! It has not become released! If you release it, its heat will return to the spring. The mystery of realizing humaneness is to release the mind. Initially, there were nothing that caused your illnesses, how could it cause your death? Luo Rufang felt excited as if he had cast off his reins, and then his illness was cured.⁵⁷³

Yan Jun, the Neo-Confucians of both the Yangming School and the Cheng-Zhu School, as well as the Buddhists, all regarded desires as a main obstacle preventing a person from reaching enlightenment. Yan Jun was only different in his view of how to abolish them. The mistake Luo Rufang made, according to Yan Jun, was to restrain his desires, and this was not the same as to free himself from desires. In the passage above, Yan expresses his disbelief in taking away desires by force. For him, the solution lies in having self-confidence, which will enable a person to release the mind. Yan is quoting Mencius, which has been interpreted differently by various scholars. When Mencius talks of *qiu qi fang xin* (求其放心), Legge understand it as “seeking for the lost mind”⁵⁷⁴, but Yan’s interpretation has the opposite meaning of “striving for releasing the mind”. Here the released or lost mind is not an obstacle but the goal.⁵⁷⁵ According to He Yisun, Yan makes Luo realize that he had no reason to be sick. His misunderstanding of himself, or more precisely his mind, was his illness, according to Yan, so when he came to the correct understanding he was cured. In He Yisun’s account, Yan Jun acted as a doctor or healer, and when Luo Rufang was cured he is said to have paid Yan Jun respect, that is, he became his disciple.

The discussion on desires makes Yan Jun stand out among Neo-Confucian thinkers. Wang Shizhen (1526–1590) accused Yan Jun of indulging in desires. He painted a totally different picture of how Yan Jun in his description of how Yan transmitted Taizhou learning to He Xinyin. In Wang Shizhen’s account,⁵⁷⁶ Yan Jun is pictured as a rude, uncultivated and despotic person. But to see the desires and let them leave the mind, and to indulge in desires, which Wang accused Yan of, are not the same thing. Huang

⁵⁷³ YJJ: 82–83.

⁵⁷⁴ In Legge there is the following translation: “The great end of learning is nothing else but to seek for the lost mind.” See *The Book of Mencius*, Gao Zi Shang.

⁵⁷⁵ Wu points out that Shao Yong (1011–77) also understood Mencius in the same way as Yan Jun did, but finds it difficult to know if Yan Jun had heard about his ideas, or if he came to the same conclusion independently. See Wu 2009: 282).

⁵⁷⁶ HXYJ: 143–144.

Zongxi would later say that Wang's criticism of Yan was exaggerated. However, as one of the most influential intellectuals during the sixteenth century, Wang's ideas about Yan had a great impact on his contemporaries, as well as on Confucians of coming eras. Wang Shizhen's description of how Yan Jun's learning was transmitted to He Xinyin, will be discussed below in Chapter 8. He Yisun describes a transmission from Yan Jun to Luo Rufang which is religious in its character, and it is an example of a kind of religious praxis. The religious praxis within the Taizhou movement is the theme of Chapter 6.

As for Luo Rufang, Huang Zongxi gives an impression in his introduction of him that he was a very humble person. Luo Rufang was one of the most learned literati scholars in this circle of Taizhou practitioners. Despite this, he still paid homage to Yan Jun, who did not have any scholarly education. However, at the time he became Yan's disciple, he had not yet been awarded the degree of presented scholars and was eleven years younger than Yan Jun, but his reverence for Yan Jun would continue. Later, when Yan Jun was imprisoned, Luo Rufang sold his land and borrowed money from friends and was thus able to change Yan Jun's penalty from the death penalty to exile.⁵⁷⁷ Although Yan Jun seems to have been a rude person, especially if we believe Wang Shizhen's description,⁵⁷⁸ Luo still served him as a son to his father. Yan Jun could, for instance, give away Luo's money, which upset his family members.⁵⁷⁹

Thirteen years after Luo Rufang had met Yan Jun, Luo's real career started, something which was predicted by Yan Jun. Luo was became a presented scholar in 1553 and started his official career as a magistrate in Taihu, in today's Anhui Province. In 1556, he became a secretary in the Ministry of Punishments, and in 1562, he went to Ningguofu (also in today's Anhui) to serve as Prefect, but like many other Taizhou practitioners his fate would change due to measures taken by Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng. I will return to that in Chapter 8.⁵⁸⁰

Conclusion

Huang Zongxi is inconsistent in his criticism of Wang Ji and Wang Gen, and that they added Chan Buddhism elements to Wang Yangming's teaching. In *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* he admits that Wang

⁵⁷⁷ DMB: 976. (Julia Ching)

⁵⁷⁸ HXYJ: 143–144.

⁵⁷⁹ DMB: 976. (Julia Ching)

⁵⁸⁰ Jiang Yonglin translates *Xingbu* 刑部 as Ministry of Justice, but *xing* 刑 means punishments and had not much to do with the modern concept of justice. Other researchers translate it as Board of Punishments.

Yangming agrees with Wang Ji about his Buddhist influenced Maxims of the “Four Non-beings”. Contrary to earlier research on the Taizhou movement, this study shows that Wang Yangming shares with Wang Gen the Southern Chan Buddhist belief in sudden enlightenment and disbelief in textual exegesis as a means of enlightenment. Therefore, earlier research claiming that Huang Zongxi was wrong in attributing Chan Buddhist ideas to Wang Gen cannot be supported. On the contrary, the problem with Huang Zongxi is that he denies that Wang Yangming was influenced by Chan Buddhism, not that he accused Wang Gen of such influence. The Buddhist influences on the learning of Wang Ji and Wang Gen make up the basis for Huang’s criticism and that they distorted the learning of Wang Yangming. One conclusion must be that those Buddhist influences were the main part of deviation from orthodox Confucian learning. That Huang Zongxi did not admit that Wang Yangming “suffered” from the same “illness” as Wang Ji and Wang Gen can only be explained in two ways: either he did not realize that Wang Yangming himself was influenced by Buddhism or he was not earnest in his description of Wang Yangming.

That Huang Zongxi divided Wang Ji and Wang Gen into two different schools must have confused later readers. Despite the differences in character between “the two Wangs”, there is no indication that they disagreed and did not take part in the same movement. On the contrary, they were intimately linked to each other via Wang Bi, the second son of Wang Gen and his inheritor of the Taizhou movement and at the same time the disciple of Wang Ji. That there was no conflict between Wang Gen and Wang Ji is underscored by the fact that it was Wang Gen who entrusted Wang Ji to teach his son.

From the examples of transmission given and the lack of transmission narratives, another conclusion is that there were no fixed transmission procedures established within the Taizhou movement. On the contrary, they explicitly argued that a straight line of transmission would not be beneficial. The Taizhou practitioners merely tried to reach knowledge from discussions with different masters and friends and through individual efforts in meditation.

6. Praxis and organization of the Taizhou movement

In the following chapter, I will discuss the praxis and organization(s) of the Taizhou practitioners. Questions in focus are concrete, such as the Taizhou practitioners' religious material culture, which religious and social activities they engaged in and what kind of organization(s) they tried to build. Furthermore, I try to illustrate how their actions are related to their ideas. Since they at this stage became more active and intentionally tried to organize themselves, I find it relevant to talk about a movement here. It is, of course, not possible to determine an exact time when a shift from a social network to a movement took place.

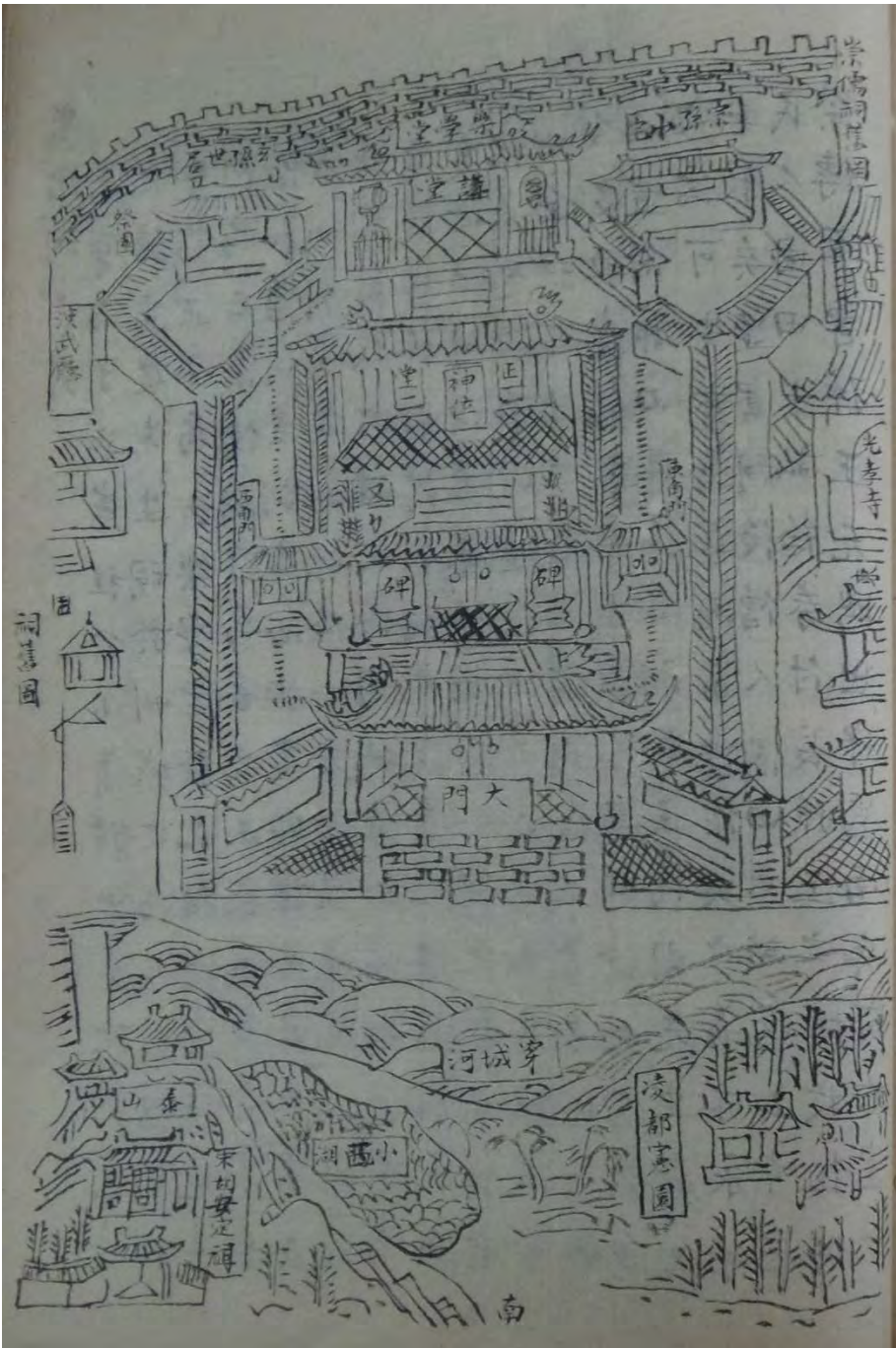
Material culture

The Taizhou practitioners seems not to have spent much time and resources on constructing buildings. However, there are a few exceptions. In 1536, the Dongtao Retreat was built by a certain Hong Yuan, who became a presented scholar in 1532 and died in 1590.⁵⁸¹ In 1552, after the death of Wang Gen, a clan organization *zonghui* 宗會 was established under the leadership of Wang Bi.⁵⁸² In 1576, the Dongtao Retreat was changed into the Ancestral Temple of Lofty Confucians (*Chongrucu* 崇儒祠).⁵⁸³ The complex includes the Hall of Joyous Learning (*Lexue Tang* 樂學堂).

⁵⁸¹ XZW, Juan 2: 30b. There is confusion about his name. In *The Chronological Biography* of Wang Gen, the character for his name is Yuan, but in later sources it is written as Tan, which is easy to understand since there is only one more stroke in the character. He was also called Jueshan 覺山 'experiencing the mountain'.

⁵⁸² Also called *zonghehui* 宗族會 or *zuzonghui* 族宗會. See Wu 2009a: 59.

⁵⁸³ This building was used as housing and a factory after 1949, but was renovated in 1986 when it was established as a museum of Wang Gen and the "Taizhou School".



10. The Hall of Joyeous Learning.

A sketch of the Hall of Joyous Learning is found in *The Complete Works of Wang Gen* from 1604 (XZW) (See Figure 10).⁵⁸⁴ There is also the complex is the Hall of Striving for Humaneness (*Mianren Tang* 勉仁堂) (See Figure 11). Wang Gen is said in *The Chronological Biography* to have written the essay “Method of Striving for Humaneness” (*Mianren Fang* 勉仁方) the same year as the Dongtao Retreat was built in 1536.⁵⁸⁵ (See Figure 8.) According to the figure, the Hall of Striving for Humaneness was built in between the lodge of visiting guests on the left-hand side, and the Studio of Repaying Kindness (*Baode Zhai* 報德齋) on the right-hand side. On the far left of the lodge of visiting guest were the residences of Wang Gen’s sons, and on the right-hand side of the whole complex was Anfeng Street, which was probably the main street in Anfeng, the place where Wang Gen came from and which was a salt producing unit. The Dongtao Retreat might have been a family shrine to begin with, but the fact that Yan Jun and other Taizhou practitioners from distant places also visited this place shows that it was open for people not belonging to the Wang clan. In 1607, the third-generation disciple of Wang Gen, Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣, restored it, and in 1612, the fourth-generation disciple Wang Dingyuan 王鼎元 (dates unknown) recorded it as an ancestral hall.⁵⁸⁶

In *The Collected works of Yan Jun*⁵⁸⁷ there is a list of people who financially supported block-carving for a school library. The family name most frequently used is Yan. This means the descendants of Yan Jun belonged to the most devoted supporters, and/or belonged to those with the best economy.⁵⁸⁸ In general the Taizhou practioners seem to have used existing buildings for their activities. He Xinyin, for example, used his ancestral shrine when he organized his school, the Collective Harmony Hall, where the students lived separated from their families.⁵⁸⁹ The Guild Hall he opened in Beijing for lecturing was probably also an existing building he acquired for this purpose.⁵⁹⁰ There are drawings and descriptions of musical instrument and sacrificial objects in a text written by a person called Chen Yingfang 陳應芳 in 1609. (See Figure 11, Religious objects.) These drawings are added to *The Complete Works of Wang Gen*. These objects were used in the ancestral hall and might have been created by Wang Gen in the same way as the clothes and the chariot he used on his trip to Wang Yangming (and also on his trip to Beijing in 1539, if it occurred at all).

Objects in the figure include different kinds of wine vessels and spoons for ceremonial drinking. Drinking ceremonies were a part of the community compact meetings, not only the meetings of the Taizhou practitioners but also

⁵⁸⁴ XZW, Juan 1: 27a.

⁵⁸⁵ XZW, Juan 2: 30b. The text is found in XZW Juan 3: 34a–37a.

⁵⁸⁶ XZW, Juan 1: 26b.

⁵⁸⁷ Yan Jun Ji 顏鈞集 (YJJ).

⁵⁸⁸ YJJ: 99.

⁵⁸⁹ Dimberg 1974: 45–46.

⁵⁹⁰ Dimberg 1974: 47.

such meetings in general. There are no elaborate discussions in the material about the significance of the drinking ceremonies. The ceremonies might have been libation sacrifices, but it is not possible at the moment to prove this. It was customary to toast those who had performed meritorious deeds during the compact meetings. As for spoons they had, at least for Yan Jun, the specific meaning of containing the essence of the *yang* force. As has already been mentioned, he regarded the dot in the character of ‘spoon’ (*shao* 勺) as the essence of the *yang* force. The spoon character is the part to the right in the character of ‘agreement’ (*yue* 約). In this way he links the essence of *yang* to the agreement in the community compact. The agreement was a personal commitment to follow the ethical rules of the compact. Therefore, I consider it plausible that the spoon is linked to an idea of the *yang* force, and to the personal commitment of the agreement in the community compact. Perhaps everyone attending the compact meeting tasted wine from the spoon while signing the agreement of the community compact, and by eating from the spoon they believed they would become empowered by the *yang* energy. It is uncertain whether this idea was embraced by other Taizhou practitioners, but since they add the spoon to the chart of sacred objects, it must have had a specific function and significance.

There is no evidence that it was wine they tasted from the spoon. It could also have been soup or gruel, but probably something liquid. However, there are no soup or gruel pots in the sketches of the objects in Figure 11, so I still believe they used the spoon for the wine, and that they heated the wine in those vessels which have legs to stand on a fire.

The figure also included pictures of musical instruments such as drums, bells and sounding stones (*qing* 磬).⁵⁹¹

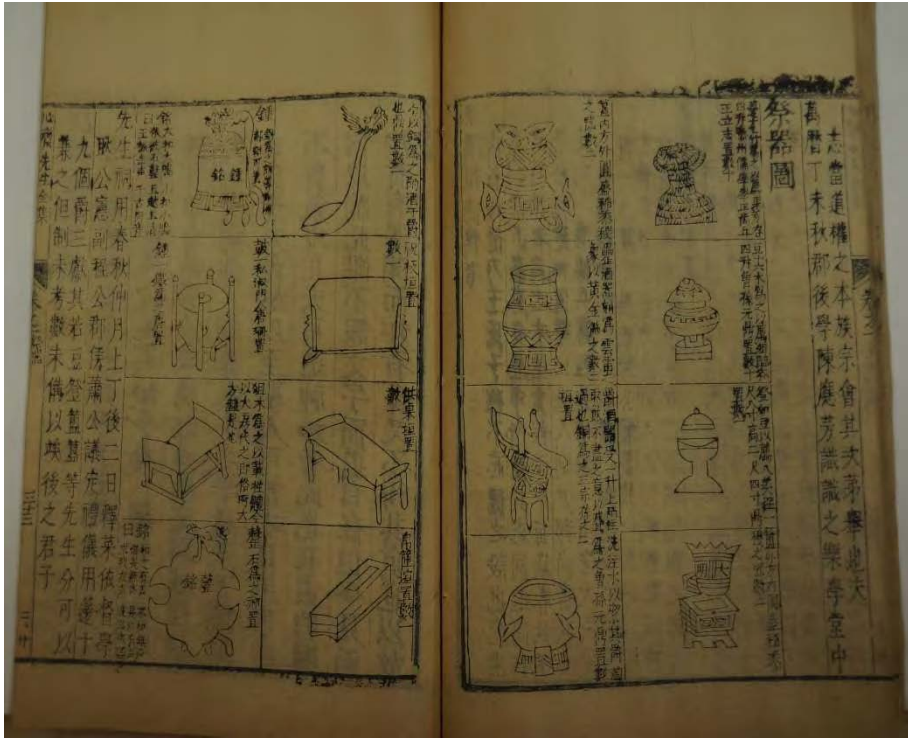
Music, song and recitation

Music played an integral role in the Confucian ritual already in *The Analects*. Confucius is depicted as a person who enjoyed music to a high degree, and if someone was good at singing, he joined in singing himself.⁵⁹² A day without Confucius singing is explicitly said to be an extraordinary day such as a day in grief.⁵⁹³ Discussions and lecturing are often accompanied by music, according to *The Analects*. There is a famous passage where Confucius asks his disciple Zengzi (Zeng Dian) about his inner wishes. When Confucius did so, Zengzi interrupted playing his Zither to talk about his yearning to go out in the wilderness with his young friends, to dance and sing at the rain altar. When Confucius heard what he said, he heaved a sigh of relief and said he

⁵⁹¹ XZW, Juan 1: 32b–33a.

⁵⁹² *The Analects* “Shu Er”: 32.

⁵⁹³ *The Analects* “Shu Er”: 10.



11. Religious objects (XZW, Ch. 1: 32b–33a)

agreed with Zengzi. Apparently, he was not impressed by the other disciples' lofty and ambitious plans for their lives.⁵⁹⁴ This story is referred to by the Taizhou practitioners, who yearned for the same kind of freedom as Zengzi and Confucius are said to have done. Music was one way to reach this freedom. According to *The Analects*, Confucius used to play sounding stones. It is said that one day, when Confucius was playing stones in the State of Wei, a man carrying a straw basket passed by and said that Confucius' heart was full, otherwise he would not be able to beat the stones the way he did.⁵⁹⁵ The Taizhou practitioners' use of musical stones and other instruments is an attempt to make Confucius their model of life.

Singing and reciting texts was an integral part of the discussion learning meetings. In his preface to Wang Bi's Collected Works *Mingru Wang Yi'an xiansheng yiji*, there are several comments about how their singing filled the valleys. Zhou Rudeng mentions, that the disciples (of Wang Bi) collected and

⁵⁹⁴ *The Analects* "Xian Jin": 26.

⁵⁹⁵ *The Analects* "Xian Wen": 39.

compiled the songs and sayings and that they were chanted and recited.⁵⁹⁶ This probably first of all refers to the songs and sayings by Wang Bi, but also to those composed by Wang Gen. Reciting texts had been a common part of Wang Yangming's compact meetings. There is not much information about which texts the Taizhou practitioners recited, nor which songs they sang. An assumption is that they recited the sayings in *The Recorded Conversations* by Wang Gen, but also the "Song of Joyous Learning" and his poems. In *The Recorded Conversation* by Wang Gen, there is a passage saying: "The disciples (*menren* 門人) sang: "Dao is happiness existing in prosperity and adversity wherever you are".⁵⁹⁷ It is also said in *The Annotated Quotations* by Wang Gen that he recited a saying by Mencius: "If the Way prevails in the world, one has to sacrifice oneself for the Way. When there is no Way in the world, one must sacrifice oneself together with [one's] Way. I have not heard of sacrificing the Way for the sake of other people."⁵⁹⁸ The sayings they sang and recited were probably edifying quotations like this.

Wang Bi was known as a good singer, and already at the age of eight Wang Gen let him sing and recite poems at assemblies according to *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*.⁵⁹⁹ Huang Zongxi claims that people were reminded of Zengzi and his yearning for going out in the wilderness singing and dancing, when they heard Wang Bi's voice which had a clear character of "stone and metal".⁶⁰⁰ Wang Bi later also composed many songs and poems himself. Zhou Rudeng's preface to Wang Bi's collected works shows that his songs and sayings were chanted and recited on different occasions, especially after his death. We also know that they recited *The Six Maxims* by the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang, but they might also have recited traditional texts from the Confucian classics. Songs from *The Book of Odes* are mentioned in the texts, so those poems might have belonged to their repertoire as well.

⁵⁹⁶ WXZQJ: 205.

⁵⁹⁷ WXZ, Juan 3: 10b. (*Menren ge: dao zai xianyi suidi le* 門人歌: '道在險夷隨地樂'). The quotation is from a poem by Wang Yangming entitled "To get up after sleep and write down what is in your mind" (*Shui qi xie huai* 睡起寫懷). Wang Yangming Quanshu 14.66b. The poem further tells us about being free without memories, like birds and fishes. This poem might be inspired by Zhuangzi.

⁵⁹⁸ 天下有道，以道殉身；天下無道，以身殉道。未聞以道殉乎人者也。 (In Legge's translation: "When right principles prevail throughout the kingdom, one's principles must appear along with one's person. When right principles disappear from the kingdom, one's person must vanish along with one's principles. I have not heard of one's principles being dependent for their manifestation on other men.")

⁵⁹⁹ MRXA: 718.

⁶⁰⁰ MRXA: 718.

Meditation

Owing to Wang Gen's emphasis on action, it is easy to conclude that he focused less on meditation during the latter part of his life. However, that might be too hasty a conclusion. Meditation obviously continued to be important for the Taizhou practitioners. I assume Wang Gen did not give up meditation, but rather tried to combine it with a life of social activism. There is a discussion between Wang Ji and Wang Gen about Luo Hongxian (1504–64) which is relevant to the question which way of living is preferable, a life of meditation or one filled with social activities such as teaching. Luo Hongxian was a brilliant student placed as number one in the palace examination in 1529. With this position he would have been able to make a wonderful career within the imperial administration, but when his father-in-law and minister of the court congratulated him he answered: "A real man must contribute more than that. Is it really enough to come out first in an examination that takes place once every three years?"⁶⁰¹ In congruency with this attitude, Luo declined a position as a secretary in the Ministry of War. Deeply inspired by Wang Yangming's *Moral Education* as well as by another famous disciple of his who emphasized stillness,⁶⁰² Luo decided to devote all his time and effort to meditation practices. He even carved out a cave, the Rock Lotus Cave, for himself, where he practised meditation for three years.⁶⁰³

The Chronological Biography of Luo Hongxian proves that Luo Hongxian had close ties with Wang Gen, Wang Gen's disciple Lin Chun and Wang Ji. In 1539, he first met Lin Chun and "discussed the learning" with him, and later the same year he met Wang Gen. On this occasion Wang Gen gave him his texts "Method of Striving for Humaneness" and "The Song of Great Accomplishment" (Dacheng Ge 大成歌).⁶⁰⁴ Wang Gen and Wang Ji had a correspondence which touched on the case of Luo Hongxian. Wang Gen had been informed that Luo was hesitating about being a teacher, probably in a letter from Wang Ji. In a letter to Wang Ji he writes: "It is a pity that [you] did not ask him about it."⁶⁰⁵ Wang Gen obviously recognized Luo's achievement, and wanted him to take an active part in the learning discussion movement and not keep his knowledge to himself. Perhaps because of this questioning by Wang Gen, Wang Ji visited Luo. According to the records of Huang Zongxi, Wang Ji was afraid that Luo went in for meditation too much and would lose his original spontaneity. And perhaps Wang Ji, like Wang Gen, thought that the teaching movement had lost an important force in Luo Hongxian. However, the meeting between the two men resulted in Wang Ji

⁶⁰¹ MRXA: 386.

⁶⁰² Nie Bao (1487–1563).

⁶⁰³ MRXA: 387.

⁶⁰⁴ Wu 2001: 342–343.

⁶⁰⁵ XZW, Juan 4: 20b.

becoming deeply impressed by Luo's mental achievements. According to Huang Zongxi, Luo said that he felt more spontaneity and harmony now after an intensive period of meditation.

It is like equalizing taxes.⁶⁰⁶ From the sixth month until now, already for half a year, I have all day long been [working on] not tiring myself out, and not becoming too attached to things nor becoming too easy going, and not exaggerating [my achievements]. I only fear that, [like this] in solitude, I might not attain what I strive for. When all kinds of distracting thoughts do not enter [my mind], and I do not even notice the two states of movement and stillness, I tell myself that this is in fact the achievement of stable stillness (*jingding* 靜定).⁶⁰⁷ It is not the moment when one is settled in meditation, but when stillness become activity without being attached to stillness itself.⁶⁰⁸

This is a fine example of how the discussions evolved among the disciples of Wang Yangming, discussions which circled around the dichotomy of stillness and movement, and which can also be understood as the dualism between meditation in isolation and social activism including teaching discussion meetings. Wang Ji's visit to Luo Hongxian might tentatively be dated to 1540, just before the death of Wang Gen. Wang Gen's son and inheritor Wang Bi regarded meditation as crucial, as did his later follower Yan Jun, who inspired many Taizhou practitioners in Jiangxi and other places, including Luo Rufang. Especially Yan Jun illustrates how meditative experience forms the basis of future activism. One explanation would be that they deviated from the way of social activism of Wang Gen, but it could also be the case that Wang Gen never regarded social activism and meditation as contradictory. The sources of Wang Gen neither contradict nor verify this, so for the time being, it is impossible to answer this question.

Yan Jun's seven-day seclusion

Yan Jun 顏鈞 (1504–1596) was born in Jiangxi Province, Ji'an 吉安 Prefecture, Yongxin County 永新縣. Yan Jun changed his name Jun to Duo 鐸, since Jun was forbidden due to an imperial taboo.⁶⁰⁹ His styled names (Hao) were Shannong 山農 and Gengqiao 耕樵. Shannong means "Mountain peasant", a name that has deep roots in Chinese history. A certain Shannong

⁶⁰⁶ Luo Hongxian compares his spiritual endeavours with his previous work as an official, and that at the time he was obviously engaged in making the taxes more equal.

⁶⁰⁷ *Jingding* 靜定 is a term used within both Daoist and Buddhist religion for the highest meditative state.

⁶⁰⁸ MRXA: 387. The last sentence is a translation of: “非紐定默坐時是靜，到動應時便無著靜處也。”

⁶⁰⁹ This must have been in 1572, when the Wanli Emperor ascended the throne.

is mentioned already in the Rites of Zhou, 周礼. It shows his eccentric character, and that he wished to stay free from the restraints of society.

Yan Jun's interest in meditation started as the result of a long depression. As a child, Yan Jun is said to have been physically weak and not very intelligent. People believed he was mentally retarded.⁶¹⁰ He began to study when he was twelve, and the following year, he travelled with his father to South Zhili (today's Jiangsu), where he went to school. However, his father suffered from an illness for several years after this and died when Yan Jun was 17, so he could not continue his studies and returned home. The funeral was not even finished when his eldest brother Qin 欽 was accused of committing a crime, perhaps falsely, and was sent on corvée duty. After this the family was impoverished.⁶¹¹ His family background has certain similarities with Wang Gen's – an impoverished family resulting in interrupted schooling.

As with so many others during the Ming dynasty, the spiritual turning point for Yan Jun was the reading of Wang Yangming. Yan Jun says that this came when his elder brother gave him a copy of Wang Yangming's *Moral Education*. When in his reading he reached the phrase: “the mind and the thought, concentrated and harmonious, like a cat just about to catch a mice, like a hen brooding her eggs”⁶¹², he was inspired to sit down for seven days in seclusion to learn this kind of concentration “as if imprisoning himself”.⁶¹³ The fruit of this meditation week was an enlightenment experience, which Yan Jun describes with an expression from *The Book of Songs* ‘kongzhao’ 孔昭, in previous scholarship translated as ‘grandly brilliant’ and ‘very intelligent’.⁶¹⁴ As a result of this spiritual achievement, he immediately understood the meaning of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*.

In a text with the general title “The essence of instructions [for reaching enlightenment] in nine sections”, and with the subtitle “Clear [instructions] for enlightening⁶¹⁵ one's mind in a seclusion of seven days”, Yan Jun describes in detail how this meditation should be practised. He tries to transmit his own initial experience of seven-day meditation to posterity.

Meditation weeks are practised in Buddhist monasteries and probably much earlier than the time of Yan Jun. Modern anthropological studies of

⁶¹⁰ Huang 1996: 1.

⁶¹¹ YJJ: 23.

⁶¹² YYJ: 23. *Jing shen xin si, ningju chujie. Ru mao bu shu.* 精神心思，凝聚融結。如貓捕鼠，如鳥覆卵。In WYMQJ 16, we find the first half of the saying, but not the second half about the hen. According to Wing-tsit Chan, the saying goes back to Chan Master Cuxin (fl.1060). See Wang Yangming 1963: 35, note 24.

⁶¹³ YJJ: 24.

⁶¹⁴ YJJ: 37.

⁶¹⁵ Reference to the *Book of Songs*. Legge translates 孔昭 to ‘grandly brilliant’ and ‘very intelligent’. First in *Minor Odes of the Kingdom, Decade of Lu Ming*, Lu Ming it says: 我有嘉賓、德音孔昭。(Here I have admirable guests; whose virtuous fame is grandly brilliant.), and in the *Greater Odes of the Kingdom, Decade of Dang, Yi*: 昊天孔昭、我生靡樂。(Great Heaven is very intelligent). I have translated it here as ‘enlightening’.

Korean⁶¹⁶ and Chinese⁶¹⁷ monasteries describe this intensive meditation practice. It is said that Buddha meditated for seven days under the Bodhi tree until he was enlightened. The Buddhist tradition has various names for this meditation week. One is ‘to be in peaceful meditation for seven days’ (*anchan qiri* 安禪七日), today often called ‘Southern meditation for seven days’ (*nanchan qiri* 南禪七日), which seems to be related to a Southern Chan practice. Closer to the time of Yan Jun is the temple gazetteer of Li’an, which mentions that Prince Yong (later the Yongzheng Emperor) practised “sit the seven” together with the monks of the Bolin monastery in 1712. This was done according to the monastic rules of Li’an monastery.⁶¹⁸ Since the practice is mentioned in their monastic rules, it certainly goes back to an older tradition. However, the source of Yan Jun’s practice is most likely Wang Yangming, who mentions an ancient ritual in Chinese tradition. A seven-day abstinence (*qi ri jie* 七日戒) was included in a larger sacrificial ritual to Heaven described in *The Book of Rites*. It is said that the animals to be sacrificed should stay in the stable for three months, while the worshippers should be in abstinence for seven days and in vigil for three days. (*San ri su* 三日宿).⁶¹⁹ In Wang Yangming’s text, the word ‘vigil’ (*su* 宿) is changed into ‘fasting’ (*zhai* 齋), but it is still the same ritual he refers to. The expression is also found in the writings of Zhu Xi, so we can infer that his discussion about the ritual was noticed by Wang Yangming, who in his turn transmitted it to his disciples and the Taizhou practitioners. It might therefore be a previous tradition of seven-day abstinence or meditation in ancient Chinese ritual praxis, which was taken up by the Buddhists and made a Buddhist tradition. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Wang Yangming meditated seven days in front of the bamboo, although this did not lead to his enlightenment; on the contrary he fell sick. This illness, however, was a prerequisite for his later “insight” into the shortcomings of Zhu Xi. At the time of Yan Jun, a seven-day meditation practice might also have been common among all kinds of people dealing with self-cultivation regardless of tradition. In the following, it will be shown that Yan Jun’s seven-day meditation had distinct Daoist features.

Unfortunately, it is only the first section of nine in Yan Jun’s text that has survived, but from this we still get some substantial information. The concrete description of the practice he offers to his students starts as follows:

All those who have the will and the desire to obtain the achievement through physical effort have to select and clean a building for two or three days and nights, spread out beddings one after another, and then [I] will inspect and organize those who are willing to sit [in meditation], [so that] everyone is sitting

⁶¹⁶ Buswell 1992: 187–189.

⁶¹⁷ Welch 1967: 75–78.

⁶¹⁸ ter Haar 2009: 452.

⁶¹⁹ *Liji*, Liqi 23.

correctly on the bedding, without being self-indulgent or partial, and undertaking the following tasks for themselves:⁶²⁰ Everybody should collect his own body, tie a piece of silk to cover the two eyes, not opening them day or night; stop balls of cotton wool in the ears to prevent oneself from hearing anything external;⁶²¹ shut the mouth and not utter a word; clench the hands without moving; cross the legs without stretching them out; keeping the body upright without being unbridled and lazy; hang down the head slightly as if searching and concentrating oneself on the return of the vital energy into the mind. In this way everybody rigorously restrains himself.⁶²²

Yan Jun concludes this part by saying that this is what is meant by ‘seclusion’ (*biguan* 閉關). What kind of meditation technique is this? To let the ‘vital energy’ (*qi* 氣) return to the mind is a typical Daoist practice. In the following, the exercises become even more Daoist, with talk of ‘the cinnabar field’ (*dantian* 丹田), which is the place in the body believed to generate the *qi* power, according to Daoist longevity practices.

Thereafter, [I] trigger the achievement of the return of vital energy. [The students] slowly inhale the breath of *yang* air through the nose,⁶²³ and let it come to the mouth, where they keep it [and let it be mixed with] the saliva in the mouth through gargling. Then they let the saliva pour down to the [lower] Cinnabar Field where it moves around by itself in a few circles.⁶²⁴ Then they again inhale and keep the saliva in the mouth, and in the same way they swallow and let it pour down one hundred thousand times without interruption for two to three days, and [the practitioners are] not able to stop themselves.⁶²⁵ In this way [they are supposed to] exert themselves with laborious effort, and even though the sweat is pouring as if they were bathing in it, they do not allow themselves to wipe it away. And even though the bones and joints are aching, they do not allow themselves to stretch them out and relax. Everyone should do like this. Until a member cannot endure the suffering, drink or swallow [the saliva] he should not tell me to free him from the [meditation] regulations. [Afterwards,] they can lie down to sleep until they wake up by themselves. Some students sleep very deeply for several days and that would be much better.⁶²⁶

The *qi* which goes down to the lower cinnabar field is recharged in this centre, located in the abdomen close to the navel. The idea is to make the concentration of *qi* increase there and ultimately in the whole body. According

⁶²⁰ I.e. listen to Yan Jun’s instructions.

⁶²¹ The advice to cover the eyes and block up the ears could be interpreted metaphorically.

⁶²² YJJ: 38. Wu Zhen regards this as the preparatory phase similar to the 筑基 phase of Daoist inner alchemy. See Wu 2009a: 276.

⁶²³ *Yangqi*, or yang pneuma, could be air during the spring season or if they are facing south.

⁶²⁴ Different sources locate the cinnabar field to 1.3, 2, 2.4, 3 or 3.6 inches inside or below the navel. See Pregadio 2008: 302.

⁶²⁵ The number should not be understood literally, i.e. it has the meaning ‘many’.

⁶²⁶ YJJ: 38.

to Daoist longevity techniques, *qi* is the *yang* energy, opposed to the *yin* energy linked to liquid elements, in this case saliva.⁶²⁷ To let gulps of saliva punctuate breathing exercises was common in the Daoist tradition already at the time of Ge Hong (ca. 280 – ca. 343).⁶²⁸ Saliva in the Daoist tradition is *jing* 精 liquid, and *jing* corresponds to the upper and lower fields of the cinnabar field. The upper *jing* is saliva and the lower is semen. The *qi* and *jing* intermingle and creates a union. In the Daoist longevity tradition this would result in the embryo of immortality, or the “child”.⁶²⁹ However, Yan Jun does not mention any ambitions of immortality, nor does he mention “child”. At the beginning of the text he speaks of the “child’s mind” (*chixin* 赤心)⁶³⁰ which is close to “the capacity of the spirit and the Heavenly ordained nature” (*tianxing shenneng* 天性神能), but then the reference is *The Book of Mencius* and not the Daoist tradition. According to Yan Jun, the tradition of seven-day meditation goes back to “the learning of the holy spirits” (*shengshenjiao* 聖神教),⁶³¹ and more explicitly to the *fu* 復 hexagram in *The Book of Changes*. There it is said that ‘repeat’ (*fu*) indicates that on this occasion one should “return and repeat the Way” (*fanfu qi dao* 反復其道). “In seven days comes the return” (*qiri lai fu* 七日來復) and “it will be advantageous in whatever direction you go” (*li you you wang* 利有攸往). Furthermore, it is said that the ancient kings, in accordance with this hexagram, shut the gates (*biguan* 閉關) at the winter solstice, so the merchant and princes could not go out travelling in their duties. Yan Jun anchors his meditation praxis in *The Book of Changes* and the concrete closing of the city gates during the darkest period in the winter. Somehow, “the closing of the gates” (*biguan*), came to have the meaning a life in seclusion (there is no talk of *biguan* in *The Analects*, nor in *The Book of Mencius*), and it is this meaning that is used by Yan Jun. This seven-day meditation would give the practitioner a fruitful situation in whatever direction he goes, that is, whatever enterprise he takes on, he will succeed.

Yan Jun comments that fortunately he never lost his own Heavenly-ordained nature.⁶³² After describing how to let the vital energy flow in the body, Yan Jun continues to speak about the results of the seven-day meditation program:

After they wake up, they are not allowed to talk or laugh. For those who unconditionally have taken part in the seven-day meditation, when the time is

⁶²⁷ Robinet 1997: 106.

⁶²⁸ Robinet 1997: 110.

⁶²⁹ Robinet 1997: 109.

⁶³⁰ YJJ: 37.

⁶³¹ An alternative translation would be “the learning of the spirits and the sages”.

⁶³² YJJ: 37.

ripe, I will lower my voice,⁶³³ saying: “At this time, each of you with this specific spirit, which is correctly called the clear brightness and [which is strictly] personal (gong 躬), will stay upright with a clear and bright mind. You will feel comfortable and with *qi* flowing freely [in the body]. What you obtain from these days of hard work is the essence of the Way and [to be able to] discard the body.”⁶³⁴

The last sentence about discarding the body is a reference to *Zhuangzi*.⁶³⁵ This chapter in *Zhuangzi* describes Confucius and his disciple Yan Hui, and how he bids farewell to knowledge by sitting in forgetfulness. The discussion between Yan Hui and Confucius in the allegory by *Zhuangzi* results in the understanding that Yan Hui is superior to him, and how Confucius becomes his disciple. Ultimately, it is a satire of Confucius. That Yan Jun refers to this text is interesting, showing a distance to the Confucian tradition visible in the writings of Yan Jun. Yan Jun evaluates the “learning of the sages” highly, and has both appraisal and criticism for the “learning of the immortals” (Daoism) as well as for the *Ruists*. Yan Jun continues:

All of you will [inevitably] be as if you have gone through a metamorphosis.⁶³⁶ Already one body with the Way, rejecting discursive thought (*chucong* 黜聰), you will be reborn and attain the highest state of spiritual enlightenment.⁶³⁷

After the program is finished they should continue to practise and consolidate the achievement.

You need to keep practising over and over again; reflecting about yourself and experiencing the spirit;⁶³⁸ silently comprehend your Heavenly-bestowed nature without violating anything or creating disorder for a single moment. You should sleep peacefully for seven days without thinking or pondering as if you are unconscious and without knowledge. After this you must practise for three months without taking yourself lightly, and you should keep to concentration. In this way, silently you keep nourishing yourself. After the seven days [of meditation], you are allowed to stand up, comb your hair, wash yourself, dress

⁶³³ According to Soothill 1975, the expression *miyu* 密語 has the meaning ‘esoteric expression’. It probably does not have this meaning here, only that Yan Jun lowered his voice almost to a whisper. Mantra is usually called *zhenyan* 真言 in Chinese, so I have excluded that explanation.

⁶³⁴ YJJ: 38

⁶³⁵ *Zhuangzi*, “The Great and most honoured master” (From the inner chapters). 黜聰明 in Legge’s translation: “my perceptive organs are discarded”.

⁶³⁶ 換骨脫胎 *huangu tuotai* is an idiom. It originated within the Daoist religion and had the meaning of deliverance of the embryo and transformation of all bones into the bones of an immortal. Later, the meaning changed to “a profound transformation of one’s thinking”. I assume that Yan Jun here did not take it literally in the Daoist sense but in a transferred sense.

⁶³⁷ YJJ: 38. In the Daoist sense it would have been to become an immortal.

⁶³⁸ Literally, “to taste” *ziwei* 滋味 the spirit.

and put your hat on.⁶³⁹ Then you should pay homage to Heaven and Earth, to the Emperor, to your parents, to Confucius and Mencius, and to your Master for giving birth to you, transmitting the tradition to you and teaching you about it. Finally, your life is recreated.⁶⁴⁰

Here, Yan Jun enters a stage where he guides the followers collectively. This is the kernel of the essay. He reveals the aim of the seven-day meditation, which is to create a renewal of a person. Traditionally, Heaven and Earth as well as the parents are supposed to give birth to human beings. The Neo-Confucian thinkers of the Song and Ming dynasties maintained that the Confucian tradition was broken after Mencius, but that the thread was taken up by Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) and other Song Confucians.⁶⁴¹ This was also the idea of the scholars belonging to the Wang Yangming movement. Hence, the tradition, according to them, was transmitted from Confucius via Mencius to the great masters of the Song and Ming dynasties. In the quotation above, Yan Jun probably refers to himself as the master. In this way, Confucius and Mencius as well as Yan Jun himself transmit the tradition, no matter if we call it the Confucian tradition or not and teach the students about its essentials. They are all indirectly and directly instrumental in the renewal of the students' lives, that is, all those taking part in the seven-day meditation program, and who had the expected achievements. However, the effort made by the student himself is crucial. All experiences must be attained through one's own effort. In the word 'renewal' lies successful self-cultivation.

Hereafter, the disciples of Yan Jun will follow and comply [with his teaching] for three months, memorizing and understanding the oral transmission of humaneness and wisdom, expounded in *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. They will create a union of their own mind and nature with all changes [therein]. This is called correcting the mind to become sincere, to know how to investigate things and the sequence of ordering the self and the family. You can obtain these achievements step by step without leaving out any step.⁶⁴² Therefore it is said: "If you succeed in a three-month period, you will reach an enlightenment which make the mind become one with your nature; the experience of the seven-day meditation will completely restore your energy and will forever attach yourself to yourself (*chang li gong* 常麗躬)."⁶⁴³

⁶³⁹ I.e. wear formal clothing.

⁶⁴⁰ YYJ: 38.

⁶⁴¹ Already Han Yu (768–824) claimed that the Confucian tradition was broken after Mencius. In this regard he was a precursor of the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties.

⁶⁴² Reference from *The Book of Changes* 曲成萬物而不遺 in Legge's translation: "by an ever-varying adaptation he completes (the nature of) all things without exception"

⁶⁴³ YJJ 38. It is uncertain who Yan Jun is quoting at the end of this passage. It might be Wang Gen.

After the seven-day meditation it is necessary to receive the learning of the master to consolidate the result for a period of three months. It is like the *lianshen* 煉神 phase of Daoist inner alchemy,⁶⁴⁴ when the adept is moving the inner elixir upwards to the upper cinnabar field located in the brain, where the spirit is located. When the inner elixir enters the upper cinnabar field, it is supposed to refine the spirit and revert the mind to emptiness.⁶⁴⁵

Three months of group discussions will trigger the vital energy within their bodies and their whole life. That is to “cut and file, to chisel and grind” as it is expressed in *The Great Learning*, completely obtaining achievement of reverence and deportment.⁶⁴⁶

Yan Jun again refers to a Confucian classic, in this case *The Great Learning*, which is central to the Taizhou practitioners and the Wang Yangming movement as a whole. In *The Great Learning*, the Prince of Qi is described. He is both elegant and accomplished. It is said that: “As we cut and then file; as we chisel and then grind: so has he [the Prince of Qi] cultivated himself. How grave is he and dignified! How majestic and distinguished! Our elegant and accomplished Prince never can be forgotten.”⁶⁴⁷ *The Great Learning* further tells that “cut and file” means the work of learning, and “chisel and grind” indicates self-cultivation. That he is grave and dignified “indicates the feeling of cautious reverence” and that he is commanding and distinguished “indicates an awe-inspiring deportment”.⁶⁴⁸ Former kings cannot be forgotten, says *The Great Learning* and refers in turn to *The Book of Songs*. This is just one of these numerous references in Yan Jun and other Taizhou scholars’ work to the Confucian classics. They anchored their ideas of meditation and self-cultivation in the Confucian classics, although their concrete practices had a Daoist or Buddhist design. In the following sentence Yan Jun refers to *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which among the Confucian classics was as important as *The Great Learning* for the Taizhou practitioners.

[The ideas of] *The Doctrine of the Mean* is [that the gentleman should] comply with [his nature], regulate [himself] and be watchful over himself when he is alone, and [furthermore] that he should tame [himself to reach the state of] equilibrium and harmony so the happy order [of the world would prevail] and [everything] will be nourished and flourish.⁶⁴⁹

Here, Yan Jun explains lines from *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which is describing the authentic person, the *junzi*, who is attentive to his inner

⁶⁴⁴ Wu 2009a: 276.

⁶⁴⁵ Pregadio 2008: 302.

⁶⁴⁶ YJJ: 38.

⁶⁴⁷ *The Great Learning* 4. Legge’s translation.

⁶⁴⁸ *The Great Learning* 4. Legge’s translation.

⁶⁴⁹ YJJ: 38.

dynamics when he is alone. This is the essence of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, namely the mental state of equilibrium, when there are “no stirrings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy”⁶⁵⁰ of the mind. *The Doctrine of the Mean* further explains:

When those feelings have been stirred, and they act in their due degree, there ensues what may be called the state of harmony. This equilibrium is the great root from which all the human actions in the world grow, and this harmony is the universal path which they all should pursue. Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout Heaven and Earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish.⁶⁵¹

The idea of *The Doctrine of the Mean* is that after the state of equilibrium is attained in stillness, the state of harmony will lie behind every movement and action of the authentic person. Furthermore, when he acts with this kind of harmony, everything in the world will benefit from it. Yan Jun and other Neo-Confucians referred to this passage when they tried to describe a mental state which is transmitted in everyday life, that is, not only during exercises of quiet meditation. In this way they developed a philosophy around the two antonyms stillness and movement, where they tried to attain stillness in movement, that is an unconditioned state while acting and in everyday life. Yan Jun continues:

If we come together and send out friends who have joined us, we will become a wind which moves the whole country. It is correct to say that, when you know how to act and how to rest on the mound, it is extremely easy to go out in the world [propagating the learning of the Way].⁶⁵²

To rest on the mound is a reference to *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which in turn refers to a line in *The Book of Songs*: “The twittering yellow bird rests on a corner of the mound.”⁶⁵³ *The Doctrine of the Mean* is quoting Confucius saying: “When it rests, it knows where to rest. Is it possible that a man should not be equal to this bird?”⁶⁵⁴ The corner of the mound has thus become a metaphor for the place where one can rest – which could be a place in the mind or a physical place for meditation – and the bird a metaphor for the man deeply involved in self-cultivation. The final part of what is left of Yan Jun’s text reads:

Below, I will begin to explain step by step the program of practices for daily life in eight sections, so the great achievement of seven-days seclusion will easily be consolidated forever. One might say that if you first have understood

⁶⁵⁰ *The Doctrine of the Mean* 1. Legge’s translation.

⁶⁵¹ *The Doctrine of the Mean* 1. Legge’s translation.

⁶⁵² YJJ: 38.

⁶⁵³ *The Book of Songs*, Mian Man 2.

⁶⁵⁴ *The Great Learning* 7.

it, you will easily keep its capacity; if you later become stupid [the capacity] is difficult to remove! How is it possible to question this achievement which will absolutely change the [current] chaotic state of the world within three years!⁶⁵⁵

The breathing exercises described in the previous section, which have strong similarities with Daoist praxis, are linked here to the Confucian classics *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Yan Jun makes a close connection between the mental state achieved through the practice of seven-day meditation, and the possibility to change the world. For him, the meditation program, and the mental state it results in, is a prerequisite for the later social and teaching activism. However, the meditation technique, which is basically Daoist, is still only a skillful means to reach the goal. For Yan Jun it is described in the classical texts: texts regarded as belonging first of all to the Confucian tradition. Here, they are not used by Yan Jun to strengthening the Confucian discourse but to create a transformation of the individual and the society. With knowledge of the program for meditation, self-cultivation and self-transformation, it is possible to extend its result to others and transform the whole world. To do that, it is necessary to have a suitable organization.⁶⁵⁶

Organization

How did the Taizhou practitioners build up their organization or organizations? They relied on different types of organizations, like private academies (*shuyuan* 書院)⁶⁵⁷ community compacts (*xiangyue* 鄉約), clan or lineage organizations (*zonghui* 宗會 / *zonghehui* 宗和會) and guild-halls (*huiguan* 會館), and they possibly used community schools (*shexue* 舍學) as well to spread their message.⁶⁵⁸

Wang Gen was active in the forming of the Taizhou community compact, but it was not until he died that a clan society was established under the leadership of his second son Wang Bi. Whether the members of this society were the same as his disciples is not clear from the sources, nor do we know if only relatives were allowed as members or if neighbours and friends participated. After this, organizational activities became strong in Jiangxi. Nothing proves that the organization consisted of an overarching structure with cells under it. It appears there were several centres of reforms and

⁶⁵⁵ YJJ: 38. The following eight sections are missing.

⁶⁵⁶ Luo Hongxian is said to have reached “a stage of awakening after meditating for ten days”, See Liu 1970: 315.

⁶⁵⁷ Meskill 1982: *passim*.

⁶⁵⁸ Schneewind 2006: *passim*.

activities that mushroomed at different places. In Jiangxi, Yan Jun established a “A society for coming together in harmony”. Not long afterwards He Xinyin also set up a society with a similar name; “The hall for collective harmony”.

He Xinyin also established a guild-hall when he arrived at Beijing. This was a hostel established by prefectures of provinces for their officials and candidates coming to the capital for duties or to take part in the metropolitan examinations. He Xinyin’s guild-hall, however, seems to have been quite different. People came from everywhere and from all walks of life attracted by He’s lectures.⁶⁵⁹ He Xinyin was apparently a very dynamic person taking every chance to engage in teaching.

The private academy and the community compact were organizations with deep roots in Chinese history. The private academies were used by Zhu Xi and other Song scholars, and the community compact system went back to the Song dynasty as well. In the private academies, scholars discussed the learning of the Way (*Daoxue* 道學). The community compact was a type of organization at the village level meant to improve social relations among neighbours.⁶⁶⁰ The community compact was combined with the *baojia* system by Wang Yangming,⁶⁶¹ a system that was used at the beginning of the Ming dynasty for security reasons. Ten families were grouped together for mutual surveillance. If one member of the ten families discovered anything suspicious they should report it to the officials; if they did not report crimes, all the ten household would be considered guilty.⁶⁶² Wang Yangming’s community compact honored *The Six Maxims* by the Ming founder Ming Taizu. *The Six Maxims* were moral precepts, including to be filial to one’s parents and respectful to elders; to live in harmony with neighbours and admonishing the young; and to be satisfied with one’s occupation and not commit any crimes. These Six Maxims were also honored in the compacts of the Taizhou practitioners Yan Jun and Luo Rufang.

The academies

Compared with the community compact groups, the purpose of the private academies was to pursue a scholarly debate on Neo-Confucian philosophy. According to Miaw-fen Lu, the academies of Wang Yangming were elite organizations; she argues that the central issues were philosophical discussion and moral practice.⁶⁶³ However, among the Taizhou practitioners, members

⁶⁵⁹ Dimberg 1974: 47–48.

⁶⁶⁰ Community compact is sometimes called ‘community covenant’ in the academic literature.

⁶⁶¹ Littrup 1981: 161.

⁶⁶² Littrup 1981: 160.

⁶⁶³ Lu 1997: 127–129.

with very humble origin also participated in the learning discussions (*jianghui* 講會). Well-known examples are the potter Han Zhen 韓貞 (1509–1585) and the woodcutter Zhu Shu 朱恕 (dates unknown). Han Zhen was first a disciple of Zhu Shu and later he became the disciple of Wang Gen’s second son, Wang Bi. Both Han and Zhu have been used to illustrate the example of the commoner in the ranks of the Taizhou practitioners. Han came from a poor family who made pottery. Huang Zongxi describes his teaching activities thus:

He instructed peasants, artisans, and merchants, and those who followed him were over one thousand. In the autumn when there was less to do, he gathered the followers to discuss the [Taizhou] learning. He went from village to village, singing first and then [the others] responded. The sound of music and recitation (*song* 誦) filled the countryside.⁶⁶⁴

The importance of song and music within the Taizhou movement is emphasized and shows that the discussion meetings were not only theoretical in nature but also strongly emotional. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the Taizhou practitioners used the academies as empty vessels to fill them with their ideas and activities. However, nothing proves that the discussions in the academies before the time of the Taizhou movement were exclusively theoretical and intellectual either.

The community compact

Community compacts (*xiangyue* 鄉約) were organizations established by officials in their counties to improve morality and settle conflicts at the village level. Kandice Hauf defines it as “sub-county organization, stressing the harmonizing of social relations, resolution of disputes, moral education, and mutual aid”.⁶⁶⁵ She argues that *xiang*, usually referring to one’s home area, was “the largest territorial unit into which the county was divided” but that it did not specify the spatial extent, number of people or number of households.⁶⁶⁶ The compact meetings included singing, reading of moral commandments and self-criticism of moral faults.⁶⁶⁷

According to Wang Gen’s *Chronological Biography*, Wang Gen wrote regulations for the community compact in Taizhou on behalf of the censor

⁶⁶⁴ MRXA: 720.

⁶⁶⁵ Hauf 1996: 1. Hauf has made a close study of community compacts in Ji’an Prefecture, Jiangxi Province.

⁶⁶⁶ Hauf 1996: 14. Hauf estimates 5,000 to 10,000+ fiscal households (*hu*) or 20,000 to 40,000+ people per *xiang*, which means she estimates that an average household had only four family members. This must be an underestimation.

⁶⁶⁷ Cheng 1996: 84.

Hong Yuan in 1536, the man who had the Dongtao retreat built.⁶⁶⁸ The community compact might have existed in Taizhou before this occasion, and Wang Gen was asked to improve an already existing organization. The organizations of the Wang Yangming movement were less formalized in style compared with the kinship organization of ChengZhu Confucianism, which emphasized seniority and hierarchy in seating and procedures. The community compact of the Taizhou movement was even less formalized. In contrast to the community compact of Wang Yangming, bad and good deeds, for instance, were not registered in the records of Luo Rufang's community compact.⁶⁶⁹ Thus there is a development towards a freer style, including fewer strict regulations and fewer hierarchial procedures from Zhu Xi over Wang Yangming to the Taizhou organization. It is however uncertain whether Zhu Xi's community compact regulations were ever implemented.

The community compact meetings of Luo Rufang focused on inspiring people to do good deeds, instead of criticizing them for bad behaviour.⁶⁷⁰ As mentioned above, the learning discussions meetings within the Taizhou network were not exclusively for the literati scholars but also included commoners. The demarcation line between meetings in the academies and the community compact was not distinct. Whether it became blurred with the Taizhou movement or was already indistinct from the outset is difficult to say.

Luo Rufang made use of lecture meetings and community compacts in his governing. Yu-yin Cheng has studied the community compacts and gives much space to them in her PhD thesis on Taizhou Confucianism. Therefore, there is no need to go deeper into the social history of the community compact here, but it is still interesting to mention why they were used and how the community compacts of the Taizhou practitioners differed from earlier community compacts. For the history of the compacts below, I rely on Cheng's thesis. The earliest community compact association is traced back to the Northern Song period, 1077 to be exact. The purpose of the early community compacts meetings was to promote virtue and proper behaviour. The members should encourage each other to act virtuously; they should correct each other's mistakes and moral lapses; they should behave in accordance with rules of decorum and customs; and finally, they should aid those who suffered from illnesses and calamities. Good deeds and wrongdoing should be recorded in registers kept by the heads of the community compacts. Zhu Xi added elaborate rules of ritual regarding distinctions of rank and seniority in his recommendations for the compact meetings, and he also added discussions of the classics. However, it seems as if his writings on compact meetings were never put into practice. The earlier compact meetings (Song dynasty) were held in village school buildings. Wang Yangming, who had a

⁶⁶⁸ XZW, Juan 2: 30b.

⁶⁶⁹ Cheng 1996: 300–301.

⁶⁷⁰ Cheng 1996: 84.

much more religious approach changed the place of the meetings to Buddhist and Daoist temples and required the participants to kneel in front of the deities and take vows. This could be compared to Zhu Xi, who explicitly forbade community members to talk about spiritual beings. It is of further interest that Wang Yangming required the community members to perform public self-criticism at monthly meetings.⁶⁷¹

The community compact organized by Luo Rufang was quite different. Beside the community head, other members took active part in arranging twice-monthly assemblies and lectures. Tutors at the community school led the students in singing poems at the meetings. These members were called *tongzhi* (同志 lit. ‘the same will’), a word that in modern Chinese was later used as a translation of the Western word “comrade”. As in the case of Wang Yangming’s meetings, Luo’s meetings were held in Buddhist shrines or Daoist temples, but he disliked the legalist way of public praise and condemnation. Luo had himself had bad experience of recording good and bad deeds. At the age of 19, he had kept a “Daily record of subduing oneself” (*keji rilu* 克己日錄). This was a part of his efforts in self-cultivation, but it resulted in a severe illness. After this, Luo burned his ledger of merits and demerits.⁶⁷²

He Xinyin took the community compact even further in this direction. He formed a new type of organization located in a “Collective Harmony Hall”. His organization was a sort of a utopian community, regulating clan life in detail, like rituals of capping, marriage and funerals. The organization collected taxes, ran public schools and took care of the aged.⁶⁷³ He Xinyin organized the clansmen to collect taxes. Instead of being paid by each household, the taxes were commonly paid to the local official by the clan. He Xinyin was also concerned with educating the children within the clan at a place far from their homes, to make affection reach beyond the family. The Collective Harmony Hall was mainly used for this educational purpose.⁶⁷⁴ He Xinyin has a rather negative view of the family, which at first seems contradictory since he held *The Great Learning* in high regard. As discussed in Chapter 4, an important idea in *The Great Learning* is that the mind must be regulated first, and then the family, the country and the cosmos can be regulated. The family in *The Great Learning* is not a kernel family but an extended family. It is probably a whole clan that this text refers to. Still, in my view He Xinyin’s idea about the family comes closer to that of Mo Zi (470? – 391? BC), who is talking of undifferentiated or universal love (*jian’ai* 兼愛), and he points in the direction of the Confucian Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858 – 1927), who in his *Book of Great Unity* (*Datong Shu* 大同書) advocated the

⁶⁷¹ Cheng 1996: 296–307.

⁶⁷² Cheng 1996: 323.

⁶⁷³ He Xinyin’s criticism of private ownership of land has made him a favorite among Marxist scholars such as Ji Wenfu 嵇文甫 (1895 – 1963) and Hou Wailu 侯外庐 (1903–1987).

⁶⁷⁴ HXYJ: 70–72.

idea of abolishing all kind of borders, such as borders between sexes, nations and races. In Kang's utopia, the ambition of abolishing the family and replacing it with state-run institutions for raising the children is expressed.⁶⁷⁵ It is not surprising that He Xinyin's attempts to create an egalitarian community met resistance, nor is it surprising that the communists have been interested in his project either.

Yan Jun's ideas about the community compact

That Yan Jun and Luo Rufang traveled together in the twelfth month of the *jiachen* year (mid-December 1544 – mid-January 1545) is mentioned in an important text about the community compact, which Yan Jun wrote in 1545. It has the title “Yan Jun's compact of friends in Yangzhou”.⁶⁷⁶ It is therefore very likely that Yan Jun and Luo Rufang discussed the community compact. In “Yan Jun's compact of friends in Yangzhou” (*Yangcheng tongzhi huiyue* 陽城同志會約) he strongly advocates this kind of organization. Yan Jun says about Luo Rufang and himself that:

We stayed at Hanjiang Academy,⁶⁷⁷ and participated in a meeting for ten days, where we discussed orthodox learning intensively, stubbornly [holding to the] Way of the mean (*zhongdao* 中道).⁶⁷⁸ Among the local scholars of Yangzhou, those who doubted it and those who had been convinced were fifty-fifty. There was a student, Yin, who had consulted me three times. We were in full discussion⁶⁷⁹ for two nights, and then he suddenly became vividly happy. The day after our workshop, Yin packed [his belongings] in haste, and conducted a ceremony to pay his respect to me as his master.⁶⁸⁰ After that he accompanied me at the Taodong Retreat for over one month.⁶⁸¹ Day and night, with self-encouragement he made progress in such a short term, and understood the principles implied in *The Great Learning* very quickly. He is exactly the right person to work with. Later he left me for his home, where his main task would be to support and serve his parents. I also left Yangzhou and kept travelling and went back for another meeting in the eighth lunar month at the Tianning temple.⁶⁸² Two months later, scholars from Shuzhou, Tongzhou, together with

⁶⁷⁵ Kang 1959: *passim*.

⁶⁷⁶ YJJ: 29–31.

⁶⁷⁷ Located in Yangzhou.

⁶⁷⁸ *Mencius* “Jin Xin 1”:41 and “Jin Xin 2”:83.

⁶⁷⁹ Or “penetrating the questions thoroughly in discussions”.

⁶⁸⁰ During such ceremonies the Master faced south and the disciple north, hence the expression *beimian li* 北面禮, “facing north ceremony”.

⁶⁸¹ The Taodong Retreat was the place where the community compact meetings of Wang Gen took place. See XZW, Juan 2: 30b.

⁶⁸² This temple was located at Changzhou. In the Ming it would take approximately one week to travel between Yangzhou and Changzhou by boat. (And two weeks from Jiangxi to Yangzhou or Taizhou)

natives assembled in Yangzhou, with even more good people from Shanxi, Shaanxi, Jiangsu and Zhejiang! This was definitely a good opportunity to learn to know friends. As the winter solstice was approaching, I wanted to cross the [Yangzi] river to go south. Several students asked if they could continue with the meetings after I left, so the community decided there would be a meeting on the fifth of every month. [During the meetings] they would stay and eat on site, encouraging and teaching those ignorant of our learning, and guiding students to new achievements.⁶⁸³

So far in the text, this could be a description of the activities in a private academy, but the text also stresses agreement. Scholars travelled far to participate in the meetings at the academies. The very point of his text is to emphasize the fruitful combination of agreement and meeting in the compact organization. Yan Jun gives the motivation for it thus: “to consolidate the wills to sustain our pure alliance [in order to] perpetuate our learning and assimilate new people. This is a humane strategy of uniting everything and everyone in one body”.⁶⁸⁴ After declaring this, Yan took a brush and wrote down the agreement in a piece of calligraphy. It begins:

Agreements are crucial for meetings, and it is essential to have a meeting after signing an agreement. Why is it essential? Confucius said: “The cautious seldom err.”⁶⁸⁵ Why are agreements crucial? *The Book of Changes* says: “Joining in the meeting of excellences, he [the authentic person] is fit to show in himself the union of all propriety.”⁶⁸⁶ Propriety means restraining [oneself], that is, regulations of learning. Meetings are the great purpose of the world. Thus [the character of agreement] *yue* 约 obtains its meaning from [its component parts] *ji* 系 (to tie up or fasten) and *shao* 勺 (spoon). The dot in the middle of [the character] *shao* represents the essence of *yang*.⁶⁸⁷ This essence within the *shao* is like a true thing grasped within the palm of the hand. When *ji* is added to it, it is like tightening the fist, [making it] unlikely that it loses or releases [what it grips]. For this reason, it is called a ‘compact’. [The character of] propriety derives its meaning from [its components parts] *li* 豊 sacrificial vessels and *yi* 衣 cloths; “sacrificial vessels”. It refers to full form, and “cloths” to be extravagantly dressed, a metaphor for people embodying [the Way] deep in their mind, and that they are totally faithful.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸³ YJJ: 29–30.

⁶⁸⁴ YJJ: 30.

⁶⁸⁵ *The Analects* “Li Ren”: 23. Legge’s translation. Yan Jun might understand *The Analects* in a different way. 约 both have the meaning ‘agreement’ and ‘to be restrained’, ‘economical’. Yan Jun might have understood the quotation from *The Analects* as: “Those who have made an agreement seldom err.”

⁶⁸⁶ Legge’s translation. The text describes Qian 乾 and the Way of the *Junzi*, the authentic person.

⁶⁸⁷ Yang has a general meaning of truth.

⁶⁸⁸ YJJ: 30.

Although the explanation of the character *yue* is folkloristic, it gives us a clear picture of Yan Jun's idea behind the compact and its importance for the Taizhou movement. The compact helps the Taizhou practitioners to hold fast to the essence and keep it, argues Yan Jun. This essence is related to the dynamic active force *yang*, so thanks to the compact they will be a strong force. Was this idea of the spoon, and the essence in it, related to the spoons depicted in the sketch of religious objects in *The Complete Works by Wang Xinzhai* (*Chongjuan Xinzhai Wang Xiansheng QuANJI*, 重鑄心齋王先生全集)? (See Figure 11.) Did they have a ritual with drinking wine using a spoon, and linking it to the idea of the essence of *yang* force? Yan's explanation of the character "propriety" or "ritual" links it to sacrificial vessel and cloths, other objects from the sketch of ritual objects. There are several sacrificial vessels depicted beside the spoons in Figure 11. Yan Jun relates the sacrificial vessel to full form and the cloths to be extravagantly dressed, both symbolizing "to embody the Way deep in the mind" and "to be loyal". Was this an idea in relation to the drinking ceremony? And did Wang Gen have this in his mind, when he gave his sons names that all consisted of the radical part "cloths"? It is impossible to come to any conclusion for the time being, but of course the ideas behind those objects had deep symbolic significance. In this text on the community compact, Yan Jun argues that the compact makes people attentive, and through the compact the mind of people will be regulated and loyal. Yan believed that all people have the same nature, in the same vein as Wang Yangming and Wang Gen had argued before. The only difference between the sage and the commoner is that the commoner loses his essence. Yan continues:

The vast and flowing *qi* fills [mind] and is manifested in their sight, hearing, speech and movements; there is a mild harmony in the countenance and a rich fullness in the back, therefore it is called "propriety".

"Rich fullness in the back" refers to a saying by Mencius where he discusses the authentic person, the *junzi*, who by his nature follows that which conforms to benevolence, righteousness, propriety and knowledge.⁶⁸⁹ This is rooted in his heart and in his mind. It became a part of his body, and of his bodily posture. Yan has more to say about propriety:

This propriety is the mandate of Heaven, it is developed by the mind. The little dot in [the character of] the spoon emerges and develops spontaneously. Everyone has it. Why could only a few people conform to it (i.e. propriety), yet many lose it? The authentic person says:⁶⁹⁰ "[That people tried] to reach the

⁶⁸⁹ *Mencius*, "Li lou 1".

⁶⁹⁰ This might refer to the teacher of Yan Jun, that is, Xu Yue, or to Wang Gen.

Way⁶⁹¹ without learning, and to clarify learning without meetings, was the reason why the sages established learning on the basis of mind, and organized meetings on the basis of learning”. The meeting just aims to accomplish learning, and [in order to achieve] learning it is necessary to organize meetings. This compact makes the mind attentive, and [makes it] pay attention to propriety. When [the agreement] in the compact is accepted, the mind will be regulated, and when there is attention of propriety a [fruitful] meeting will materialize. The compact combine virtuous men with excellent meeting. When every attendee does not err at all in every action, he will master the essential implied in *The Great Learning*, then you have grasped the fortune; our alliance of friends will stay eternally loyal. “Therefore, the union of people in the remote parts of the country” will from this moment overflow the world forever.⁶⁹² Therefore, it is said: “The person who is authentic, does not merely fulfill his own self-realization. With his authenticity he makes others become authentic.”⁶⁹³ How could establishing a compact be a small matter?⁶⁹⁴

The meetings were organized to facilitate learning and make the learning accomplished. Furthermore, these activities would make the Taizhou practitioners stronger and help them to spread their ideas. The agreement in the compact organization together with these activities was supposed to create a new moral order. Yan Jun was obviously conscious of the social force in organizing meetings, and through the agreement they were able to consolidate this force.

Yan Jun describes the relation between the individual and other people, and not only other people but the whole world, saying:

Human beings grow between Heaven and Earth and their bodies are rooted in the grand fundament [i.e. the Way]. This is called the self. This self is hidden in the mind, and the mind holds spirit. With spirit, sight and hearing will become bright and sharp. With spirit, speech and actions will be trustworthy and respectful. With spirit, supporting and serving parents will be of filial piety; with spirit, obedience of one’s elder brother will be manifested in younger brothers; with spirit in daily affairs, there will be sincerity. When affairs change [the person] does not dare to do as he pleases⁶⁹⁵ and deceive others. In this way, he will not be unsatisfied [about his progress in self-cultivation]. Therefore, it is said: “To accomplish oneself is the richest fruit.” “When the self is accomplished” means to establish the self, [and when] the self selects a position [in society], it will come closer to people and things, and become one [body] with them, so that all “individual selves” will be connected to the totality.⁶⁹⁶ As

⁶⁹¹ The “Way” or “accomplishment” meant in Neo-Confucianism in general “To accomplish the highest moral based on proper understanding of principles of nature”.

⁶⁹² Reference to *The Book of Changes*.

⁶⁹³ *The Doctrine of the Mean*: 26. In Legge’s translation: “The possessor of sincerity does not merely accomplish the self-completion of himself. With this quality he completes other men and things also”.

⁶⁹⁴ YJJ: 30.

⁶⁹⁵ To be self-indulgent.

⁶⁹⁶ Or to the organism. It might even be understood as the organization.

a result [the accomplished person] will exhaust his spirit in encouraging and guidance, constraining the vitality in humaneness, righteousness, ritual and music. By necessity he will give peace to the aged and treat the young tenderly and be honest with friends.⁶⁹⁷ Then it is called: “the fruit of accomplishing others and other things.”⁶⁹⁸

The accomplished or authentic person forms one body with everyone and everything. This is in the organizational as well as the metaphysical aspect. He emphasizes the difference between doing something with spirit and doing it without spirit, that is, to be mindful when doing things, and to do things with reverence. Yan Jun does not mention the seven-day meditation yet, but it obviously forms the basis for later social activities:

From now on, when you have trust, many of you [scholars] will be determined. You must gather every month for meetings to devote yourself. Then everyone will possess the piety for parents and respect for elder brothers in the same way as [the sages] Yao and Shun;⁶⁹⁹ the humane Way of Confucius and Mencius will penetrate all minds of the world, the city of Yangzhou will be like the [ancient] states of Tang, Yu, Zou, and Lu,⁷⁰⁰ which eventually became the place of the enlightened men Dong Zhongshu, Wu Yubi and Chen Xianzhang.⁷⁰¹ Finally, it will not fail the expectations of my spiritual master (*xinweng* 心翁) [Wang Gen], who was born nearby. This is the reason why extraordinary people boldly go out in the world,⁷⁰² and without worrying about the result of their inspirational work, just keep to [the principle of] of practising by themselves from the beginning to the end.⁷⁰³

Yan Jun bequeathed the document in 1545 on the day of the summer solstice.⁷⁰⁴ Then the friends from Yangzhou drank each other's toast in the typical ceremony of the community compact. There were singing, and dancing accompanied by music. Finally, he makes the connection between the meditation retreat and the compact meeting: “The purpose of the meditation retreat and the compact meeting is to return and report to us old friends about coordinating the wills to undertake the establishment [of the compact], and when you invite us you will succeed.”⁷⁰⁵ For Yan, the scholarly distinction

⁶⁹⁷ *The Analects* “Gong Ye Chang”: 26.

⁶⁹⁸ YJJ: 30.

⁶⁹⁹ I.e. everyone has the capacity to become a sage.

⁷⁰⁰ These were the states of the ancient sages Yao, Shun, and Yu as well as Confucius, who came from the state of Lu.

⁷⁰¹ Dong Zhongshu 陳獻章 (179–104 BC), Wu Yubi 吳與弼 (1397–1469) and Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500).

⁷⁰² Chushi 出世 ‘to go out in the world’, can also have the meaning ‘to be born’ and ‘to serve government’. Here Yan Jun’s idea is most likely to engage in education and extend one’s innate knowledge of the good to other people, that is, to preach the learning of the mind to enlighten others.

⁷⁰³ YJJ: 30–31.

⁷⁰⁴ They probably chose the day of the summer solstice for such an important event.

⁷⁰⁵ YJJ: 31.

between the community compact and the private academy was probably totally irrelevant. His ambition was to reach everyone and everything under Heaven.

This text clearly shows that for Yan Jun the individual practice of meditation and the social activities were not contradictory. Meditation could be practiced intensively in a communal setting as in the seven-day meditation retreat, but it was also supposed to be practiced alone. The communal meditation and the compact meetings were organized to give the practitioners training and to inspire them to make further efforts. Wang Gen had argued that it was important not to remain in seclusion but to pass on the knowledge found in stillness to others. One assumption might be that Wang Gen gave up meditation later in life to engage in social activities instead, but nothing in the primary sources support this conclusion. In Chapter 4, it has been shown that it was important for Wang Gen to protect and secure the self. To secure the self was furthermore linked to the peaceful mind. If the self and the life of oneself was not secured, the mind could not be at peace, in the view of Wang Gen. He was talking about “the Way of combining the inner with the outer”.⁷⁰⁶ Therefore, a fundamental change of society was necessary to support the strivings for the desired state of mind.

Conclusion

The praxis of the Taizhou movement included music, song, recitation and meditation. The Taizhou practitioners met on regular occasions at various places such as family shrines, private academies and guild-halls. The meetings seem to have been highly emotional with discussions on ethical questions. The sessions did not only include lectures by charismatic leaders, but also open discussions in which everyone could take part. The songs they sang were most probably shorter edifying songs written by Wang Gen and other Taizhou leaders, but possibly also traditional songs even as old as from *The Book of Songs*. The singing was accompanied by musical instruments such as drums, bells and sounding stones. The text recited were, for instance, *The Six Maxims* by the first Ming Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, whose aim was to improve morality on the local level. Meetings ended with toasting.

Sometimes the Taizhou practitioners stayed for longer retreats as the seven-day seclusion led by Yan Jun indicates. This meditation retreat was performed communally and had strong Daoist traits. Meditation could also be

⁷⁰⁶ *He nei wai zhi dao* 合内外之道. XZW, “Mian Ren Fang”, Juan 3: 36a. His whole argumentation is: “To accomplish oneself is humaness, and to accomplish other (or other things) is wisdom. The virtue of one’s nature is the Way of combining the inner with the outer.”

performed individually. The aims of meditation in general were to make the individual determined both to improve morality and to reach enlightenment.

The local organizations were based on contracts that were signed by those who were committed. The aims of the contract were like meditation and the edifying songs of ethical art, but also to strengthen the organization. The contracts would make the Taizhou practitioners more attentive, determined and loyal. Therefore, it is possible to say that religious praxis and organization stayed in a mutually supporting relationship. Although, there is nothing to prove that the different organization of Wang Gen's family, Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Luo Rufang were united on an organizational level, the aim was to unite everyone in one body – at least in Yan Jun's opinion.

7. Secular or sacred?

This chapter will discuss the Taizhou movement regarding whether it can be considered a religion or not. First, I will present a discussion among Chinese scholars about the character of Neo-Confucianism as switching between a religious and a philosophical mode. In relation to this, I will discuss whether the ideas, praxis and organization of those Taizhou practitioners I have studied had a secular or religious character.⁷⁰⁷ Secondly, I will discuss the Taizhou movement from the perspective of two different kinds of definitions of religion, formulated by contemporary Western scholars of religion, in order to further problematize the question whether the Taizhou movement can be seen as a religious movement or not.

The question of “religionization”

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, there has been a discussion whether Confucianism should be defined as a religion or as a philosophy. This discussion has, during the last decades, given way to a more dynamic approach, with scholars arguing that Confucianism switches between a religious and a philosophical pole over time depending on the historical and societal situation in which it has operated. Chinese scholarship uses the terms “philosophication” (*zhexuehua* 哲學化) and “religionization” (*zongjiaohua* 宗教化) to describe this dynamism. The term “religionization” has elsewhere been applied to political systems, using vital elements from religious traditions.⁷⁰⁸ The Taiwanese scholar, Wang Fan-sen, is one of those scholars talking about Confucianism as switching between a philosophical and a religious pole. He argues that Confucianism underwent a “philosophication” when the School of Principle became dominant in the Song dynasty. In late Ming and at the beginning of Qing, the opposite happened, that is, a “religionization” of Confucianism. This became especially obvious under the

⁷⁰⁷ The concept of secular is used here as an etic term referring to worldly aspects. I will not define this word here nor the concept of secularization.

⁷⁰⁸ Sam S. Souryal, for instance, describes Saudi Arabian society and their application of Shariah law as “religionization”. See Souryal 1987: *passim*.

influence of Xu Sanli 許三禮 (1625–1691),⁷⁰⁹ who developed a learning of “worshipping Heaven” (*Gaotian zhi xue* 告天之學). His intention was to shape Confucianism into a religion (*jiao* 教) like Buddhism and Daoism.⁷¹⁰ Similarly, the mainland scholar Wu Zhen, argues that several Confucians in late Ming and early Qing “went from “ethics” to “religion”.”⁷¹¹ The Confucians he is discussing all talked about fearing, serving and respecting Heaven.⁷¹² According to Wu Zhen, the concept of God (*Shangdi* 上帝) was central in their discourse.⁷¹³ Wu Zhen assume that their attempt to institutionalize a Confucian religion (*kongjiao* 孔教) or a Ruist religion (*rujiao* 儒教) was influenced by Catholicism. However, this was later than those Taizhou practitioners I have studied were active. They never mentioned Christian missionaries,⁷¹⁴ and would belong to an earlier ethical period when there was a “movement for moral improvement” (*daode quanshan yundong* 道德勸善運動), according to Wu.⁷¹⁵ Neither Wang Fan-sen nor Wu Zhen define religion, but an underlying assumption seems to be that religion is regarded as “a belief in god or gods”, or in the Chinese setting; “worshipping Heaven” (*gaotian* 告天). Using modern and more elaborate definitions consisting of several aspects of religion would make it difficult to maintain such a standpoint.

In twentieth century scholarship, Confucianism was in general dealt with as a philosophical tradition. The emphasis was placed on Confucianism as political philosophy or moral philosophy, two aspects that are related to each other.⁷¹⁶ Since Confucianism has been linked to a certain social layer in Chinese society, namely the literati, it has recently become common to study Confucianism within the field of social history. Yü Ying-Shih is a leading American-Chinese Scholar in this field. He argues that Chinese society was never as “religionized” as European society. The reason, according to Yü, is that Christianity had a very strong position in European society, while in Chinese society the Confucian tradition was balanced by Daoism and Buddhism. None of these traditions held a total hegemony. Therefore there was never a situation of a non-religious or totally religious governing of Chinese society. The implication, according to Yü, is that there was not a

⁷⁰⁹ *Jinshi* 1661.

⁷¹⁰ Wang 2004: *passim*.

⁷¹¹ Wu 2009b: 158.

⁷¹² Those were Wen Xiangfeng 文翔鳳 (d. 1642), Wang Qiyuan 王啓元 (b. ca 1559) and Xie Wenjian 謝文淳 (1616–1682) and Wei Yijie 魏裔介 (1616–1686).

⁷¹³ Wu 2009b: 157.

⁷¹⁴ Li Zhi, however, met Matteo Ricci (1551–1610), and expressed doubts about his intentions. See Fontana 2011: 159.

⁷¹⁵ Wu 2009b: 156.

⁷¹⁶ A good example of the former is Fung Yu-Lan’s *A History of Chinese Philosophy* from 1973, and of the latter Hsiao Kung-chuan’s *A History of Chinese Political Thought* from 1979.

secularization process either, as was the case in Europe.⁷¹⁷ Yü's view of religion and religiousness seems to originate in his understanding of the Buddhist tradition. What makes Buddhism religious in this view is its wish to leave the world, that is, its soteriology. This is also found in the Daoist tradition, but not in the Confucian tradition, the latter clearly being interested in this-worldly affairs rather than other-worldly, claims Yü. This way of drawing a demarcation line between Confucianism and Buddhism is very common among Chinese scholars. For example, we see this view represented in the discussions by the influential scholars Wing-Tsit Chan and Fung Yü-lan. The watershed between Buddhism and Confucianism, Neo-Confucian thinkers included, is that the meditation exercises and self-cultivation in Confucianism are practised within the society, the family, and amidst the social relations and responsibilities, in contrast to the Buddhist monks, who leave their families and strive to leave the world and its "sorrowful sea of life and death".⁷¹⁸

The real situation, however, is much more complicated. For example, according to the Buddhist leader Hanshan, who lived in the sixteenth century, there is a this-worldliness in Buddhism realized in the Bodhisattva ideal. To become a Bodhisattva, the monk must learn secular skills such as governmental administration, medicine, literature and so on. The Bodhisattva lives in the world but has the freedom to leave it and enter the realms of the gods for the salvation of others.⁷¹⁹ If we look from the other side, that is, from Confucianism, Li Zhi claimed that the Confucians also wanted to leave the world.⁷²⁰

A scholar who recognizes that the division between Buddhism and Confucianism is difficult to draw is Chen Lai. From a philosophical perspective, he discusses the concepts of 'non-being' (*wu* 無) and 'being' (*you* 有). Usually, Buddhism and Daoism are regarded as having the concept of non-being as their basis. The implications of this idea are that the state of mind strived for would be characterized by emptiness and the behaviour of non-action (*wu-wei* 無為). Confucianism would have the opposite characteristics. Chen Lai shows that it is impossible to draw such demarcation lines between Confucianism on the one hand and Buddhism and Daoism on the other.⁷²¹

In the view of Yü Ying-Shih, Yan Jun is a religious figure. Yü even argues that Yan Jun is not a philosopher or a thinker, since he does not develop the thoughts of Wang Yangming and, accordingly, does not fit into Huang Zongxi's work *The Record of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*.⁷²² He does not, however, claim that Yan Jun does not fit into Huang's work because he

⁷¹⁷ Yü 2002 (2009): *passim*.

⁷¹⁸ WYMQJ: 106.

⁷¹⁹ Hsu 1979: 153.

⁷²⁰ Billeter 1979: 208.

⁷²¹ Chen 2006: 4.

⁷²² Yü 2002 (2009): 558.

was not a Confucian. Yan Jun harboured a mission to save the world, expressed in his appeal “Urgently save the burning mind”. This salvation tendency that had been prevalent in Confucianism before Yan Jun was basically secular, according to Yü, although there was “a religious element that was hidden behind”.⁷²³ Yü does not define secular, but recognizes that in the Confucian tradition there is a salvation tendency since there is a general idea that “the clear Way will save the world” (*mingdao jiushi* 明道救世); however, this saving of the world is secular (*sushide* 俗世的) according to Yü. As mentioned above, he probably regards the Confucian strivings as secular because they do not strive to leave the world as the Buddhists do. However, he obviously regards Yan Jun as a Confucian, but a religious one. Yü Ying-shih mentions that Yan Jun’s mission to save the world was linked to the experience he gained through his meditation practice lasting for seven days, an experience which he regards as ‘religious’ (*zongjiao de jingyan* 宗教的經驗). In this way Yü dichotomizes ‘religion’ and ‘philosophy’. However in my opinion, the religiousness if the Taizhou practitioner I have studied had only changed character compared with earlier Neo-Confucians. The Taizhou practitioners were more charismatic and appealed to people’s emotions. According to Yü, their meditation practice had its forerunner in the practice of Wang Yangming, and it was also the same kind of meditation as the School of Principle practised.⁷²⁴ Regrettably, Yü gives no further information about the kind of meditation technique this was.

Wang Fan-sen claims that he studies Ming personalities from the angle of social history or what he calls “life history”. Like Yü he has written about Yan Jun focusing on the text “Urgently save the burning mind”.⁷²⁵ Wang Fan-sen discusses the incident when Yan Jun cures Luo Rufang’s disease, thus acting as a healer or a psychotherapist. Wang Fan-sen claims that Luo Rufang wanders between the School of Principle and the School of Mind, as well as between the School of Mind and Jingming Daoism. Yan Jun understands that the root of Luo Rufang’s disease lies in his mind, and by pointing this out for Luo Rufang he cures him and makes him a leader of the Taizhou movement. According to Wang Fan-sen, Yan Jun plays three roles: first, he improves the community; second, he breaks the barrier between literati and ordinary people in the learning movement; and third, he acts as a psychotherapist and a healer. This analysis is in my view correct. In Yan Jun’s healing work, the religious element, according to Wang Fan-sen, is very strong something which inspires him to talk about “individual religion”.⁷²⁶

Wang Fan-sen claims that Confucianism did not develop a complete religious system but imitated minor aspects from Buddhism and Daoism as

⁷²³ Yü 2009 (2002): 558.

⁷²⁴ Yü 2009 (2002): 558.

⁷²⁵ Wang 1999: *passim*.

⁷²⁶ Wang 1999: 266.

well as from Christianity. In Wang's view, there were some Chinese thinkers who tried to give the word Heaven (*tian* 天), new interpretations in late Ming.⁷²⁷ Those people were worried that the threat of the popular Buddhist and Daoist religions would weaken Confucianism and therefore argued for adopting certain elements from these religions as well as from Christianity. One of those was Xu Sanli who argued for "removing philosophical thought, returning to mysticism" (*qu zhesi, fan shenmi* 去哲思, 返神秘).⁷²⁸ Xu Sanli considered the question of how to define religion. The word he used for religion was *jiao* (教), which is the traditional word used in the compound words Buddhist religion (*fojiao* 佛教) and Daoist religion (*daojiao* 道教). He identified religious behaviour as, for example, reading sutras and praying for happiness. Xu Sanli claimed that Confucianism was originally a religion in the same sense as Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity, by reading ancient books and records. According to Wang Fan-sen, Xu Sanli's interpretation is problematic; Wang asks why he made such big efforts to "discover" a non-existing tradition to establish his teaching of "worshipping Heaven" if Confucianism originally was a religion?⁷²⁹ In my view, Xu Sanli only tried to describe the development of Confucianism according to his understanding. It is rather Wang Fan-sen's idea of "religionization" that is questionable, since he does not provide a definition of religion.

Contemporary definitions of religion and the Taizhou movement'

In order to analyze the religious character of the Taizhou movement, I have investigated in which ways the ideas and praxis of the Taizhou movement fits into two kinds of contemporary definitions of religion. One is monothetic or bounded and the other is polythetic or unbounded. The bounded definition requires that if we have a class such as "religion", there needs to be a set of characteristics which are common to every member of the class.⁷³⁰ The unbounded definition does not have this requirement.

Jan A. M. Snoek argues that it is often impossible to draw a border round a class, and that phenomena might also overlap different classes, as in the example of rituals and play, which have some common characteristics such as that they are "marked off from the routine of everyday life: framed, liminal, anti-structure"; they are multi-medial, purposeful (for the participants),

⁷²⁷ Wang Fan-sen mentions Wang Qiyuan, Wen Xiangfeng and Xu Sanli. See Wang 2004: 52.

⁷²⁸ Wang 2004: 85.

⁷²⁹ Wang 2004: 86.

⁷³⁰ Needham 1975.

channeling emotions and performative.⁷³¹ To be able to define “rituals”, for example, it is necessary to sum up as large a collection as possible of characteristics which are typical of most rituals.⁷³² The idea of unbounded and polythetic definitions goes back to Ludwig Wittgenstein and his idea of family resemblances, which means that “a given expression may be employed to talk about various particulars” but that it is not necessarily a “single quality or feature that links them all.”⁷³³

Bruce Lincoln argues for the polythetic definition, since in his view a definition which “privileges one aspect, dimension, or component of the religious necessarily fails, for in so doing it normalizes some specific traditions...”⁷³⁴ However, his definition has four “minimum” dimensions to which it is possible to add other dimensions or aspects that can vary.⁷³⁵ In my opinion, this means that his definition is monothetic, although other scholars can add some other dimensions or aspects to it, which can vary. He generalizes about Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam, claiming that Protestantism is more oriented towards the “belief” of the individual than the latter two, which emphasize practice, discipline and community.⁷³⁶ Furthermore, he argues that religious subjects are “bound in moral communities” which are governed by “institutional structures that direct the group and command their members’ obedience.”⁷³⁷ In this comparison, Lincoln’s definition is used as an example of a bounded definition with four “minimum” dimensions.⁷³⁸ Those four dimensions are:

1. “A discourse whose concerns transcend the human, temporal, and contingent.”
2. “A set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected.”
3. “A community whose members construct their identity with reference to a religious discourse and its attendant practices”.⁷³⁹
4. “An institution that regulates religious discourse, practices, and community.”⁷⁴⁰

⁷³¹ Snoek 2006: 11.

⁷³² Snoek 2006: 7.

⁷³³ Saler 1993: 160.

⁷³⁴ Lincoln 2006 (2003): 5.

⁷³⁵ Lincoln 2006 (2003): 5.

⁷³⁶ Lincoln 2006 (2003): 1.

⁷³⁷ Lincoln 2006 (2003): 5.

⁷³⁸ Lincoln would, however, not agree with my claim that his definition is bounded/monothetic.

⁷³⁹ Lincoln 2006 (2003): 6.

⁷⁴⁰ Lincoln 2006 (2003): 5–7.

The Taizhou practitioners I have studied meet Lincoln's first dimension, since Lincoln does not talk about beliefs in gods or godlike beings. The Taizhou practitioners used metaphysical concepts such as the Way (*dao* 道) and the Heavenly Principle (*tianli* 天理). They expressed a belief that human beings can be linked to the Way, and that the Heavenly Principle embraces all human beings. This principle in human beings is the same principle as pervades the universe. Wang Gen claimed that the learning of the Heavenly Principle is the same as the learning of 'the innate knowledge of the good'.⁷⁴¹

Lincoln's second dimension is also fulfilled by the Taizhou practitioners. They were engaged in rituals of the compact meetings including discussions, reciting, singing, music and drinking ceremonies. Those rituals aimed at improving ethical behaviour. As members of a community compact, the Taizhou practitioners should take care of family members, neighbours and citizens at the local level.

Furthermore, the Taizhou practitioners clearly meet Lincoln's third dimension concerning a community which constructs its identity in accordance with the above-mentioned discourse. This is what happened in the private academies and retreat complexes as well as during compact and learning discussion meetings.

By adhering to a compact contract, the Taizhou practitioners became members of local communities. The community compact meetings aimed at improving life here and now, and in many ways had secular motives such as being a good friend within the community.⁷⁴² However, to be mindful in living "here and now" is described as a mental quality which is the result of a deeper understanding of reality. The discussions in the community compacts referred to ideas about how to become one with the Way, how to understand one's own mind and how the mind is linked to a greater reality. However, for the Taizhou practitioners I have studied it did not mean believing in different non-worldly paradises and did not involve the worship of any divine beings. They were not religious in that sense. As discussed in the introductory chapter, they rather belonged to a mystical tradition, and as Richard King claims, this mysticism was not in opposition to rationality.⁷⁴³ Their critics, however, sometimes criticized them for being non-rational. Wu Zhen relates that the two of Wang Gen's dreams were dismissed as absurd by his critics, and that Luo Rufang was criticized for claiming that he had a vision of the Primeval Lord of Heaven (*Taishang Zhangren* 泰山丈人).⁷⁴⁴

In the Taizhou discourse another important aspect is that individual enlightenment is important for societal endeavours. At the same time, they believed that creation of a community and reformation of society would make

⁷⁴¹ XZW, Ch. 3: 37b. (Discourse on Heavenly Principle and Knowledge of the Good)

⁷⁴² XZW, Ch. 3: 12b. (Recorded Conversations)

⁷⁴³ King 1999: 7–34.

⁷⁴⁴ Wu 2009a: 437.

it easier for the individual to reach the desired state of mind, that is, help the individual to be calm, mindful and joyous. Yan Jun explicitly says that signing the contract in the community compact is essential for helping the members to be attentive, and to have signed a contract certainly created an identity for those involved.⁷⁴⁵

For Lincoln's first three criteria of religion, it is quite unproblematic to describe the Taizhou movement as a religion, although the Taizhou practitioners to a high degree were focused on this world and did not want to leave it. However, difficulties arise with his fourth dimension, which requires an institution. The Taizhou practitioners never established a full-fledged institution, although they engaged in organizational work. Their organization might have become a solid and formalized institution with fixed rules and regulations later if their movement was not crushed by those in power. But this never happened. Therefore, if we apply Lincoln's definition to the Taizhou movement, the conclusion must be that it was not a religion in this fourth sense. The orthodox Neo-Confucianism which was deeply interlaced with the governmental, administrative and examination system fits much better to his definition of a religion than the Taizhou movement. Involvement with this institution was in many cases criticized by the Taizhou practitioners. An evaluation of Wang Fan-sen's claim that Song Neo-Confucianism would be more philosophical and late Ming Confucianism would be more religious cannot be supported using Lincoln's definition unless we make a demarcation between "a religion" and "to be religious", arguing that orthodox Neo-Confucianism constituted a religion and the Taizhou movement did not, whereas the Taizhou practitioners were more religious than the proponents of orthodox Confucianism. However, most definitions of religion do not have the requirement of an established institution.

Would it be easier to classify Confucianism as a religion using an unbounded and clearly polythetic definition? Martin Southwold found that monothetic definitions emphasizing beliefs in gods and spiritual beings did not fit the Theravada Buddhism he studied in Sri Lanka, and which he still wanted to call a religion because of other religion-like characteristics. That is why he created a polythetic classification with twelve dimensions or attributes.⁷⁴⁶

1. A central concern with godlike beings and men's relation with them.
2. A dichotomisation of elements of the world into sacred and profane, and a central concern with the sacred.
3. An orientation towards salvation from the ordinary conditions in worldly existence.

⁷⁴⁵ YJJ: 30.

⁷⁴⁶ Southwold 1978: 370–371.

4. Ritual practices.
5. Beliefs which are neither logically nor empirically demonstrable nor highly probable, but must be held on the basis of faith...
6. An ethical code, supported by such beliefs.
7. Supernatural sanctions on infringements of that code.
8. A mythology.
9. A body of scripture, or similarly exalted oral traditions.
10. A priesthood, or similar specialist religious elite.
11. Association with a moral community, a church.
12. Association with an ethic or similar group.

Of those twelve dimensions the Taizhou practitioners clearly meet four (4, 9, 6 and 11). They have ritual practices, a body of scriptures, ethical codes and a moral community. Although not totally convincing, they fit the second dimension of a dichotomisation of elements in the world into sacred and profane, and a central concern with the sacred, although it is difficult to find an equivalent for the Western word “profane” in their discourse. They talk about that which is ‘vulgar’ (*su* 俗) and people who have worldly desires, that is, desires for fame, wealth and sex. However, as will be shown in Chapter 9, this has been more a general Confucian idea supported also by the Daoists, and something the Taizhou practitioners were criticized for. In the view of the Taizhou practitioners, everyone is a potential sage and the whole world is sacred. As for the fourth dimension in Southwold’s definition, the Taizhou practitioners strove for a kind of salvation which would take place in this world and not outside of it. The eighth dimension of mythology fits them rather well. They discuss the mythology of the early sage Kings who are ahistorical.

As for the question of ethnicity the Taizhou practitioners were probably Han Chinese. Li Zhi, who belonged to a different ethnic group (*Hui* 回), which was Muslim, was in my opinion not a Taizhou practitioner. There might, however, have been other Taizhou practitioners belonging to Hui or other ethnic groups, but that we do not know. The Taizhou practitioners are not concerned with ethnicity, so the twelfth dimension does not fit them.

To summarize, the dimensions that clearly do not fit the Taizhou practitioners are 1. central concern with godlike beings, 7. beliefs in supernatural sanctions on infringement of their ethical codes, 10. a priesthood or religious elite, and 12. association with an ethnic group. This means that the Taizhou practitioners meet very well four of twelve dimensions and rather well four others (2, 3, 5 and 8), but not at all the remaining four (4, 9, 6 and 11). With some effort it is possible to say that the Taizhou practitioners met most of Southwold’s dimensions and thus could be regarded as a religion. This, however, would also apply to Neo-Confucianism in general. It is therefore not possible to use either Lincoln’s or Southwold’s definition to

support the idea that Neo-Confucianism underwent a “religionization” during mid and late Ming; on the contrary, using Lincoln’s definitions, they turned away from “religion” since the Taizhou practitioners were indifferent or hostile towards institutions.

The emotional dimension and the question of personal experience

Some definitions of religion add an emotional and experiential dimension.⁷⁴⁷ This dimension is lacking in Lincoln’s definition of religion, which is a conscious choice by Lincoln. His aim is to leave the pattern of making the “interiority the locus of the religious”.⁷⁴⁸ In the Wang Yangming movement, it is not possible to neglect ‘the interiority’, and the same can be said of the Taizhou practitioners. ‘The interiority’ is as important as ‘the exteriority’ and that they are mutually dependent both in Wang Yangming’s philosophy and in the ideas of the Taizhou practitioners.

The Taizhou movement had strong charismatic leaders and they expressed themselves during the learning discussion meetings in emotional and captivating ways. This is probably one reason why Wang Fan-sen and other Chinese scholars regard the Taizhou movement as more religious than earlier Neo-Confucianism. The Taizhou practitioners also utilized their followers’ emotions to strengthen the movement.

Furthermore, they strongly argued that their knowledge should be attained in a personal way (*zide* 自得).⁷⁴⁹ In their vocabulary, they expressed the dramatic turning point of the mental state as an enlightenment (*wu* 悟) using the same word as the Buddhists, although it very often came in a dream and not at the end of a long meditation session.⁷⁵⁰

Robert H. Sharf claims that “experience” did not play a cardinal role in traditional Buddhism and that it has become a rhetorical question among modern Buddhists lacking knowledge of Buddhist history. This might be true of the Buddhist tradition (although I believe Sharf underestimates the value of personal experience in traditional Buddhism).⁷⁵¹ However, it is certainly not true of the Taizhou practitioners and not of Neo-Confucians in general. For the Taizhou practitioners personal experience formed the basis of their activities. (See Chapter 4, “Some Neo-confucian key concepts”). Furthermore, the enlightenment experiences they described were not regarded as something exclusive for the charismatic Taizhou leaders. They believed

⁷⁴⁷ One example is Ninian Smart 1996: 166–195.

⁷⁴⁸ Lincoln 2003 (2006): 1.

⁷⁴⁹ de Bary 1970: 154. Wang Yangming *Moral Education* (Da Ouyang 答歐陽 Chongyi?).

⁷⁵⁰ XZW, Ch. 2: 4a. See also chapter 4.

⁷⁵¹ Sharf 1995: 228–283.

that everyone had the capacity to obtain such experiences. If everyone had personal experiences of humaneness and happiness, they would also understand how to take their personal responsibilities within the community seriously. The strongly emotional meetings with songs and music aimed to make the participants have experience individually in a communitarian setting. Discarding the dimensions of personal experience and emotions in descriptions of Taizhou religiosity misses something fundamental, and the Taizhou practitioners themselves argued that this was an integral part of what they were doing.

Sacred rituals and sages

Bruce Lincoln does not mention the idea of the “sacred” and “holy” in his definition of religion. Thus he avoids the contested ground in the field of religious studies, where criticism of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade has been harsh. Does it make a difference if the rituals and enlightened human beings are regarded as holy or not? For the Jesuits at least it had a consequence. They argued that Confucianism was a School of the literati (*literatorum secta*) and their rituals secular,⁷⁵² and on this ground Jesuits could take part in Confucian secular rituals. Initially they had argued that the Chinese religion was a “natural religion”. Criticism from the Dominicans and Franciscans made the Jesuits change their view; they adopted the idea that the Confucian rites were secular and use the concept of “civil religion” instead.⁷⁵³ This change was, however, a measure taken to counter attack accusations of heresy, and not to give an objective description of Confucianism. Even in ostensibly secular rituals of imperial society, there was a religious dimension. At least the Confucian scholars argued that one should perform them with reverence.⁷⁵⁴ This is why the Jesuit claim that Confucianism was a secular school was obviously a construction which served their wish to continue working close to or even within the Chinese administration.

In the writings of the Taizhou practitioners as well as in early Confucianism and the Classics, the words ‘sacred/holy’ (*sheng* 聖) and sage (*shengren* 聖人) are used frequently. Herbert Fingarette argues that *li* 禮 (ritual, rite, ceremony, etiquette) in *The Analects* of Confucius is holy. Fingarette furthermore says: “The perfection in Holy Rite is esthetic as well as spiritual.”⁷⁵⁵ And he even uses such a word as “presence” to describe the difference between a “dead” ritual and a “living” ritual. Fingarette creates an analogy with two different ways of shaking hands; he claims that the presence

⁷⁵² Meynard 2011: 8.

⁷⁵³ Meynard 2011:7.

⁷⁵⁴ For a discussion on the spirituality of Confucianism see Fingarette 1994: *passim*.

⁷⁵⁵ Fingarette 1994: 8–9.

or lack of presence in the way of shaking hands makes such an ordinary act two diametrically different actions – although the Confucians would not shake hands at all. Confucius argued for doing everything with presence to create a ‘living’ ritual.⁷⁵⁶ I claim that Fingarette’s argument is not only valid for Confucius in *The Analects* but also for the Taizhou practitioners.

In a text which is entitled “Doctrine on returning to the beginning” (*Fuchu Shuo* 復初說), Wang Gen discussed the importance of returning to what is original. “The utmost point of the root is to make the mind sincere/.../Therefore, to be sincere is the root of the sage (*shengren* 聖人). ‘To be sacred, is to be sincere’”.⁷⁵⁷ In this regard, Wang Gen followed earlier Song Confucianism. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Wang Gen argued that Confucius was a human being, exactly as Wang Gen was himself.⁷⁵⁸ The consequence is that if Confucius was a sage, all other human beings are sages, and if Confucius was sacred, all human beings are sacred too. That is a fundamental assumption of the Taizhou practitioners, and this assumption is the basis for their ethics. There are recurring statements that the commoner is a sage already in *Moral Education* by Wang Yangming. A common expression is: “There is no difference between the sage and the stupid person”.⁷⁵⁹ Wang Yangming also declares that “Heaven, Earth and things are one body with myself”.⁷⁶⁰ And he even says: “Human beings are the mind of Heaven and Earth”,⁷⁶¹ an utterance which is echoed in the writings of Yan Jun.⁷⁶² *Sheng* 聖 means to be ‘holy’ or ‘sacred’, and this concept is crucial and gives the ideas of Wang Yangming and the Taizhou practitioners a religious character. The mutual dependency between Heaven, the world and human beings is universal and transcends time and space.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, the objects depicted in Figure 11 have a deep symbolic meaning. The chariot and clothes created by Wang Gen were his way to make the ancient sages his model. For him it meant to live the way they did and embody the Way. Living as the sages did was to be a sage, and, in line with this reasoning, to perform such an act was for Wang Gen to convince others that he was a sage. Furthermore, the audience of the performance should examine themselves and grasp their own true nature, thus understanding that they were sages like Wang Gen and the sages of antiquity.

⁷⁵⁶ Fingarette 1994: 9.

⁷⁵⁷ *Sheng, cheng er yi yi* 聖,誠而已矣. XZW, Juan 3: 29b (Discourse on returning to the beginning). Wang Gen is referring to Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017 – 73), Tongshu Chengxia 通書誠下, who in turn refers to the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

⁷⁵⁸ XZW, Juan 5, 29b.

⁷⁵⁹ *Wu jian yu sheng yu* 無間與聖愚 A literal translation would be: “There is no space between the sage and the stupid”. WYMQJ, Vol. 1: 79.

⁷⁶⁰ *Tiandi wanwu, benwo yiti zhe ye*. 天地萬物, 本吾一體者也. WYMQJ, Vol. 1: 79.

⁷⁶¹ *Fu ren zhe, Tiandi zhi xin*. 夫人者天地之心. WYMQJ, Vol. 1: 79.

⁷⁶² YJJ: 15. Yan Jun’s formulation is almost identical with Wang Yangming’s. Yan said: *Ren Tiandi Xin*. 人天地心.

The musical instruments, furniture, wine vessels and spoon were ritual objects used during community compacts and other meetings.⁷⁶³ The world, the human beings and their interrelatedness possessed a kind of sacredness, according to the Taizhou practitioners. As described by the Taizhou practitioners, the aim of the rituals is self-transformation and ultimately transformation of a whole community.

Conclusion

This thesis claims that the concepts of “philosophication” and “religionization” of Confucianism used by some Chinese scholars does not contribute to our understanding of the Confucian tradition. In this thesis the concept of “tradition” is used instead of “philosophy” and “religion”, despite my argument that there are several religious (as well as philosophical) traits in this tradition. In my view, the Confucianism of the earlier Song dynasty was not less religious but was religious in a different way compared with Confucianism in the Ming dynasty. The Taizhou movement was more emotional and their leaders more charismatic than their precursors in early Ming and in the Song dynasty. I would describe the dynamism that Wang Fansen and Wu Zhen discuss as a change in religious discourse and praxis, rather than a change from a more “philosophical” mode in the Song to a more “religious” one in the Ming. Other traditions we usually regard as religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism also have systematic philosophical or intellectual superstructures and ethical ideals not very different from Confucianism, and nobody would claim that, for instance, Catholicism underwent “philosophication” during the eleventh century when Thomas Aquinas lived.

Using different definitions of religion leads to different results concerning the question whether the Taizhou movement should be considered a religion. For instance, Bruce Lincoln’s bounded concept and definition showed that the ideas and praxis of the Taizhou practitioners agreed quite well with his first three dimensions of religion but did not fit his fourth dimension of institutionalization. Although the Taizhou practitioners were very concerned about the societal situation and created organization for their purposes, they never established an institution. Thus using Lincoln’s definition, the Taizhou movement could not be defined as a religion. There are, however, other traditions we usually regard as religions such as Hinduism which also lack this aspect.

Martin Southwold’s definition works, but only because his definition is unbounded and only a majority of its dimensions are required. Beliefs in

⁷⁶³ XZW, Juan 1: 33a explicitly states that it was one spoon.

godlike beings did not form an important part of the Taizhou discourse, nor did beliefs in supernatural sanctions on infringement of their ethical codes, a priesthood or religious elite and association with an ethnic group. Dimensions such as ritual practices, ethical codes related to their beliefs, mythology and a body of scripture, or similarly exalted oral traditions fit in very well with the Taizhou ideas and practices.

Definitions which have an emotional and experiential dimension can better describe what the Taizhou practitioners strove for. They utilized their adherents' emotions and tried to transform emotions of anxiety, humiliation, self-humiliation, insecurity and lack of concentration into their opposites of calm, respect, self-respect, security and attentiveness both in meditation and in daily life. Ultimately, they yearned for an experience of enlightenment.

Those who were transformed and achieved this enlightenment became sages and would from that moment onwards possess a quality of sagacity, which was regarded as a potential in every human being. However, the Taizhou practitioners did not try to create a dichotomization between secular and sacred. They rather tried to make the secular world sacred.

8. Wang Yangming's and the Taizhou practitioners' relation to the three traditions

This chapter addresses the question of Wang Yangming and the Taizhou practitioners' relation to the *Ruist*, Daoist and Buddhist traditions. I have previously stated that in general they were rather eclectic in their approach to the three traditions. Did they say anything which can confirm that they mainly were *Ruists*? I will not comment on later Taizhou practitioners such as Jiao Hong and Zhou Rudeng here, although they seem to be more influenced by Buddhism than their precursors. The reason is that I have limited this thesis to first of all Wang Gen, He Xinyin, Yan Jun and Luo Rufang, that is, those active in the sixteenth century.⁷⁶⁴ Li Zhi belongs to the sixteenth century, but I will not discuss him either since I do not regard him as a Taizhou practitioner, although he was inspired by them.

Initially, I will discuss some Buddhist utterances in the writings of Wang Yangming, and how those should be evaluated. To what degree was Wang Yangming influenced by the Buddhist tradition, and did the Taizhou practitioners differ from Wang Yangming in a fundamental way? I have already touched on the question regarding Huang Zongxi's accusation that Wang Ji and Wang Gen pressed Chan Buddhism into the teaching of Wang Yangming.

Buddhism and Daoism in Neo-Confucianism

No scholar would deny that Neo-Confucianism is influenced by Buddhism and Daoism. The very formation of Neo-Confucianism was a result of the Confucian answers to the Buddhist questions about the mind.⁷⁶⁵ The precursor

⁷⁶⁴ Jiao Hong died in 1620 and Zhou Rudeng in 1629. For studies on Jiao Hong and Zhou Rudeng see, for example, Ch'ien 1986 and Zhao 1995.

⁷⁶⁵ Here I do not claim that this Buddhism was foremost Indian in nature. Sharf has argued that it is dangerous to talk of an "encounter" between India and China, since the discussion about Buddhism in China took place among the Chinese Buddhists themselves. See Sharf 2002: 2. A

of Neo-Confucianism, Han Yu (768–824), known for his ferocious criticism of Buddhism, was aware of Buddhist aims and practices. This is seen in his famous text: “Memorial on the Buddha Relic”. (*Lun Fogu biao* 論佛骨表) In this text, he criticized the Emperor for ordering a relic of a finger bone of Buddha to be venerated in the imperial palace for three days. Han Yu argued that the Emperor served Buddha, who was only a ‘barbarian’. Because of Han Yu’s criticism, he was sentenced to exile.⁷⁶⁶ Han Yu wrote an essay called “Preface of Seeing off the Eminent Monk Gaoxian” (*Song Gaoxian shangren xu* 送高閑上人序).⁷⁶⁷ In this essay, he argues for unity of literary writing (*wen* 文) and the Way, comparing the calligraphic style of Zhang Xu, with that of the Eminent monk Gaoxian. By comparing the calligraphy of Zhang Xu with that of Gaoxian he criticizes the monk and Buddhism. He argues that Zhang Xu expresses all his emotions in his calligraphy. As a Buddhist, Gaoxian should try to eliminate desires and attachments; thus, according to Han Yu, his calligraphy expresses feelings of exhaustion and defeat.⁷⁶⁸ Han Yu established the idea that there is an orthodox line of transmission of the Way, which was broken after Mencius (ca. 371 – ca. 289 BC). Furthermore, he made Mencian thought the core line of Neo-Confucianism. It was the mystical side of Mencius that was placed in focus, including his discussions on the mind and human nature. Special interest was shown in Mencius’ method of self-cultivation and statements like “nourishing the mind” (*yangxin* 養心) and “reducing the desires” (*guayu* 寡欲).⁷⁶⁹

The thought of another thinker from the Tang dynasty, Li Ao (d. ca. 844) had much in common with Buddhism. His concept of nature (*xing* 性) comes close to the Buddhist concept of ‘original mind’ (*benxin* 本心) and his concept of feeling (*qing* 情) to the Buddhist term ‘vexation’, ‘annoyance’ (*fanna* 煩惱, Sanskrit *kleśa*).⁷⁷⁰ For Li Ao, feelings come from nature, but they are still evil. However, if one is aware of the feelings, their evil character will cease to exist. This happens when the mind is silent and immovable claims Li. Therefore, it is important to engage in fasting and abstinence. The word Li Ao uses for fasting is (*zhai* 齋), which later would occur in the name Wang Gen took as his styled name (*Xinzhai* 心齋). Together with *xin* it has the meaning of ‘fasting of the mind’. As has already been mentioned, the concept “fasting

real dialogue between Indian and Chinese Buddhists never occurred, according to him. Yet, Buddhism originally came from India, and Chinese Buddhists in the Tang dynasty (618–907) travelled to India and returned. Furthermore, there were mercantile exchanges between China and India, which must have had some effects on religious, spiritual and material culture.

⁷⁶⁶ Hartmann 1986: 84–85. For a translation of Han Yu’s text on the Buddha Bone, see Han 1979: *passim*.

⁷⁶⁷ Translated into English by Charles Hartman. See Hartman 1986: 222–223.

⁷⁶⁸ Hartman 1986: 222–223.

⁷⁶⁹ Fung and Bodde 1942: 96.

⁷⁷⁰ Fung and Bodde translates it as ‘passion’, which is not exactly what it means. See Fung and Bodde 1962: 100.

of the mind” originally came from the Daoist classic Zhuangzi. Here we have a good example of how different symbolic elements in the three traditions move from one tradition to another creating countless transformations.

To return to the arguments of Li Ao, he further claimed that there will always be an alteration between quiescence and movement. He referred to *The Book of Rites*, which talks about the sage, saying: “Therefore when he is in his carriage, he listens to the harmonious sound of the bells, and when walking on foot, he listens to the tones of the pendant jades.”⁷⁷¹ The pendant jades were worn by officials to remind themselves that their conduct should be virtuous. Always mindful of the present situation, the quiescence of the sage exists in the middle of movement and activity; and in the quiescence there is always some kind of movement. Li based his ideas of quiescence and movement on statements in *The Book of Changes*.⁷⁷² From Li onwards, the terms Way, nature, feeling, quiescence and movements became key concepts in Neo-Confucian writings and the striving for being mindful in the present situation a common feature in Neo-Confucianism in general and later also in the Taizhou movement.

Although there is consensus about Buddhist influences on Neo-Confucianism, there are disagreements concerning the degree of this influence. Several Japanese scholars have been interested in the Confucian relation to Buddhism during the Ming dynasty, stressing the Buddhist side of Neo-Confucianism, a tendency criticized by Wing-tsit Chan.⁷⁷³ One of the Japanese scholars interested in this relation is Araki Kengo.⁷⁷⁴ Contrary to Wing-tsit Chan, Araki argues that Chan Buddhism played a great role in developing the School of Mind.⁷⁷⁵ He points to the rebellious side of Chan Buddhism saying that it: “tries to grasp this mind as a naked man who has discarded all doctrinal embellishments and traditional norms.”⁷⁷⁶ Both in the School of Mind (the LuWang School) and in the School of Principle (the ChengZhu School), the mind is regarded as the master of the human being. However, compared with the School of Mind, the mind in the School of Principle is regarded as having a quality of stability because it possesses ‘principle’, and a quality of instability due to its tendency to act against principle claims Araki. The former was called nature, and the latter feelings. However, nature was regarded as the core, so this school held that “the nature is identical to principle”. The reason why Zhu Xi attacked Chan Buddhism so violently, according to Araki, is that Chan Buddhists ignored the authority of

⁷⁷¹ *The Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), Yu Zao 37.

⁷⁷² Fung and Bodde 1942: 107.

⁷⁷³ Chan 1962: *passim*.

⁷⁷⁴ Araki 1975.

⁷⁷⁵ Araki Kengo 荒木見悟 (1917–) is also published in Chinese. *Fojiao yu rujiao* [Buddhist and Confucian Religion] 2005, and *Mingmo Qingchu de Sixiang Yu Fojiao* [Thought of late Ming and early Qing and Buddhism] 2006.

⁷⁷⁶ Araki 1975: 40.

principle in the mind.⁷⁷⁷ To be able to judge the degree of influence, it is necessary to dig deeper into the works of the Neo-Confucians. Here follows a description of Wang Yangming, and of persons related to the Taizhou movement, and their relation to Buddhism and Daoism.

Daoist and Buddhist influences on Wang Yangming

As a movement deeply influenced by the thought of Wang Yangming, the Taizhou movement's relation to Buddhism is also unconsciously or consciously influenced by his relation to Buddhist ideas and practices. Wang Yangming went through both a Daoist and a Buddhist period, like so many other Neo-Confucians. According to an account, on his wedding day Wang Yangming passed by a Daoist temple, where he met a Daoist priest. They talked about how to nourish everlasting life, and Wang became so absorbed in the discussion that he forgot to return home until they fetched him the next morning.⁷⁷⁸ According to Wing-tsit Chan, it was his active life and public responsibilities that "helped him to realize the errors of Taoism and Buddhism".⁷⁷⁹ Chan, apparently not a Daoist or a Buddhist himself, also concludes that in 1504, when Wang conducted the provincial examinations in Shandong, he asked questions that "revealed such profound knowledge of the evils of Buddhism and Taoism".⁷⁸⁰ In the introduction to Wing-tsit Chan's translation of Wang Yangming's *Moral Education*,⁷⁸¹ Chan does not specify which evils these are, but he most likely agrees with Wang Yangming in his criticism of the Buddhists, arguing that they were escaping "from social responsibilities, their inability to handle human affairs, and their selfishness."⁷⁸² The earlier xenophobic arguments against Buddhism, that is, the argument that Buddhism was bad merely because it was foreign, made by Han Yu (768–824) and others are absent in Wang Yangming's writings. Wang Yangming's criticism is focused on the discrepancy between ideal and reality, claiming that the Buddhists could not live up to their ideals, because their requirements were too lofty.

During Wang Yangming's exile in Guizhou, he had an ambition to educate the "barbarians" he lived with. Wang taught "the barbarian Miao tribes" (Chan's expression) to build, for instance, houses.⁷⁸³ Representing the Chinese

⁷⁷⁷ Araki 1975: 41. Something which is confusing in this article by Araki is that he talks of a "School of Mind" within Chan Buddhism.

⁷⁷⁸ Chan 1963a: xxii.

⁷⁷⁹ Chan 1963a: xxiii.

⁷⁸⁰ Chan 1963a: xxiii.

⁷⁸¹ Chan translates the title *Chuanxi lu* 傳習錄 as "Instructions for Practical Living."

⁷⁸² Chan 1963a: xxxvii – xxxviii.

⁷⁸³ Chan 1963a: xxiv.

civilization, crowned with Confucian thought, Wang Yangming helped local inhabitants in the southern borderland to become humane. The picture Leo K. Shin sketches of Wang Yangming in his article “The Last Campaigns of Wang Yangming” is of a man belonging to those scholar officials who wanted to transform or “civilize” non-Chinese people in the same way as “one chisels pieces of jade or carves blocks of wood”, that is, make them become like the Chinese.⁷⁸⁴ This is compared with those scholar officials, like Qiu Jun (1421–95), who wanted to preserve the boundary between “Chinese” and “non-Chinese”. For Wang Yangming the non-Chinese people had the same “original nature” (*benxing* 本性) as the Chinese. In his opinion, the difference lay in their “animated nature” (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性), that is, their actual state, being closer to that of the birds and beasts than to the Chinese. Their desires had made their *qi* corrupt, and in that way their *benxing* had become “beclouded”.⁷⁸⁵ Although, Wang Yangming seems to have had quite a negative view of the native Guizhou people, at least he did not regard them as being of a fundamentally different nature. Wang Yangming was engaged in subduing the peoples in the southern borderland as a Chinese military. From the point of view of those who were subdued his “lofty” attitude of recognizing them as having the same fundamental nature as the Chinese might have been even more humiliating. However, after a fierce battle, Wang Yangming reached some understanding of them. They were not strangers any more as was the case of most Han Chinese living in the central parts of the Ming Empire.

As I have argued elsewhere, Buddhist interest in the mind influenced the Neo-Confucian thinkers, and made them search in the Confucian classics for early discussions on the mind.⁷⁸⁶ Following the Buddhist interest in the mind and its functions, several Buddhist metaphors of the mind appear in the Neo-Confucian writings, as in the writings of Wang Yangming.⁷⁸⁷ For Wang Yangming the mind is the starting point of his thoughts, and the understanding of the ‘knowledge of the good’ is the core of his teaching. Wang Yangming owes very much to Mencius, from whom he got the concept of ‘knowledge of the good’. It was Wang Yangming’s notion of extending this innate knowledge, that is, to put it into practice, that was new in Wang Yangming’s interpretation. He compares innate knowledge to the Buddhist notion of “spiritual seal” (*xinyin* 心印).⁷⁸⁸ The Buddha mind in every human being is the seal which can verify the truth independent of written or spoken words. The teaching of innate knowledge is like a compass. The mind is a life-giving

⁷⁸⁴ Shin 2006a: 119.

⁷⁸⁵ Shin 2006a: 116.

⁷⁸⁶ Lidén 2011: 166.

⁷⁸⁷ Wing-tsit Chan mentions that Wang Yangming uses 40 or more Buddhist expressions in *Moral Education*, but as far as I know he never published a list of them or has shown how he counted them.

⁷⁸⁸ WYMJ: 93.

power, it is the source and principle of goodness in man. Wang Yangming's view of mind is close to Mencius', who regards the mind (or the heart) as the source of human being's conscious and moral activity.⁷⁸⁹ In Chan Buddhism it has a different connotation, that of 'reality', 'being', and 'the ultimate reality'.⁷⁹⁰ However, Wang Yangming often uses animal metaphors with Buddhist connotations when he tries to describe the mind. For example, the thoughts are likened to restless monkeys, a common trope in Buddhist literature. Wang Yangming says: "When teaching people, one cannot be one-sided. At the beginning of the [meditation] studies, one's mind is like [restless] monkeys and the feelings are like [galloping] horses. They cannot be tied down."⁷⁹¹ The monkey mind *kapicitta* is a Buddhist term used by Buddhists to describe the restless, agitated and easily distracted consciousness.⁷⁹² There is also a specific Monkey Sutra, *Makkata Sutta*,⁷⁹³ which is a short discourse on being mindful in meditation. It opens with the monkey parable about two kinds of monkeys; those who are wise and avoid the trap of the hunter, and those foolish monkeys that cannot keep away from it but get caught in it with their five limbs (2 paws, 2 legs and the head) representing the five senses. The sutra thus warns practitioners of meditation not to follow Mara and seek sensual pleasures. This monkey parable might have been familiar to Ming intellectuals like Wang Yangming. However, to compare the mind to monkeys and horses was also a common trait in Daoism among Quanzhen or 'Complete Perfection' masters. The Quanzhen practitioner should learn how to "subdue his monkey-mind" and to "control his horse-will".⁷⁹⁴ After the quotation by Wang Yangming above, another animal metaphor turns up, namely the cat metaphor: "At all times be like a cat trying to catch a rat, with eyes single-mindedly watching and ears single-mindedly listening." This quotation has been discussed previously (Chapter 5, Yan Jun's seven-day seclusion).

Wang Yangming often mentions that he makes use of Buddhist sayings. One example is the parable about the dog and the lion: "The Buddhists have the parable of a servant throwing a piece of food [to a dog and a lion. When the lion] sees the food but jumps at the man, it gets the man [who is its major objective.] [On the other hand, when the dog] sees the food [which does not

⁷⁸⁹ Julia Ching argues that the Chinese notion of *xin* transcends the English word "mind", and that it is closer to the French word *Coeur* in the sense Blaise Pascal gave it. See Ching 1976: 57.

⁷⁹⁰ Ching 1976: 55.

⁷⁹¹ WYMJ: 16.

⁷⁹² *Jathaka* III, 148, V: 445. The horse metaphor is used in *Bhagavad Gītā* 3: 43, and already in the *Kaṭha Upanishad* 3:4-6. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the *ātman* is the charioteer. See the translation by Olivelle 1998: 389. The concept of *subitism* is mentioned in Chapter 2, "Previous research."

⁷⁹³ S 47.7.

⁷⁹⁴ Yao 2004: 583.

amount to much], and chases after it, what does the dog really get?”⁷⁹⁵ The textual background to the parable is a discussion about book learning and exegesis compared to self-realization. It is not necessary to go deeper into the lion symbol in Buddhist culture and literature to understand this parable. It is very clear that the lion is the superior animal compared with the dog. At the end of the section, there is an explanation that the lion is like those who focus on what is important, namely, self-examination, whereas the dog is like those who engage in textual studies. The parable is from a Buddhist dictionary from the Northern Song dynasty, *Zuting shiyuan* 祖庭事苑, which quotes it from *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-śāstra*, a treatise attributed to Nagarjuna. Just before this parable, Wang Yangming argues that everything becomes clear if one takes the teaching of ‘knowledge of the good’ into account. Heterodox stances fall apart naturally if they are compared with this teaching, according to him.

In another section in *Moral Education*, Wang Yangming is again explicit in using Buddhist language. Here he uses the mirror metaphor, which in addition to the animal metaphors is very frequent in his writings.⁷⁹⁶ He declares:

‘One should not cling to anything but let the mind produce [naturally]’ (*Wu suo zhu er sheng qi xin* 無所住而生其心). This Buddhist saying is correct. When a clear mirror reflects things, what is beautiful appears as beautiful and what is ugly appears as ugly. Everything that is reflected [in the mirror] is true. This is what is called the mind producing [naturally]. What is beautiful appears beautiful and what is ugly appears as ugly. The things pass along but do not remain. This is to not cling to anything.⁷⁹⁷

Wang Yangming uses the mirror metaphor to describe how the mind works when a person has no attachments. He continues by using a disease analogy, also very common in Buddhist teaching. Man is described as a person suffering from an illness, and the Buddha cures the disease by his teaching, dharma. In *Moral Education* Wang Yangming cures the sick person by his theory of ‘knowledge of the good’. Wang Yangming continues:

You have seen the essence and correctness of the disease analogy, and it will clarify what you have asked about in this section. When people suffer from severe illnesses, although [occasionally] there are no symptoms, the root of the disease is still present. Why should the patient feel safe and neglect medical treatment simply because there are no symptoms? If the patient waits until the symptoms occur before accepting medical treatment, it will be too late.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁵ WYMJ: 71.

⁷⁹⁶ Paul Demiéville argues that the mirror metaphor is related to a “subitist” tradition, which expresses a belief in a sudden realization of the ultimate truth. He has found the mirror metaphor not only in Chan Buddhism but also in the Daoist Classic Zhuangzi, where it expresses passivity and detachment. See Demiéville 1973: 119.

⁷⁹⁷ WYMJ: 70.

⁷⁹⁸ WYMJ: 70.

The mirror trope is further used in the recordings by Wang Yangming's disciple Lu Cheng 陸澄 (dates unknown, *jinshi* 1505), who said to Wang Yangming:

'I still do not understand the meaning of "being centred" (*zhong* 中).' [The Master Wang Yangming] said: 'It must be personally experienced (*tiren* 體認) by your own mind. It cannot be explained in words. "Being centred" is nothing but the Heavenly Principle.'

'What is the Heavenly Principle?'

'When you get rid of your desires, you will recognize it.'

'Why is "being centred" the Heavenly Principle?'

'Because there is nothing prejudiced or partial about it.'

'To what kind of [mental] quality does that of being non-prejudiced and impartial belong?'

'It is like a bright mirror. It is completely clear, without being stained by dust.'

'To be partial is to have a coloured view. When one is attached to the love of sex, wealth, fame, and so forth, one is obviously not centred. However, before the feelings are aroused, the mind is not yet attached to the love of sex, wealth, fame, and so forth.'⁷⁹⁹

Wang Yangming argues that it is possible to "be centred" when one is non-attached, and that this state of mind must be realized personally. This state of mind cannot be reached by book learning. That a sage has reached it is seen from his capacity to respond to things immediately, and that he reacts in an adequate way spontaneously. A person with an unclear mind would not be able to do that. Wang Yangming says: "The mind of the sage is like a clear mirror. Since it is nothing but clarity, it responds to all thoughts as they come and reflects everything/.../A student must first try to [make his mind] clear [as a mirror]. He should worry only about this, and not that he will not be able to reflect things when there is a change."⁸⁰⁰ The student of the 'knowledge of the good' must work on it. It is obviously not the case, according to Wang, that enlightenment comes suddenly without hard work to reach the goal. One might wonder if Wang Yangming had read or heard of the *Platform sutra*, the most famous example of argumentation for sudden enlightenment made in the description of how the patriarch Hongren chooses his inheritor by asking the

⁷⁹⁹ WYMJ: 23.

⁸⁰⁰ WYMJ: 12. Following this quotation, there is a passage, which has been discussed by Japanese historians of philosophy, arguing that it has Buddhist origin. In Wing-tsit Chan's translation it is rendered: "I said, if so, how about the saying, 'Empty, tranquil, and without any sign, and yet all things are luxuriantly present.?'” Yamazaki Ansai (1618–82) listed all sayings in this section and the Neo-Confucian discussions about them, but he did not mention if they were Buddhist or not. Chan argues that the terms "indefinite", "boundless" and "without a sign" have Daoist origin. Ota Kinjo (1765–1825) said that the second half of the saying is almost identical with a saying by the Chan master Zhenjiao (d. 712), from the Yongjia reign, in "Zhengdao Ge" in *Jingde chuandeng Lu*. See note 4, in: Chan 1963a: 27.

monks to write verses on the wall. Shen Xiu is there said to have written the following stanza:

The body is the Bodhi tree,
The mind is like a clear mirror.
At all times we must strive to polish it.
And not let the dust collect.⁸⁰¹

In answer, Hui Neng writes his well-known stanza, which makes Hongren transmit the patriarchal robe to him. It says:

Bodhi originally has no tree,
The mirror also has no stand.
The mirror is originally clean and pure.
Where can it be stained by dust?⁸⁰²

It was Hui Neng's disciple Shen Hui (670–762) who advocated the doctrine of sudden enlightenment, and it was most likely he who also created the legendary person Hui Neng.⁸⁰³ A basis in this doctrine is the idea of absence of thought. Wang Yangming argues against it, claiming that this is impossible. "From morning to evening, and from youth to old age, if you want to be without thoughts, that is, not knowing anything, [this is impossible] unless you are in deep sleep or are dead like dry wood and dead ashes."⁸⁰⁴ From this, we can see that Wang Yangming in this saying was closer to the Northern Chan Buddhism of gradual enlightenment. Beside the Buddhist language, Wang Yangming also adopted the Chan Buddhist teaching style. One example is his usage of Chan Gong'an 公案 (Jap. Kōan), or "cases" which is the original meaning of Gong'an. Once he said to his disciples:

'You have to find how [to extend innate knowledge] yourself. I have no other method to offer. Once there was a Chan master. When someone came to him to ask about the dharma, he merely raised a *chenwei* [dust whisk]. One day his disciples hid his *chenwei* to see what he would figure out to do. [When someone asked him about the dharma] he looked for the *chenwei* but could not find it, and merely raised his empty hand. The teaching of innate knowledge is my method of the *chenwei*. What else could I rise?'⁸⁰⁵

Chenwei 塵尾 is a whisk used for dusting or chasing away insects. It is, however, also a specific device used by Daoist masters in their ritual, and by

⁸⁰¹ Yampolsky's translation in: Yampolsky 1967: 130.

⁸⁰² Yampolsky's translation in: Yampolsky 1967: 132. There are different versions of this stanza.

⁸⁰³ Faure 1991: 12.

⁸⁰⁴ WYMJ: 35.

⁸⁰⁵ WYMJ: 109.

Buddhist dharma monks symbolizing chasing away vexation. It must be the latter meaning it had for Wang Yangming in this passage. For him the concept of ‘knowledge of the good’ was his tool to help people abolish annoyance and vexation. In this way Wang Yangming uses the Chan Buddhist Gong’an in his own teaching, however, he is also very critical of Buddhism as well as Daoism. Once he discussed the Daoist notion of emptiness (*xu* 虛) and the Buddhist notion of non-being (*wu* 無). He said:

The Daoists talk about emptiness. How can the [Confucian] sages add an iota of reality to this emptiness? The Buddhists talk about non-being. How can the [Confucian] sages add an iota of being to this non-being? But the Daoist talk about emptiness comes from their [desire to] nourish everlasting life; and the Buddhist talk about non-being comes from their [desire to] escape from the sorrowful sea of life and death. Something has been added to the original substance [of the mind], and therefore it is not the original emptiness or non-being any more, and thus the original substance [of the mind] has been obstructed.⁸⁰⁶

This means that although Wang Yangming recognized that the Daoist notion of emptiness and the Buddhist notion of non-being were perfect in theory, he argued that the Daoists and the Buddhists could not realize their ideas in practice.

To what degree did Wang Yangming borrow Buddhist metaphors and parables as a rhetorical technique, without being influenced by Buddhist ideas? It seems as if he sometimes merely uses the Buddhist language in this way.

Wing-tsit Chan’s main arguments in his article “How Buddhistic is Wang Yang-ming?”⁸⁰⁷ is first that, although he often visited Buddhist temples, he did not have any deep relations with Buddhists like his Neo-Confucian predecessors Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) and Zhang Zai (1020–1077). Zhang Zai studied for the Buddhist monk Changcong 常總, and Cheng Hao (1032–1085) conversed for a whole day with Buddhists in a Buddhist temple. His second argument is that Wang Yangming did not have much contact with Buddhist scriptures either. When he refers to Buddhist works, he usually uses references from Zhu Xi or other Neo-Confucian writers. Wing-tsit Chan’s most important argument is that Wang Yangming’s criticism of the Buddhist notion of the mind hit the fundamentals of Buddhism, namely the Chan Buddhist doctrine of the mind.⁸⁰⁸ In my view, Chan overlooks or reduce three aspects. First, that Wang Yangming often expressed a gradual criticism of the sudden approach, which is like the Northern Chan Buddhist stance. Wang Yangming might not have been aware of this similarity himself since he lived

⁸⁰⁶ WYMJ: 106.

⁸⁰⁷ Chan 1963b.

⁸⁰⁸ Chan 1963a: xxxviii, and Chan 1962: 210.

in South China and was possibly confronted with the Southern Chan Buddhism of sudden enlightenment more than the Northern gradualistic Chan Buddhism. Second, Wang Yangming even recognized the superiority of sudden enlightenment as expressed by Wang Ji (See Chapter 5). However, although Wing-tsit Chan is hard in his criticism of the Japanese scholars and their claim that Wang Yangming was deeply influenced by Chan Buddhism, Chan admits that there are similarities between the instantaneous realization of Wang Yangming and the sudden enlightenment of Chan, and that Wang had said “what the Buddhists called the original nature at the time when one thinks of neither good nor evil is what the Confucian school calls innate knowledge.”⁸⁰⁹ The third problem with Wing-tsit Chan’s view is that the criticism of Wang Yangming for not reading and referring to Buddhist sutras is that this was an attitude that came from Chan Buddhism itself. Therefore, this is in fact an argument *for* his Chan Buddhist influence and not *against* it. It is another matter that this text-sceptical attitude of Chan Buddhists has been exaggerated and that the sutra reading has always been frequent in Chan Buddhist monasteries and temples and still is.

To sum up, it is possible to say that Wang Yangming not only used Chan Buddhist language and metaphors to express Confucian ideas but had also adopted vital Chan Buddhist ideas and praxis (or non-ideas and non-praxis). Whether those ideas in turn were partly inherited from an earlier Daoist tradition goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

Wang Gen and the three traditions

Wang Gen identified himself with the Confucian tradition (or more precisely the *Ru* tradition). Like Wang Yangming, he did not refer to any Buddhist sutras, but to classical texts such as *The Analects*, *The Book of Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Luo Rufang also mainly referred to these classics, but compared with Wang Gen, Yan Jun was explicitly critical of the *Ruists*, holding up “the learning of the sages” (*shengjiao*) as an ideal instead. A contradiction between the *Ruists* and “the learning of the sages” is, however, not visible in Wang Gen’s thoughts.

Daoist traits in Wang Gen’s thoughts

As mentioned, Huang Zongxi claims that Wang Gen (and Wang Ji) took Wang Yangming’s teaching in the direction of Chan Buddhism. The standard history

⁸⁰⁹ Chan 1963a: xxxvii.

of Ming (*Mingshi* 明史), also written in the Qing dynasty as Huang's *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*, said that Wang Gen "was himself a wild scholar; who took the doctrine of his teacher [Wang Yangming] far away from it and went deep into the two teachings of the two masters [Buddha and Laozi]." ⁸¹⁰ Thus this official history of the Manchu dynasty added Daoism to Huang's accusation. For the Manchus who were Buddhists, the accusation of Buddhism was probably not enough.

Most scholars doing research on the Taizhou practitioners do not discuss the Taizhou practitioners' relation to the Daoist tradition. An exception is Ji Fangtong, who says a few words about Wang Gen and the Daoists. ⁸¹¹ Ji focuses on the emphasis on naturalness and spontaneity in Wang Gen's theory of self-cultivation, and furthermore notices a similarity between Wang Gen's idea about protecting the self and Daoist ideas about health care, self-care and "protection of life". ⁸¹²

As mentioned in Chapter 4, there are expressions of freedom in the thoughts of Wang Gen, which remind of expressions in Daoist literature. An annotation by Wang Gen illustrates how he creates a connection between the Way, knowledge about one's nature and an easy and free way of life. "When ignorant men and women know how to act, then there is the Way. When one is as lively as hovering hawks and leaping fish, ⁸¹³ then there is knowledge about one's nature." ⁸¹⁴ The naturalness and spontaneity of birds and fish as well as of ignorant men and women expresses the true knowledge of one's nature. I associate those expressions with "Free and easy wanderings" *Xiao yao you* 逍遥游 in *Zhuangzi*, but Wang Gen's reference is the Confucian (or rather pre-Confucian) classic *Zhongyong* 中庸.

There is another annotation expressing a similar yearning for freedom. Here various disciples of Confucius stand for different capacities and different attitudes of life. Zengzi or Zeng Dian is one of the most famous disciples of Confucius. He was Confucius' grandson and it is said that he became the teacher of Mencius. Wang Gen comments on the text of *The Analects* thus:

Zengzi's happiness at his capping ceremony and the rain sacrifice has the same meaning as Confucius telling his students that there was nothing that he did not tell them. Confucius sighed as he told them. It was simply because what his students said was wrong that Confucius acted in an unconstrained (wild) manner (*kuangchu* 狂處). For example, if Zengzi had a 'family cave' (*jiadang* 家宕 i.e. family commitments) he would be unable to go forth and act. Confucius' students could go forth and act since they did not have family

⁸¹⁰ *Mingshi*, Rulin 2, Ch. 283.

⁸¹¹ Ji 2005: 61–64.

⁸¹² Ji Fangtong refers to *Zhuangzi*, Yangshengzhu. See Ji 2005: 63.

⁸¹³ *The Doctrine of the Mean*: 12, which in turn refers to the *Book of Odes*. *The Doctrine of the Mean* says that even the sages cannot practise the knowledge, but ignorant men and woman can, and it is visible in the flying birds and diving fish.

⁸¹⁴ XZW, Ch. 3: 6b.

commitments. Confucius had family commitments but was able to go forth and act nevertheless.⁸¹⁵

The capping ceremony is a *rite de passage* of coming of age in traditional China. In *The Analects* it is connected with the rain sacrifice. *The Analects* state that in the last month of spring, Zengzi dressed in spring clothes would go to the rain altar together with five, six other young men who assumed the cap, and six, seven boys. They would bathe in the Yi River, enjoy the breeze and return home singing.⁸¹⁶ Zeng Dian's yearning has similarities with Zhuangzi and the wish of the author's alter ego to reject government service and "drag the tail in the mud" (*ye wei yu tu zhong* 曳尾於塗中).⁸¹⁷ However, Wang Gen does not link it to Zhuangzi; he just makes the comment that learning for civil service examinations and for self-cultivation are two different things:

Some scholars point out the mistakes of pursuing studies for civil service examinations. Their intentions are the same as Zeng Dian's in his disapproval of his three fellow disciples.⁸¹⁸ How could the learning of the civil service examinations be totally wrong? But it is not the way in which an authentic man could secure his self and establish his Heaven-ordained being.⁸¹⁹

Wang Gen rejects the examinations but emphasizes that the strivings of the authentic man are something different. The similarities between Wang Gen's ideas and the Daoist tradition could be understood in two ways; either Wang Gen did not want to be linked to the Daoist but to the Confucian tradition; that he lacked knowledge of Daoism; and/or that he and his contemporaries were not quite aware of any division between the two traditions of Daoism and Confucianism. Probably, the Daoist and the Confucian tradition were intertwined to such a degree in the sixteenth century that common men and women did not have any clear ideas about any differences. My impression is that when the Daoist tradition is mentioned in their writings, it is often in rather formulaic expressions such as the 'two masters' (*ershi* 二氏), referring to Buddha and Laozi without any substantial elaboration on what it meant.

⁸¹⁵ XZW, Ch. 3: 8a.

⁸¹⁶ *The Analects*, "Xian jin": 26.

⁸¹⁷ Zhuangzi, "The Floods of Autumn" (Qiu shui) 11.

⁸¹⁸ *The Analects* 11:26. Wang Gen's view on civil examinations does not in its essence differ from that of Wang Yangming.

⁸¹⁹ XZW, Ch. 3: 12b.

Wang Gen's lack of Buddhist references

As already mentioned, Wang Gen followed Wang Yangming in not quoting from the Buddhist sutras. Huang Zongxi's accusation, that Wang Gen and Wang Ji added Chan Buddhist elements to the teaching of Wang Yangming, has been criticized by modern scholars who accept his criticism of Wang Ji, but not that of Wang Gen. Scholars like Monika Übelhör admit that Wang Gen's teaching style was similar to the Chan Buddhist style, but that the similarities ended there.⁸²⁰ Both Wang Yangming and Wang Gen were charismatic personalities, and Wang Gen was famous for being able to convince people and transmit the teaching from mind to mind. It is said that among the disciples of Wang Yangming "Wang Ji was the most talented in argumentation, but [listening to him] there were those who believed and those who did not. It was Wang Gen, who with his eyebrows and eyelashes (that is, his facial expressions) made the greatest number of people enlightened."⁸²¹ Another similarity between Wang Yangming and Wang Gen was their emphasis on action, especially in the latter part of their lives. In *The Collected sayings* by Wang Gen, not much is said about Buddhism. I have only found one quotation:

Someone said that Buddhism and Daoism obtained the essence from Confucianism. Wang Gen said: 'Essence and function are identical. If they have the essence from Confucianism, they have also obtained the function from Confucianism. The function of Buddhism and Daoism comes from the essence of Buddhism and Daoism.'⁸²²

This does not provide any substantial information on his view of Buddhism or Daoism. It only explains that he regarded essence and function as identical, which is an idea derived from Wang Yangming. One might guess that he regards the essence of Confucianism as different from Buddhism, but we cannot be sure. Earlier I have mentioned that Wang Gen criticized his father for worshipping Buddhist deities in the family shrine, and that he drove them out.⁸²³ For a merchant like Wang Gen, it was a big step to become a leader of a Confucian movement since leaders of the Neo-Confucian movement had been literati scholars. It might have been easier to become a Buddhist leader, but merchants' relations to Buddhism during the Ming are understudied. Interestingly, Timothy Brook mentions a merchant from Huizhou who was involved in charitable works. He compiled a gazetteer of Pingshan Hall, a monastery outside Yangzhou that received support from salt merchants,⁸²⁴ but

⁸²⁰ Übelhör 1986: 118.

⁸²¹ MRXA: 710.

⁸²² WXZQJ: 5. *Yong* could also be interpreted as 'application'.

⁸²³ XZW, Ch. 2: 5b.

⁸²⁴ Brook 1993b: 219.

in general merchants were not involved in Buddhist patronage projects, according to Brook.⁸²⁵ Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) had been travelling in China for a while dressed as a Buddhist monk. Realizing that this dress did not give him the respect he strove for, he changed to a Confucian robe. In a similar way, Wang Gen probably found it more prestigious to be a Confucian than a Buddhist. However, we cannot be sure that it was a kind of instrumental behaviour to link himself to the Confucian rather than to the Buddhist tradition. He might have been convinced that Confucianism revealed a deeper truth than Buddhism. However, it is reasonable to assume that his interest in the mind and its functions was inherited from other Neo-Confucians, who in turn were inspired by the Buddhist discussions.

To look for more concrete Buddhist influences on the Taizhou practitioners, it is better to proceed to Wang Gen's second son, Wang Bi.

Three “Buddhist” poems by Wang Bi and Han Zhen

As his *Chronological Biography* states, Wang Bi was not only the inheritor of Wang Gen's teaching but also a disciple of Wang Ji and Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574).⁸²⁶ Among his best friends were Luo Rufang and Jiao Hong. *The Chronological Biography* tells that he was an extraordinary child from his birth and that people said he was even more worthy than his father. The sign that he had an extraordinary character was a wart behind his left ear, compared with his father, who had fleshy warts in his palms. This was also regarded as a lucky omen, but not as good as having one higher up on the body. In *The Chronological biography* of Wang Gen, it is said that Wang Bi was born the same year as Wang Gen had his enlightenment dream.⁸²⁷

⁸²⁵ Brook 1993b: 217–223.

⁸²⁶ There are some questions regarding his biographies. It is unclear when and by whom his *Chronological Biography* was written, and his *Brief Biography* (*xingzhuang* 行狀) added to the Works by Wang Bi contains many mistakes. The Works by Wang Bi is a cooperative work by Lin Na (dates unknown) and Wang Yuanding 王之垣 (dates unknown). According to Wang Yuanding, the disciples compiled a record 24 years after Wang Bi's death. This was based on the notes taken by Wang Zhiyuan. After this Cheng Pan 程泮 printed and published the works (*Yiji* 遺集) which were edited by Lin Na 林訥. Lin Na came from Fujian province, but because he became a disciple of Wang Bi he moved to Taizhou and died in Dongtai County at the age of 84. According to *The Brief Biography* of Wang Bi, he followed his father to Zhejiang in 1519 (when he was 9) and studied in the mansion of Wang Yangming. This would be one year before Wang Gen became the disciple of Wang Yangming. But Wang Yangming spent this year in Jiangxi where he subdued revolts against the Emperor. Wang Yangming would not return to Zhejiang until 1521, the year when Wang Bi according to the chronological biography would have become the disciple of Qian Dehong and Wang Ji. Therefore, this biography must be incorrect. See Wu 2009a: 195–196.

⁸²⁷ WXZQJ: 206.

Beside his biographies, other sources of his life are the writings by Wang Dingyuan and the grave inscription written by Jiao Hong. The latter evaluated him positively. He tells us that Wang Gen ordered Wang Bi to study not only for Qian Dehong and Wang Ji but also for Yuzhi Faju 玉芝法聚 (1492–1563). Yuzhi was a Chan monk and a good friend of Wang Ji. This monk also met Wang Yangming once in Kuaiji (today's Shaoxing) in 1525.⁸²⁸

It is said that Wang Bi had more than 200 disciples,⁸²⁹ one of whom was the potter Han Zhen 韓貞 (1509–1585). Wang Bi wrote several poems to him, and Han Zhen also wrote poems to Wang Bi. The following poem entitled “Harmonizing Lewu’s⁸³⁰ rhyming couplet ‘Making an effort to reach the accomplishment of Yinzi.’”⁸³¹ In this poem Wang Bi reveals Buddhist sentiments and thoughts:

When the mind is restrained it becomes virtuous.
 When it is restrained and becomes no-mind it knows nature and Heaven.
 Waiting for the time when my effort has become mature,
 I will blend salt and plum in harmonious proportions in large and small tripods.⁸³²

Not a worry in their hearts
 When there is work to do, still idling and sleeping.
 I cannot help laughing at worldly people, willingly enduring their bondage,
 I do not know when they will be free.⁸³³

Unfortunately, the original poem by Han Zhen is not to be found. In the title, he refers to a man from Nanjing, Yin Mai 殷邁 (1512–1581). He became a presented scholar in 1541, the same year Wang Gen died, and after this made a formidable career. He had knowledge about Chan Buddhism, and if the Taizhou practitioners did not read Buddhist sutras, this man did. He read several sutras, for instance *The Śūraṅgama-sūtra*, and reflected about them in his poetry.⁸³⁴ For some reason both Han Zhen and Wang Bi tried to emulate his spiritual achievement. In one poem (*Binghuai* 病懷 Yearning in sickness), Yin Mai mentions *Xinzhai*, and it is likely that it is Wang Gen he refers to, which probably means that they knew each other. The last two lines in the

⁸²⁸ Wu 2009a: 199. Araki Kengo 荒木見悟 has written about the relationship between Yuzhi and Wang Yangming. Wang Bi wrote a letter to him, which has a Chan Buddhist flavour according to Wu Zhen.

⁸²⁹ Cheng 1996: 171.

⁸³⁰ Lewu 樂吾 ‘Enjoy the self’ is Han Zhen’s studio name.

⁸³¹ Yinzi is Yin Mai 殷邁 styled Shixun 時訓. This poem consists of two *jueju* 絕句 verses of four lines, each containing five or seven characters. It follows a strict tonal pattern and rhyme scheme.

⁸³² This is probably a metaphor for good governing, where big and small vessels (officials) are used to create a good balance of salt and sour (sour plums).

⁸³³ WXZQJ: 262.

⁸³⁴ *Jiangnan Gazetteer* 163: 5a.

poem by Wang Bi are interesting because they seem to contradict the often accentuated this-worldliness of Confucianism. They point in the direction of the iconoclast Li Zhi, who argued that ultimately Confucians want to leave the world too.⁸³⁵

A rhyming couplet by Wang Bi to Luo Rufang reveals Buddhist sentiments and possibly also Daoist sentiments:

Wasting an immense time searching for the Way,
you my Master have become a man of the mind.
Only searching for the true nature in the realm of enlightenment,
thus going into emptiness for an exquisite discussion
The tree is full of red flowers fresh and distinct in color,
a bright moon quiet without dust.
Pleasantly surprised, I bragged about that I reached the understanding not too
late.
Luckily, this soup bowl is renewed every day.⁸³⁶

This poem clearly shows Buddhist influences. The interest in the mind, and the search for one's true nature and enlightenment are clear examples. There is also the Buddhist metaphor of dust, here on the bright moon symbolizing the mind. On a daily basis Wang Bi works diligently to come to a deeper understanding of himself. Daily renewal echoes formulations in the Confucian Classic *The Great Learning*. However, the word "emptiness" (*xu* 虛) used in the poem above has Daoist connotations, although it is a synonym of the word *kong* (空), the latter used to translate the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).⁸³⁷ Both concepts have a similar meaning to the concept of non-being (*wu* 無) which has stronger Buddhist connotations than *xu*.

As I have argued above, the Taizhou practitioners and people in the Ming probably did not make a clear distinction between Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. If they mentioned Daoists, it was immortality seekers or priests using different means such as talismans for their clients. Wang Bi's strivings does not seem to be Daoist. Discussing the poem by Wang Bi above, it should be noted that the Chinese term for enlightenment (*wu* 悟) existed in the Chinese language before the Buddhists came to China. In *The Book of Documents* it had the meaning 'to awake', 'to realize',⁸³⁸ so it is understandable that the Buddhists used the term. Later the term became a hallmark of Buddhism; however, several Neo-Confucians such as Wang Yangming, Wang Ji, Luo Hongxian and Wang Gen strove for 'enlightenment' and describe experiences of it. It cannot be proved whether in this poem Wang Bi made a statement that he strove for a Buddhist kind of enlightenment by using the term *wu*. I think it is likely that he was aware of the tension between

⁸³⁵ Billeter 1979: 208.

⁸³⁶ WXZQJ: 239.

⁸³⁷ Soothill 1975: 276.

⁸³⁸ Karlgren 1972: 35. (58 j).

the Daoist term ‘emptiness’ and the Buddhist term ‘enlightenment’, and that the terms express the emotions of a man who has no answers but is searching with an open mind.

Han Zhen came from a potter family and grew up under difficult circumstances in Xinghua (興化) in Yangzhou prefecture. His parents, uncle and brother all fell ill and died early, which made him become a Buddhist. However, when he met the woodcutter and Taizhou practitioner Zhu Shu 朱恕, he became involved in the Taizhou movement. He then followed Zhu Shu to Taizhou and Wang Gen entrusted him to his son Wang Bi. Although the family did not have money to send Han Zhen to school, he made his own brush and learned to write characters from early years.⁸³⁹ However, the poem above by Wang Bi reveals the typical Taizhou scepticism of textual studies. In his opinion, the truth is not to be found in the scriptures of the three Masters Confucius, Laozi and Buddha but in meditational practices and in tones and melodies of poems and songs. The three teachings were obviously a hot topic of discussion in the sixteenth century, which the following section written by Han Zhen also proves:

The three teachings have the same heart, there is nothing ancient nor present about it.⁸⁴⁰ Have confidence and fill it with Heaven and Earth (*qian* 乾 and *kun* 坤). Restrain [the mind] and it will contain deep transformations. The only thing Confucius taught people was silent knowledge, and Zeng Shen merely tried to understand sounds.⁸⁴¹ Everyone can follow this way until he reaches the principle (*li* 理), there is no need for searching in the papers of the three Masters.⁸⁴²

Yan Jun’s “Discourse on the three teachings”

Yan Jun (1504–1596) enjoyed a long life and influenced several Taizhou practitioners deeply. The most striking example is how he cured Luo Rufang’s disease. At a mature age of 80, he wrote a text titled *Discourse on the three teachings* (*Lun Sanjiao* 論三教). This text could be regarded as his spiritual testament. Yan Jun discusses how it all began:

In the three teachings (*sanjiao* 三教), the Perfect Men⁸⁴³ and the original orthodox schools obtained their achievements through oral transmission of

⁸³⁹ YJJ: 159.

⁸⁴⁰ Here I have chosen to translate *xin* 心 as heart, instead of mind which would also be an alternative.

⁸⁴¹ A disciple of Confucius.

⁸⁴² YJJ: 173–174.

⁸⁴³ Zhuangzi says in the Chapter “Free and easy wandering” that “The Perfect Man (*zhiren* 至人) has no self; the Holy Man (*shenren* 神人) has no merit; the Sage (*shengren* 聖人) has no fame.” This is a translation by Burton Watson, see Watson 1968: 32.

personal insights (*kouchuan xinshou* 口傳心受). Having obtained a personal insight, everyone followed his own life ambition, either high or low, his spirit and skills, and the expected three advancements that he accumulatively achieved year by year.⁸⁴⁴

Personal understanding is thus fundamental in all traditions and, in the view of Yan Jun, to depart from personal insights is to deviate from the Way. Those personal insights have been transmitted orally. He continues by discussing the essentials of the teaching of the sages:

As for the learning of the sages, the advancements follow three levels: to rule the world and shape one's destiny,⁸⁴⁵ to serve Heaven and establish ones Heavenly-ordained being,⁸⁴⁶ to stand in awe of Heaven (*weitian* 畏天)⁸⁴⁷ waiting for ordinance.⁸⁴⁸

Although Yan Jun describes himself as “a widowed peasant”, several classics echo in the text: *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Mencius*, *The Book of Songs*, *The Analects* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Perhaps his knowledge about them was not attained through conventional schooling, but through discussions and lecturing at meetings. Nevertheless, he seems to have made a rather conscious choice by starting with the very beginning of *The Book of Changes* and the initial lines of *The Book of Mencius*.⁸⁴⁹ The first diagram of *The Book of Changes* describes *Qian* 乾 or Heaven. Those who understand Heaven are said to mount a carriage driven by six dragons and in this way “drive through the sky”. Those who understand Heaven are able “to establish their Heavenly-ordained being”. This is a quotation from *The Book of Mencius*, which in its entirety runs:

He who exhausts his mind to the utmost knows his nature, and when he understands his nature he understands Heaven. He can preserve his mind, and nourish his nature, and in this way, he serves Heaven. He does not suffer from premature death or live a very long life but cultivates himself and waits for it (i.e. what comes in life, his destiny). Thus he establishes his own Heavenly-ordained being.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁴ YJJ: 15.

⁸⁴⁵ *The Book of Changes*.

⁸⁴⁶ *The Book of Mencius*, Li Lou 1:2. 盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。殀壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。

⁸⁴⁷ *The Book of Songs*.

⁸⁴⁸ *The Doctrine of the Mean*: 14. 故君子居易以俟命，小人行險以徼幸。

⁸⁴⁹ To begin with the initial lines of *The Book of Changes* and *Mencius*, is most likely a tradition followed by Yan Jun.

⁸⁵⁰ *The Book of Mencius*, Li Lou 1:2. 盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。殀壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。

That means that such persons have first worked very hard and exhausted their minds and, in that way, come to an understanding of their own nature. This self-understanding precedes the understanding of Heaven. The citation from Mencius expresses the idea that a person who accepts the will of Heaven and waits for the ordinances of Heaven can fulfill his Heavenly-ordained potential, and Yan Jun would add “driving through the sky and controlling Heaven”. Paradoxically, the person who accepts his destiny can shape it. The dual mode of actively working for one’s goal and passively accepting the will of Heaven can be seen in *The Book of Songs* – although not as explicitly as in *Mencius* – where the notion “stand in awe of Heaven” (*weitian* 畏天) is found for the first time. The song “Wo jiang” (我將) says:

I bring my offerings, a sheep and an ox, may Heaven accept them!
 I imitate, follow and observe the statutes of King Wen
 Daily making the Kingdom secure
 King Wen he who gives prosperity
 Has descended on the right side to enjoy them (i.e. the offerings)
 Day and night, I revere the power of Heaven
 and thus preserve it.⁸⁵¹

The Doctrine of the Mean stresses the passive attitude of the superior man waiting for appointments of Heaven. Heaven decides the mission of every man, and the only thing of importance is to wait for Heaven to point it out. *The Analects* combines the awe of Heaven from *The Book of Songs*, with the idea of waiting for the appointments of Heaven in *The Doctrine of the Mean* by saying: “There are three things of which the superior man stands in awe. He stands in awe of the ordinances of Heaven. He stands in awe of great men. He stands in awe of the words of sages.”⁸⁵² Yan Jun follows Mencius’ idea that the sage does not accept the will of Heaven in a passive way. He shapes his own destiny, the world and even Heaven. In Yan Jun’s words:

Once he has achieved these advancements at the three levels, the sage would be able to establish his teaching according to this spiritual way so that he could make Heaven, Earth, human beings and all beings live, and create an arrangement which nourish them to flourish.⁸⁵³

This is Yan Jun’s conclusion about the sage and the Way of the Sages. Yan Jun then proceeds to describe the Buddhist path (literally the Way of the Buddha), and the Daoist path (literally the Way of the Immortals), saying:

To mention the teaching of Buddha (*fojiao* 佛教), there are the vehicles (i.e. programs) of practice: the Śrāvakas (lit. disciple as a voice-hearer), the

⁸⁵¹ *The Book of Songs*, Wo Jiang 1.

⁸⁵² *The Analects*, Ji Shi 8. Legge’s translation.

⁸⁵³ YJJ: 15.

pratyeka-Buddhas (lit. enlightened solitary realizer) and bodhisattva (lit. enlightened being) (*shang zhong xia cheng* 上中下乘).⁸⁵⁴ The great vehicle (of bodhisattva) has four categories of wisdom: the wisdom that extinguishes the production of selfhood; the wisdom of establishing pure works; the wisdom of doing what should be done; the wisdom that hinders this being from rebirth. To speak of the teaching of immortals [Daoism] (*xianjiao* 仙教), there are four categories: heavenly immortals (*tianxian* 天仙), human immortals (*renxian* 人仙), earthly immortals (*dixian* 地仙), and divine immortals (*shenxian* 神仙). These four categories, from the introductory to the higher, demand such exquisite efforts and skills that minor mistakes could lead to big differences, and that students of other teachings could not easily achieve these advancements.⁸⁵⁵

Here, Yan Jun acknowledges that there are persons following the Daoist and Buddhist ways who reach high levels of spiritual development. However, even those Buddhists and Daoists who have reached the highest level of their paths do not equal the Way of the sages. Yan Jun refers to longevity practices and strivings to become an immortal within the Daoist tradition. What exactly was meant by these different categories in the Ming is difficult to say, but they must go back to earlier Daoist ideas of inner alchemy (*neidan* 内丹) and ideas of attaining the rank of a celestial immortal through meditation, breathing and other techniques.⁸⁵⁶

The alchemist Ge Hong (ca. 280 – ca. 343) mentions, three kinds of immortals: terrestrial immortals, who enjoy supernatural powers such as freeing themselves from the corpse; those who take up residence in Kunlun (the axis of the world); and “divine immortals”, who can rise into Heaven in bodily form.⁸⁵⁷ In the text *Ganying pian* 感應篇, he stresses the importance of renouncing evil and accumulating virtue. Three hundred good deeds are needed to become an earthly transcendent *dixian*, and 1,200 to become a celestial transcendent *tianxian*.⁸⁵⁸ The aim of *neidan* is described as achieving immortality or a state of union with *Dao*. This is variously imagined as achieving the rank of a celestial immortal.⁸⁵⁹ Yan Jun continues:

Capable men [understanding] the spirits and Heaven were seldom born. Even though those at the highest level [within Buddhism and Daoism] came into

⁸⁵⁴ According to the Buddhist monk Hanshan Deqing, the first two categories, that is, the vehicles of śrāvakas and pratyeka-Buddhas or the lower and middle paths, are too attached to the doctrine of being. See Hsu 1979: 147. This seems to be a Mahayanaist critique of the Hinayanaists. Hanshan classified the teachings in five vehicles (*wucheng* 五乘), that is, the vehicles of Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, Śrāvakas, Heaven and human beings. The first one refers to Mahāyāna, the next two to Hīnyāna, ‘Heaven’ refers to Daoism and the last (human beings) to Confucianism. See Hsu 1979: 151.

⁸⁵⁵ YYJ: 15.

⁸⁵⁶ Baldrian-Hussein 2008: 764.

⁸⁵⁷ Robinet 1997: 87–88.

⁸⁵⁸ Bell 2008: 949.

⁸⁵⁹ Baldrian-Hussein 2008: 764.

being and accomplished some enterprises for the world, they could not have heard anything about ancient sages and their reputations. They could never surpass the great teaching of Confucius, which includes the way of *The Book of Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, and *The Book of Changes* where the innermost teaching is found. The teaching of silent knowledge (*moshizhi* 默識知) suffices. Humaneness will guarantee seriousness and presence (*li* 蒞), and [will protect] the learning of being active in rituals which creates happiness. It teaches [us] to be stable and have an [inner] residence where one approaches stillness, reaching [the mental state of] being still in one's mind and nature, in one's Heavenly destiny, in the way of humaneness, and in one's spiritual transformations. This is the smooth straightforward way, when one changes both the knowledge and the principles [one should follow] and exercises daily renewal. Therefore it is said: "If you follow this way, even if you are dull, you will become intelligent, and even if you are weak you will become strong."⁸⁶⁰ Furthermore it is necessary to say: "If one controls oneself for one day, the whole world will become humane".⁸⁶¹ "If one controls oneself for seven days, there will be great advantages."⁸⁶² How could that be misunderstood?⁸⁶³

For Yan Jun, this way is clear and easy both to understand and to follow, and it is adapted to all kinds of people. Yan Jun then proceeds to the question of mixing the Confucian and the Buddhist traditions.

There are those in the world who mix the Way of the two masters (*ershi* 二氏, i.e. Kongzi and Buddha). Why should one turn inwards in introspection to one's mind for self-knowledge? One should be conscious of one's own mind. What is false and what is true? Who should you be close to and who should you keep at a distance?⁸⁶⁴

How can we understand these questions posed by Yan Jun? In this paragraph Yan Jun is not arguing against a mixing of Confucianism and Buddhism. What he does is to warn them of not being aware of the reasons for self-examination. From this utterance we can conclude that, according to Yan Jun, there were two distinct traditions of Confucius and Buddha, and that there were those in his time who mixed them. Yan Jun is aware that there was criticism of mixing traditions, syncretism, hybridization or whatever we choose to call it. We can infer that there were those who argued for essentialism of the traditions and those who were against it or perhaps did not care, very much like the situation in academia today. It should be noted that Yan Jun does not say that there are those who mixed the Ways of Confucius and Laozi. I believe that a mixing of the *Ru* and Daoist traditions was in general not perceived as a problem by commoners, at least not in the sixteenth century.

⁸⁶⁰ *The Doctrine of the Mean* 22.

⁸⁶¹ *The Analects*, Yan Yuan 1.

⁸⁶² *The Book of Changes*, Bi 1, Bo 1 and so on.

⁸⁶³ YJJ: 16.

⁸⁶⁴ YJJ: 16.

In this text Yan Jun refrains from passing any judgement on whether this “mixing” of Confucianism and Buddhism is good or bad. He only states the fact that there were such people. What he emphasizes as the important issue is to be aware of what is going on in the mind. He does not answer the last two questions about truth and with whom one should associate either. We might surmise that if one is conscious of what is going on in the mind, then there will be knowledge about what is false and what is true, and perhaps also an experience of who it is good to be close to and who it is better to distance oneself from.

Yan Jun goes on talking about the five traditional Confucian virtues humaneness, righteousness, propriety, ritual, and trustworthiness. To them he adds music, which is related to joy. Music was an integral part of Confucian rituals.

Human beings [are defined by] humaneness, [as for humaneness] knowledge comes first; Appropriateness [is defined by] righteousness, [as for righteousness], ritual comes first; musical instruments [are defined by] music, [as for music] joy comes first; loyalty [is defined by] trust, [as for trust] courage comes first. Subsequently, to be loyal and firm is enough in handling affairs; is there anyone who is not proud of himself while feeling happy? To be gentle and amiable is enough when making use [of things], reason and appropriateness is enough [to be able to] reach all states,⁸⁶⁵ bright knowledge can protect oneself.⁸⁶⁶

The goal of these virtues is to be happy and to be able to protect and secure oneself. Yan Jun continues Wang Gen’s teaching of joyous learning and of self-protection. I think we must understand this last section as the answer to the questions above about why one should turn inwards and examine oneself, what is true and what is false, as well as the question about who to approach. Yan Jun’s idea is that one should turn inwards and introspect oneself in order to be able to acquire the qualities of the authentic person. These qualities lead to happiness and that the practitioner protects himself. If he concentrates on what is going on in his mind, he is following the teaching of the sages. Yan Jun seems to argue that if you approach yourself you will find the truth. To

⁸⁶⁵ An alternative translation might be “all regions”.

⁸⁶⁶ From the beginning the notion *mingzhe baoshen* had the meaning that the wise person did not do anything that would put himself in danger. The earliest textual example of the expression is found in *The Book of Songs* (Greater Odes of the Kingdom, the masses of the people) 既明且哲，以保其身. “Intelligent is he and wise, Protecting his own person” (Legge’s translation.). The Sui and Tang Confucian Kong Yinda (574 – 648) interpreted it as “They know clearly what was good and evil, and they could distinguish between right and wrong. Thus they used their wise knowledge to choose safety and get rid of peril, to avoid disaster and defeat.” The Jin dynasty Daoist Ge Hong (283–343) explains in the chapter 仁明 of his famous work *Bao Pu Zi*: “Mingzhe baoshen in the Daya chapter [of the Book of Songs] means a break with the earlier tradition (絕縱 juezong)”, something that must have been a turning point in a good direction according to him.

mix or not mix the three traditions is not the question for Yan Jun. He lets his followers do as they like, but they should be aware that the learning of the sages is enough.

If an authentic person in the world has these five qualities, he can tame himself and become a sage, and [then] he can control himself and become a spirit. The spirit will cover and drape the universe.⁸⁶⁷ When he is happy his hands and feet will start to dance [unconsciously]⁸⁶⁸ without knowing his allotted span of life. Does the spirit have an end or is it endless?⁸⁶⁹

The question whether the spirit is endless is rhetorical; of course, this is the view of Yan Jun and his contemporaries. The authentic person (the *junzi*) will develop into a sage if he acquires the five qualities, mentioned in the preceding quotation. The authentic person is therefore someone who is striving, while the sage has already reached the goal. Through self-control, the authentic person will become a spirit covering the whole universe, and he will feel deep joy. To distinguish the authentic person as a person who is earnestly striving from the sage who has already reached the spiritual goal, was probably a common understanding and not unique for Yan Jun.

Human beings are the mind of Heaven and Earth. This mind creates humaneness. With the emergence of humaneness comes bright knowledge. Wisdom can be expressed in a roundabout way, and brightness can be hidden. Therefore it is said: “ - From the brightest of brightness, from the wisest of wisdom, all beings are miraculous and can grow simultaneously. The human life can obtain free courses and humaneness can be achieved from what the mind desires.”⁸⁷⁰

Yan Jun has a very optimistic view of the possibilities human beings have if they follow the Confucian ideal of humaneness, which in its turn will lead to knowledge.

⁸⁶⁷ This might be an allusion to in this text Zhuangzi. If one can handle and control the Way, it will be possible for the mind to cover the whole universe.

⁸⁶⁸ *The Book of Mencius*, Li Lou 1: 27. Zhu Xi used the same expression “unconsciously dance with their hands and feet” but in a different context. He describes different levels of reading *The Analects*. Some are totally unconcerned, others understand a sentence or two, and some love it. But there are also those who “unconsciously dance with their hands and feet”, after having read it. See *Jinsi lu* 近思錄 (SKQS ed.) 1:15B or *Jinsilu* Juan 3: 38. (*Jinsi lu* is translated as “Reflections on Things at Hand” by Wing-tsit Chan. A literal translation of Zhu Xi’s title would be “Records of approaching thoughts”. I understand it as coming closer to the thoughts which are in the mind.) However, both in Yan Jun and in Zhu Xi, it is an expression of reaching an insight about oneself, and the expression is both emotional and physical.

⁸⁶⁹ YJJ: 16.

⁸⁷⁰ YJJ: 16. The beginning of the quotation (自明其明) is from *The Doctrine of the Mean* 23. It also turns up in *The Great Learning* 5. In *The Doctrine of the Mean* it is about those who are bright thanks to their sincerity, in *The Great Learning* about rulers who make themselves bright.

Cosmos gives birth to human beings. Originally there was no division between the three teachings or between various skills, and in the beginning, there were no sages that made a distinction between three teachings or between various skills.⁸⁷¹

Yan Jun argues that the division into three different teaching did not exist from the beginning but developed eventually, because persons with extraordinary skills advocated their own way.

It was only because, after the sage's death, persons of extraordinary abilities acted on their own authority, everyone promoting that which he knew and according to his abilities. Therefore, human nature is sincere and exquisite and non-activity can produce accomplishments, and [those] accomplishments follow the abilities [of people]. People can act freely in accordance with their mind, and everyone follow his own interest, knowledge and capacity, and thus he establishes his [own] teaching. When teachings became elaborate, they were esteemed as a tradition (*dao* 道). It is a fact that the teaching was divided into three teachings that became dominant between Heaven and Earth; and all established their own purposes to distinguish from each other.⁸⁷²

In the passage above, Yan Jun gives a description without evaluating the different traditions, just saying that they were free to develop their own understanding and practice. In this way, the three traditions became three distinct ways with their own systems of thoughts and praxis. However, after this Yan Jun continues by satirizing of how the practices of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism have developed. The initial comment that the Confucian strives for fame and wealth is a common internal Neo-Confucian criticism of how wrong practices have developed within their own tradition.

Furthermore, there was the division of different practices. The practice of the Confucians (*ru* 儒) is reading books and writing essays to gain fame and wealth; the practice of the Daoists (*xian* 仙) is using talismans to mislead vulgar people;⁸⁷³ the practice of the Buddhists (*fo* 佛) is to delude the common people by reciting sutras and eschewing mantras. Those three teachings have become popular, and they are all accepted and employed. Those practitioners carry on the various techniques of other schools and professions, and in their way earn their clothes and food. Who does not know that the orthodox teaching of the Great Way (*dadao zhengxue* 大道正學) just stands in the centre of the world?⁸⁷⁴ And that with it we can establish ourselves and others, understand ourselves and others, change the customs of world⁸⁷⁵ and treat all people with the same

⁸⁷¹ YJJ: 16.

⁸⁷² YJJ: 16.

⁸⁷³ 'Vulgar' is a translation of *shisu* 世俗, which has also the meaning of 'secular', but it cannot have that meaning here.

⁸⁷⁴ *The Book of Mencius*, Jinxin 1:21.

⁸⁷⁵ *The Book of Mencius*, Teng Wen Gong 1:5.

humaneness!⁸⁷⁶ Alas, men by practice grew apart wider and wider to the extent that they cannot be held together.⁸⁷⁷

Yan Jun regards the three traditions as something that is not the same as the Great Way. Even Confucianism is something distorted, and they all have come into being because of material desire. In satirical form, Yan Jun relativizes the three teachings compared with the Great Way, which stays above them all, or rather is “established in the centre of the world” (*zhong tianxia er li* 中天下而立) to use Yan Jun’s words.

I am a widowed peasant who has received my masters’ introductions and education. I have gone through 54 years of exercises and have become rather strong in my mind and spirit. In my discourse, I have incorporated all essences from the Three Teachings and various skills and reached the ultimate goal of handling the Heavenly Way.⁸⁷⁸

Yan Jun claims he has studied the three teachings and learnt the essential parts from them. Finally, he finishes his spiritual testament and declares that he will disappear but promises that others will take up his mission and continue where he ended. However, although Yan Jun declared his own disappearance at 80, he lived until he was 96.

This happy writer [Yan Jun], now 80 years old, has enjoyed learning and achieved some accomplishments and now would like to celebrate my lonely journey. I will leave without any trace. Later, there will be more scholars to rise, who are expected to understand my teaching with their intelligence.⁸⁷⁹

In this text, Yan Jun starts by talking of the advantages of the learning of the sages. Then he proceeds to a description of how the three teachings came into being, which has a rather neutral descriptive tone. Finally, he satirizes them all. What conclusion can we draw about his view on the three teachings? Obviously, he is rather critical of all the three teachings. At the same time, he recognizes that he learnt something from them all. It seems he distinguishes between “the learning of the sages” and the later *Ruists*, who according to him have distorted the original teaching. He shows a distance to the practical reality of the three teachings and that there is something else, which stays in the middle and which he calls “the Great Way” (*dadao* 大道). His satirical language has similarities with Zhuangzi but also points in the direction of Li Zhi.

In comparison with Wang Gen, there is a difference and a more critical attitude to the *Ru* tradition. If Wang Gen regarded it as “our Confucian

⁸⁷⁶ Allusion from *The Analects*.

⁸⁷⁷ YJJ: 16.

⁸⁷⁸ YJJ: 16.

⁸⁷⁹ YJJ: 16.

tradition”, Yan Jun did not. Yet, earlier in the same text Yan Jun praises the practical side of the *Ru* tradition. He said: “If you follow this way, even if you are dull, you will become intelligent, and even if you are weak, you will become strong.” Therefore, it is possible to assume that he was more anchored in the *Ru* tradition than in Buddhism and Daoism. Although, Yan Jun himself was probably not concerned about propagating one tradition over another, he has in fact a more positive evaluation of the *Ru* tradition compared with Buddhism and Daoism.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, writers in the late Ming quite often ridiculed the hypocrites and the conventional understanding of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Jokes and satire are characteristics of some Taizhou practitioners, which they had in common with Zhuangzi’s allegories and Chan Buddhist stories, as well as with Ming popular literature. As has been shown, all three traditions are satirized in Yan Jun’s writings. This satirical tradition would be followed by Li Zhi’s in his writings and in his “performances” in real life. In 1585, when he moved to the Zhifoyuan monastery, he shaved his head and had a temple built. In the temple, he installed an image of Confucius which he worshipped. In his way of acting he was not mocking religion, as Hou Wailu claims,⁸⁸⁰ but mocking the belief in the categories of the three traditions. Wang Yangming, Yan Jun and Li Zhi all tried to go beyond the conventional categories. Li Zhi was an outsider and a deep pessimist, whereas Wang Yangming and Yan Jun were insiders, working within society. Yan Jun tried to establish an alternative organization.

He Xinyin

He Xinyin wrote a short text with the title “the Learning of the Way” (*daoxue* 道學). In this text he says that “the learning of the sages” is “vast and original”. He compares the nature of man which will reach the Way with the water in the Yangzi River uniting with the sea at the end of its journey. “To learn the greatness and the centrality is the learning of the sages”.⁸⁸¹ Confucius had a retrospective attitude, looking back at an earlier system of the Zhou kings which he wished to restore. He is talking of the sages Yao, Shun and Yu, who are described as living in a primeval time, and that they are worth emulation. He Xinyin and Yan Jun both hold up the ancient sages, but they do not argue for going back to their time: they want to make the ability of the sages a striving for themselves and their contemporaries, perhaps not very different from Confucius.

⁸⁸⁰ Hou 2005 (1987): 468.

⁸⁸¹ HXYJ: 39.

He Xinyin had some contacts with Buddhists and Daoists. He visited the ninety-year-old Daoist physician Ruan Zhonghe 阮中和, who lived in central Jiangxi (Qingjiang 清江) to learn medicine and the secrets of longevity from him. Ruan was famous for having stopped a serious fever epidemic. He Xinyin returned to Qingjiang later and connected with other Daoists and Buddhist at this place.⁸⁸²

Like Yan Jun, He Xinyin also laments that people, studying the learning of Confucius were deceived by the immortality seekers and the Chan Buddhists.⁸⁸³ Compared with contemporary *Ruists*, Confucius kept to the practical affairs of daily life and did not discriminate birds, beasts and barbarians, since they all had blood and breath. Furthermore, he did not discriminate the practitioners of immortality and meditation, since all are equal under Heaven, argues He Xinyin.⁸⁸⁴

Luo Rufang

If Wang Gen, Wang Bi, Yan Jun and He Xinyin were to some degree influenced by Buddhism, Luo Rufang definitely was, since he grew up in a Buddhist family. His mother was a devout Buddhist and practised meditation.⁸⁸⁵ He received his elementary education from her.⁸⁸⁶ Inspired by Xue Xuan 薛瑄 (1389–1464) and his ideas about how to recover the original purity of the mind, he decided to pursue this goal.⁸⁸⁷ He stayed at a Lintian Buddhist monastery, where he meditated daily. To read Huang Zongxi literally, he placed a mirror and a basin of clear water in front of him, trying to make his mind as clear as the mirror and the water.⁸⁸⁸ This might be a metaphor for meditation in general, and Huang Zongxi most likely received this information on Luo Rufang from *The Records of All Confucians* (*Zhuru Xuean* 諸儒學案) by Liu Yuanqing 刘元卿 (1544–1609), who uses the same expression. Nevertheless, due to his zealous ambition, Luo became sick in his mind as though burning inside. To cure his sickness, his father gave him a copy of Wang Yangming's *Moral Education*, which gave him new inspiration. After this, he began his preparation for the civil service examination. It was in 1540, that he met Yan Jun, an event which would be a turning point for him. When he passed a Buddhist monastery in Nanchang, Jiangxi, he noticed a sign

⁸⁸² Dimberg 1974: 42–43.

⁸⁸³ HXYJ: 34–35.

⁸⁸⁴ HXYJ: 37.

⁸⁸⁵ Wu 2009a: 314.

⁸⁸⁶ DMB: 975–978. For information on the life of Luo Rufang see also YJJ: 82–84, MRXA: 760–763, Cheng 1996: 292–385, Wu 2009a: 313–323.

⁸⁸⁷ For Xue Xuan, see Koh 2011 *passim*.

⁸⁸⁸ MRXA: 760.

promising the immediate saving of burning minds. Thinking it was an advertisement for some famous doctor, Luo Rufang went to the place mentioned, and found that it was Yan Jun lecturing. This was when Luo Rufang was 25.⁸⁸⁹ Their meeting which resulted in Luo Rufang becoming Yan Jun's disciple, has already been discussed in Chapter 5. My aim in that context was to describe how Taizhou learning was transmitted and if there were any straight transmission lines within the Taizhou movement. The result of my investigation was that there was no straight transmission line. As I also mentioned in the same chapter, Luo Rufang explained to Yan Jun that he was able to remain unmoved by thoughts of life and death, gains and losses, but Yan Jun told him that he could only control his passions and that this was not the way to realize humaneness.⁸⁹⁰

The description in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* by Huang Zongxi is slightly different from the biography of Yan Jun written by He Yisun. Huang Zongxi might have had access to He Yisun's biography, but this is not certain. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Huang Zongxi was inconsistent in his criticism of Wang Ji and Wang Gen for being influenced by Chan Buddhism. In fact, Huang Zongxi was not in all respects critical of Chan Buddhism himself. This is also noticeable in his description of Luo Rufang. Huang praises his skill in oral argumentation and that he could make even uneducated people reach instant realization of the Buddhist doctrine (*fofa yiqie xiancheng* 佛法一切现成).⁸⁹¹ According to Huang Zongxi, Luo Rufang had grasped "the essence of patriarchal Buddhism" (*zushichan zhi jing* 祖師禪之精). He furthermore claims that the differences between Buddhism and Confucianism are 'infinitesimal' (*haoli* 毫釐), and that those who accused Luo Rufang of being a Buddhist did not understand him properly but listened to rumours discrediting him. According to Huang Zongxi, Luo Rufang read many Buddhist sutras when he was young, but in his older days he returned to the "learning of the sages" and Confucian ethics.⁸⁹²

Yu-yin Cheng argues that both Yan Jun and Luo Rufang were very probably influenced by a Buddhist Sūtra entitled *Sūtra on the great indebtedness to parental love* (*Foshuo fumu enzhong jing* 佛說父母恩重經), which is from the Tang Dynasty (618–907).⁸⁹³ This work was translated as a response to the Confucian criticism of Buddhism for lacking in filial respect of parents.⁸⁹⁴ It describes the mother's pain during pregnancy and childbirth,

⁸⁸⁹ DMB: 975.

⁸⁹⁰ YJJ: 82.

⁸⁹¹ MRXA: 762.

⁸⁹² MRXA: 762.

⁸⁹³ Cheng 1996: 344. Cheng claims there is a relation between this sutra and some songs in *the Book of Songs*, which also praise parental love, and describes mothers' hardships. See Cheng 1996: 339–340.

⁸⁹⁴ The text might have been a Chinese forgery. Michibata Ryōshū has made a study of it. See Cheng 1996: 345.

her work and worries for her children as well as the lack of attention from her son when he marries. The same theme turns up in “The Song of encouraging filial piety” (*Quan xiao Ge* 勸孝歌) by Yan Jun,⁸⁹⁵ and in Luo Rufang’s interpretation of the Six Maxims by the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang.⁸⁹⁶ The Daoists also produced their filial scriptures under Buddhist influence.⁸⁹⁷ Cheng further adds that Luo Rufang had studied the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (*Huayan Jing* 華嚴經) in his youth, as a part of the Buddhist influence of his family tradition.⁸⁹⁸ She argues that Luo “synthesized Confucian socio-ethical values with a version of Chan experience.”⁸⁹⁹

However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Luo Rufang also showed interest in Daoism. According to Liu Ts’un-yan, Luo Rufang had studied “alchemy and dual cultivation in terms of sexual life” for the Daoist master Hu Qingxu 胡清虛.⁹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Although Wang Gen was critical of worshipping Buddhas and did not read Buddhist sutras, his teaching style resembles that of Chan Buddhist masters. This is also a similarity with Wang Yangming. The critical attitude towards unreflective text reading in general is something they share with radical Chan Buddhists, although most Chan Buddhists did read sutras and still do.

Wang Gen’s second son, Wang Bi, expresses strong endeavour for enlightenment, which sounds very Buddhist. The Buddhist language of Wang Bi reflects an intellectual approach to Buddhism without any beliefs in Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. A possible reason for this interest in Buddhism is that he received his learning from Wang Ji, who was well read and one of the most intellectual of all the disciples of Wang Yangming. Wang Ji thoughts had strong Chan Buddhist traits. Compared with Wang Gen, Yan Jun and He Xinyin, Luo Rufang is the only Taizhou leader who experienced a pious Buddhist upbringing. A general impression is that the Taizhou practitioners

⁸⁹⁵ YJJ: 58.

⁸⁹⁶ Cheng 1996: 338.

⁸⁹⁷ For example *Scripture as spoken by Taizhang Laojun concerning recompensing parents for their great kindness* (*Taishang Laojun shuo bao fumu enzhong jing* 太上老君說報父母恩重經) from the 8th century, *Scripture as spoken by Xuangian Shangdi concerning recompensing parents for their great kindness* (*Xuantian Shangdi shuo bao fumu enzhong jing* 玄天上帝說報父母恩重經) and *Scripture according to the Ultimate True Oneness concerning recompensing parents for their great kindness* (*Taishang Zhenyi bao fumu enzhong jing* 太上真一報父母恩重經) the two latter from the 14th and 15th century. See Cheng 1996: 347.

⁸⁹⁸ Cheng 1996: 347.

⁸⁹⁹ Cheng 1996: 351.

⁹⁰⁰ Liu 1970: 308.

became successively more aware of Buddhist ideas and praxes and tried to find a way to deal with the different traditions and the challenge of similarities as well as discrepancies between them. If this thesis had included Jiao Hong and Zhou Rudeng, this would probably have been even more evident. Yan Jun and Li Zhi reached a relativistic understanding of the three teachings, and both used satire as a genre to communicate this idea; yet Yan Jun has a more positive evaluation of the *Ru* tradition compared with his evaluation of Daoism and Buddhism.

The Taizhou practitioners used different concepts when talking of the Confucian tradition. The reason might be that they did not have a commonly accepted theory. Wang Gen uses the expression ‘our Confucian tradition’, but never claims explicitly that Confucianism differs from Buddhism and Daoism. Following Wang Yangming, he only argues that essence and function are identical. In other words, the application or praxis of a tradition is the very essence of it. Ignoring theoretical speculations, he focused on what he regarded as the important thing, and that is what a person does. Wang Gen identifies himself with the *Ruists*, and possibly wanted to do so because the social stratum he belonged to was in general regarded as inferior to the social layer of literati scholars. One of his aspirations might have been to change this attitude.

He Xinyin criticized the contemporary *Ruists* but still considered Confucius to have the most profound insight. Yan Jun had a similar view. They all praised ‘the learning of the sages’ as the Way to follow, but Yan Jun does not equate it with the Way of the *Ruists*. He describes a development in the text “Discourse on the three teachings”, which started with oral transmission, and that some persons had certain insights and developed different skills.⁹⁰¹ In his view, the three traditions did not exist originally. They developed when their skills became elaborate and they wanted to manifest their learning. Yan Jun describes both positive and negative sides of the practices related to the three traditions. It is in relation to the negative sides that he uses the word *ru*. The *Ruists* read books and wrote essays to gain fame and wealth. The positive aspect of the way of Confucius, as explicated in *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *The Book of Changes* is that it is easy to understand. Everyone can follow it, compared with the ways of Buddha and Laozi which are more demanding and only accessible for a few, in the view of Yan Jun. At the same time, he proclaims that he had learnt something from all three traditions. It seems as if, consciously or unconsciously, he separates ‘the learning of the sages’, which is the original, from the *ru* tradition, which is a deviation from the original and not concordant with the Confucian ethical. Reading between the lines of Yan Jun’s text, there is criticism of the *Ruists* for lacking humaneness and not following “the way of the sages” anymore. To follow Yan Jun’s line of thought, one possibility

⁹⁰¹ For a translation of Yan Jun’s text *Discourse on the three teachings* see Chapter 7.

would be to use the concept “the learning of the sages” for the original Chinese cultural tradition before “Daoism” and “*Ruism*” were shaped into separate traditions and call the later “Confucian” tradition the *Ru* tradition, preferably from the second century AD onwards. Yan Jun, however, is not explicit about such usage.

One conclusion from the writings of Yan Jun is that the blending of Daoism and Confucianism was not an issue, since they were not separated in the beginning, but evolved from a common ground. The issue in his time was the mix of the two teachings of Buddha and Confucius. Although transmitted to China already 1500 years earlier and thoroughly sinicized in the sixteenth century, Buddhism was probably still a foreign tradition in the view of the inhabitants of the Ming Empire. However, as already mentioned, even this mix is not an issue for Yan Jun. For the Taizhou practitioners in general, the main question is to protect oneself, calm one’s mind and strive for humaneness.

As for the Buddhists, the negative aspect is seen in mechanical, non-reflective sutra-recitation, and the Daoist priests give people false hopes by using magical spells. However, despite all those negative aspects of the three traditions, Yan Jun argues that they have something to contribute, and in a self-confident manner he declares that he has picked out their essential parts, openly showing his eclectic attitude. In the end, Yan Jun seems to be convinced that he has reached a thorough understanding of himself, and then it is possible to throw the traditions away and enter a state which is beyond language and discussion.

As has been shown, there are Daoist and Buddhist influences on the Taizhou movement. For example, they assimilated the Buddhist and Daoist discourse on the mind and its relation to emotions, ethical behaviour and the human body as well as meditational praxis. To determine if this makes the Taizhou practitioners more “religious” than Neo-Confucianism in general is very difficult, since other Neo-Confucians had a similar discourse and praxis but, as already mentioned, their religiousness reflects other social layers than the literati layer which was dominant in earlier Neo-Confucianism. Like the Buddhist lay movement, the Taizhou movement covered a broad social spectrum. However, although there are some similarities with popular Buddhism and Daoism, the Taizhou practitioners criticize worship of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Daoist deities. I therefore find it difficult to claim that the Taizhou movement corresponds to popular Buddhism or popular Daoism - if it is at all possible to separate popular Buddhism and Daoism from Buddhism and Daoism in general. It is rather that intellectual Daoism and intellectual Chan Buddhism, combined with a simple lifestyle, go popular with the Taizhou movement.

9. Officialdom fights back

This chapter describes the criticism of the Taizhou movement and some incidents conducive to its decline at the end of the sixteenth century. Officials at different levels within the imperial government reacted against the activities of the Taizhou practitioners. Questions I focus on here are the reasons the officials had for criticizing them and the measures taken against them that were fatal for their movement. Researchers have not dealt much with the decline of the Taizhou movement, being preoccupied with the initial stages and the earlier Taizhou leaders and trying to grasp their main ideas. However, there seems to be a consensus that a decline was taking place at the end of the sixteenth century. Yu-yin Cheng, for instance, recognizes that it was evidently a demise, but she calls for more research on the topic and especially how Taizhou learning went under cover and transformed itself into literary criticism exemplified by Li Zhi, influencing the genre of drama.⁹⁰² It would probably also be relevant to look at the interface between Taizhou ideas and art. Several scholars have been interested in Zhang Juzheng's ban on the free academies in 1579 and the general decline of the Wang Yangming movement. The best-known work on the ban is Meskill's study of the academies in Ming China.⁹⁰³ Meskill's main idea is that the academies were regarded as centres of political opposition.

Officials at both the highest political and administrative level such as Zhang Juzheng, and magistrates at the local level acted against the Taizhou practitioners. Their actions and reactions led to the imprisonment of Yan Jun and He Xinyin. Luo Rufang was not imprisoned, but his activities obstructed his career and finally put an end to it.⁹⁰⁴ Scholars today argue that the practitioners of the Wang Yangming movement who suffered most were those belonging to lower social strata without protection from officials in high positions within the administration. Contrary to such arguments, I claim that the wind blows harder at the top of a mountain, and that it was often safer to stay on lower levels of society. What are more important than social background are, however, in my view, ideas and actions. Provocative ideas

⁹⁰² Cheng 1996: 450. As for the drama genre she mentions Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), author of *The Peony Pavilion*.

⁹⁰³ Meskill 1982: *passim*.

⁹⁰⁴ Luo Rufang has no entry in DMB, but Huang Zongxi has. Wu Zhen 2009 has one chapter about him and Yu-yin Cheng also devotes one chapter to Luo Rufang in her dissertation from 1996.

and organizations are more dangerous than belonging to a more vulnerable social stratus, whatever that might be. In this respect, I agree with Meskill, but I would like to add that the religious character of the Taizhou movement created fear among rulers and officials. At the end of the chapter, I will briefly discuss whether it is possible to talk of religious persecution.

Well-known and influential officials who criticized the Taizhou practitioners were the Ming writer and intellectual Wang Shizhen, the Donglin scholar Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612) and Xu Fuyuan 許孚遠 (1535–1604). Their criticism has shaped the view of the Taizhou movement. Although Huang Zongxi modified Wang Shizhen's criticism, he was still influenced by it. I have, however, found that some of those scholars had difficulty in hiding their admiration of the Taizhou practitioners. This applies at least to Gu Xiancheng.

Xu Fuyuan was the teacher of Liu Zongzhou, who in his turn was the master and godfather of Huang Zongxi, so this exemplifies how criticism of the Taizhou practitioners is inherited in a succession line which goes from the Donglin scholar Xu Fuyuan, via Liu Zongzhou to Huang Zongxi. Xu became a presented scholar in 1562 and was engaged in the learning discussion movement in Nanjing at the same time as Luo Rufang's disciple Zhou Rudeng.⁹⁰⁵ In 1592, Xu Fuyuan had a debate with him on human nature, also in Nanjing, where a series of conferences was held. While Zhou advocated Wang Ji's idea that human nature is neither good nor evil, Xu Fuyuan argued that human nature is good, which is in line with the thoughts of Mencius.⁹⁰⁶

Initially, Luo Rufang had a rather smooth career. He became a presented scholar in 1553, served as magistrate in Taihu, and later he received a position as secretary in the Ministry of Justice and after that as a prefect in Ningguofu (Anhui Province). However, after a discussion with Zhang Juzheng, Zhang forced him to fill a vacancy transferring him to Yunnan as a Surveillance Vice Commissioner.⁹⁰⁷ This must be regarded as a demotion. Luo was successful in his work in the area overhauling the irrigation system and pacifying local inhabitants or “exterminating the Mang people” (*mie mang* 滅莽),⁹⁰⁸ as Huang Zongxi expresses it. Luo was then forwarded to Administration Vice-Commissioner. In 1577, he returned to Beijing to give reports. There he held

⁹⁰⁵ Huang Zongxi regards Zhou Rudeng as a disciple of Luo Rufang in *The Records of Ming dynasty Confucian Learning*, but according to Zhao 1994: 176–194 (Ch. 10, “Reassessing Chou Ju-teng's Place in Late Ming thought”), and Peng 2001: *passim*, Zhou Rudeng was a disciple of Wang Ji, and in that case was not a Taizhou practitioner. But as I have argued above, the lines between the groups are porous and it is very difficult to determine who belongs to which group. See Ch. 5.

⁹⁰⁶ On-Cho Ng 2001: 15–21.

⁹⁰⁷ MRXA: 760. Unfortunately; Huang does not give the year for this event. A Surveillance Vice Commissioner was something like a police chief today.

⁹⁰⁸ The Mang people are regarded as one of the 56 ethnic groups in the People's Republic of China. Today the largest group of Mang people live in Vietnam.

lectures in the Guanghui temple (廣慧寺). Those lectures were highly popular, something which displeased Zhang Juzheng. As a result, Luo was impeached and had to resign from office.⁹⁰⁹ This was only two years before Zhang forbade the private academies, which he did in 1579.

Li Zhi, who was inspired by Taizhou learning, also had severe problems with legal authorities. Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Li Zhi were all sentenced and punished for different crimes. With He Xinyin it went so far as to be killed in prison, and as for Li Zhi, the historical records tell us that he committed suicide in prison in 1602. I will only briefly describe the judicial case of Li Zhi since he stayed outside the actual Taizhou movements and their activities. However, the reactions of the authorities against his ideas and actions illuminate the general attitude of officials in the late Ming. Furthermore, he is one of the earliest sources of information on the case of He Xinyin.

Criticism and persecution of the Taizhou practitioners

In this section, the main issues addressed are the level in society from which the strongest contemporary criticism of the Taizhou practitioners came, that is, from those who had reason to feel threatened by the Taizhou movement. I will also describe what kind of political and legal measures that were taken against them, and the general result of the criticism and political restrictions.

The highest level of the government: three Grand Secretaries

The Grand Secretary Xia Yan 夏言 (1482–1548) lived approximately during the same period as Wang Gen (1483–1541), but there seems to be no connection between him and the Taizhou movement either in a positive or a negative way.⁹¹⁰ This changed with his follower Yan Song 嚴嵩 (1480–1565), Grand Secretary from 1542 to 1565, who felt there was good reason to be watchful over the Taizhou practitioners. He became a presented scholar in 1505 and was appointed Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy in 1536. In 1546, he was appointed Chief Grand Secretary, and after this his political influence was at its peak for approximately a decade.⁹¹¹ It is said that He Xinyin was involved in a conspiracy against Yan Song, and because the plot was successful, He Xinyin was hated by Yan Song's party. This hatred was the

⁹⁰⁹ MRXA: 760.

⁹¹⁰ DMB: 527–531.

⁹¹¹ DMB: 1586–1591.

reason why He Xinyin fled from place to place for the rest of his life.⁹¹² In this plot, He Xinyin cooperated with the Daoist Lan Daoxing 藍道行, who according to Huang Zongxi was good at connecting with spirits through planchette writing (*jishu* 乩術).⁹¹³ Lan Daoxing was imprisoned and died in prison (most likely killed), while He Xinyin managed to escape. Yan Song's younger colleague, Xu Jie 徐階 (1503–1583) became a rival of Yan Song, and replaced him after a successful rebuilding of the Emperor's residence hall in 1561. After this, Yan Song was accused of corruption and his son was sent into exile.⁹¹⁴ At the end of his life, Yan Song was degraded to the status of a commoner.

During the time of Xu Jie, the situation for the Taizhou practitioners ameliorated. Xu Jie was influenced by Wang Yangming and was a close friend of other prominent students of Wang Yangming.⁹¹⁵ During the time Xu Jie was Grand Secretary, academies flourished, and lectures were held in the capital.⁹¹⁶ This, however, changed dramatically under the next Grand Secretary, Zhang Juzheng. He shared some ideas with the Taizhou practitioners, but in practice became one of their hardest enemies.

Zhang grew up in a family which belonged to the military category. He became provincial graduate in 1540 and presented scholar in 1547. He was Grand Secretary and leading minister during the Longqing reign (1567–1572) and the first years of the Wanli era (1572–1620). Xu Jie, who recognized Zhang's talent, might have been responsible for his promotion. However, at the beginning of his career, Zhang had also established good relations with Yan Song. No matter whether it was cleverness or pure luck, Zhang returned home to recuperate from an illness and in this way avoided being associated with Yan Song. On returning to the capital he was appointed an instructor at the National University. An important factor in his successful career was that he served as a tutor for the future Longqing Emperor (reign: 1567–1572). Both the Prince and the eunuchs in his household appreciated Zhang, and they would later support him in entering the highest position of power. Zhang had an extremely quick career, from grade 5A to 1B in two years.⁹¹⁷ In 1568, Zhang submitted a powerful program of reform in six points, which aimed to strengthen the Ming government. The first point, which aimed to reduce discussions, went right against the Wang Yangming movement as well as the Taizhou movement. Zhang's admiration for Wang Yangming's thoughts

⁹¹² de Bary 1970: 180.

⁹¹³ MRXA: 704. He has no entry in DMB. He was from Shandong and was interested in the learning of Wang Yangming and a good friend of Xu Jie. *Mingshi* mentions him in 列传 195.

⁹¹⁴ The name of Yan Song's son is Yan Shifan 嚴世蕃 (1513–1565).

⁹¹⁵ The disciples were Nie Bao and Ouyang De. For more information about them, see Chapter 3 and 4.

⁹¹⁶ DMB: 570–576.

⁹¹⁷ In the Nine Ranks system, 1B was the next highest level and 5A was in the middle. See Hucker 1985: 4–5.

might have changed over the years. At least he was hostile to the activities they were engaged in. Huang Zongxi mentions that Luo Rufang returned from a mourning period for his father. When Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng asked him about “his studies in the mountains”, Luo replied that he had been reading *The Analects* and *The Great Learning* and found them slightly more interesting than before. Zhang was silent, and most likely upset that Luo could make such a comment about one of the most revered Confucian Classics as if it was possible to evaluate it. These Confucian Classics had formed the basis of the education and meritocratic system that had taken Zhang to the top of political power. Luo’s comment about them was a statement that the Classics, the political establishment and Zhang Juzheng’s strivings were all unimportant. It was after this that Zhang transferred him to Yunnan as a Surveillance Vice-Commissioner.⁹¹⁸ Obviously, this was a way to get rid of him and stop his teaching activities.

As early as in 1570, Zhang Juzheng started prohibiting education organisers from establishing academies, from gathering followers to conducting philosophical discussion. A similar edict was issued in 1575,⁹¹⁹ and on February 17, 1579 came the abolition of all private academies in the Empire.⁹²⁰ Zhang Juzheng regarded them as centres for political opposition. Similar efforts had been made in the 1530s, but without result, so the academies flourished during the Jiajing (1521–1567) and Longjing eras. Zhang’s order was followed up in 1580 and 1581, which indicates that the first prohibition did not have the intended effect.⁹²¹ His inclination towards legalism has been noted by many scholars.⁹²² Wang Shizhen pointed out that he liked the legalism of Han Feizi (c. 280–233 BC),⁹²³ claiming that Zhang advocated the idea that “law has precedence over the view of the king” (*fa hou wang* 法后王), and that he praised the talented statesman and general Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) known for his skill as a strategist.⁹²⁴ Zhang Juzheng’s policy broke the heart of the activities of the Taizhou practitioners, and even though he did not kill He Xinyin personally – men at the highest level of power seldom do – the fact that he hated him was not without consequences. However, not only government officials but also scholars and men of the literati world disliked the Taizhou practitioners. One example is Wang Shizhen and his criticism of He Xinyin and Yan Jun.

⁹¹⁸ MRXA: 760.

⁹¹⁹ Meskill 1982: 138. Meskill refers to an edict written in 1570, *Guoque* (Kuo Ch’üeh) 國權 (page 4128) written by Tan Qian 談遷.

⁹²⁰ Meskill 1982: 138. (Daming huidian 大明會典 Ch. 78)

⁹²¹ DMB: 53–61.

⁹²² See Crawford 1970: *passim*.

⁹²³ The text *Han Feizi* goes back to the mid 3rd century BC.

⁹²⁴ Wang Shizhen, *Jiajing yi lai neige shoufu zhuan*, Juan 7, “Zhang Juzheng zhuan” part 1 (張居正傳上): 19a. See Deng 2004: 359. Wang also favoured the ideas of Shen Buhai 申不害 (354–337 BC), whose ideas were linked to Han Feizi.

The Ming scholars Wang Shizhen and Gu Xiancheng

Wang Shizhen criticized both He Xinyin and Yan Jun for several reasons. According to Wang, they both used the teaching movement for selfish reasons, stirring up people with their activities. In his essay: “The knight errants in Jianghu during the Jiajing and Longqing eras” (*Jialong Jianghu daxia* 嘉隆江湖大俠),⁹²⁵ he blames them for damaging the whole teaching movement inaugurated by Wang Yangming. In the words of Wang Shizhen:

During the Jiajing and the Longqing reigns (1521–1567 and 1567–1572), the learning of the Way flourished throughout the country. The reason why it became a malpractice was that they (i.e. Yan Jun and He Xinyin) used the learning discussion movement as a tool for their heroism, and that they in turn used this heroism as a pretext for satisfying their selfishness in a corrupt and violent way.⁹²⁶

Wang Shizhen did not hold Wang Gen in high esteem, but he did regard him at least as slightly better than Yan Jun, whom he accused of giving the learning discussion movement the kiss of death:

The shift from Dongyue [Wang Yangming] to Wang Gen had not yet become too bad, but the change from Wang Gen to Yan Shannong [Yan Jun] was like stinking fish and rotten meat, it was impossible to restore it.⁹²⁷

In Wang Shizhen’s opinion, Yan Jun and He Xinyin were equally disastrous, but in different ways. He Xinyin was an educated man who went astray. Wang’s criticism of Yan Jun focuses on two aspects. First, that he was an uneducated man and a bad writer; second, that he had a lenient view of desires, and more specifically desires for money and sex. Moreover, Wang accuses Yan of having indulged in sexual malpractice himself.

Another styled name of Yan Shannong was “the man from the State of Chu”.⁹²⁸ When reading the Classics, he did not know how to punctuate the sentences,

⁹²⁵ Jianghu was not only a place name, but sometimes even referred to secret societies.

⁹²⁶ “Jialong Jianghu daxia” in HXYJ: 143. The passage was previously translated in Kenneth Hammond’s dissertation on Wang Shizhen. See Hammond 1994: 23. The text is taken from *Yanzhou shiliao houji*: 35.

⁹²⁷ HXYJ: 143.

⁹²⁸ The State of Chu included most of the present Provinces of Hubei and Hunan, and parts of Sichuan, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Jiangxi Provinces. I presume the name “The man of Chu” referred to the fact that Yan Jun was from this part of China (Jiangxi). The royal family of Chu descended from the State of Chu according to the historian Sima Qian. The disciples of Yan Jun could have had such connotations when picking the name “Churen” for Yan Jun.

and he did not recognize many characters either. He tended to make eccentric and depraved statements and would give strained interpretations of the meaning of the texts. I am surprised that occasionally there are a few words that are in accord [with the Confucian tradition], although [in general his texts] gives the impression that [he wrote them when] drunk.⁹²⁹ If he wanted to go somewhere, he would send his disciples there first, to propagate and show up his ideas. Once he arrived [himself], those who were thoughtless and did not know much or know just a little would hasten forward, attend his lectures and try to come close to him. Every time he would say: “That people enjoy and have an insatiable desire for money and women comes from their nature. What they do in haste is triggered by their natural instincts, and there is no way to stop them.”⁹³⁰

To understand why Wang Shizhen criticized Yan Jun and He Xinyin, we need to know more about Wang and his agenda. It is surprising that a person like Wang criticized two radical proponents of the Taizhou movement. Wang was himself criticized for heterodox ideas due to his interest in Buddhism and Daoism. He also became a devotee of a young female Daoist, Tanyangzi 曇陽子, to whom he dedicated a long biography. According to Ann Waltner, Wang’s devotion to this teenage girl shows the “floating norms of gender hierarchy, marriage and family system”.⁹³¹ Would not such a person be open-minded when it comes to a less conventional view on sexuality? Furthermore, Wang did not stay on the side of political power. Although he came from a distinguished family and quite early in life became a prominent scholar-official, his fate and strong ideas gave him a complicated relation to men of political power. His father was a high official, serving as governor of Shanxi Province,⁹³² when he was appointed Supreme Commander of Zhiliao to defend the North and Northeast of Beijing. When the imperial forces suffered a defeat by the Mongols in April 1559, Wang Shizhen’s father was held responsible and sentenced to death. Wang Shizhen appealed for mercy; nevertheless, his father was executed by imperial order in 1560. It is said that behind the harsh punishment of his father lay the antagonism between Wang Shizhen and the Chief Minister Yan Song, who wanted to destroy Wang’s family.⁹³³ Wang’s relation to Zhang Juzheng was friendly to begin with. They both took their Palace examination in 1547, Zhang ranking 12, and Wang 83. However, as Zhang’s political career developed, their friendship gradually faded and turned into mutual hostility. Wang’s initial promotions as well as his later setbacks were probably all directed by Zhang.⁹³⁴ During a long period while frequently

⁹²⁹ Hammond 1994: 25. He refers to 《弇州史料後集》 vol. 21, Ch. 35:31a. Hammond translates the passage slightly differently. See Hammond 1994: 25.

⁹³⁰ HXYJ: 143. Originally in: 《弇州史料後集》 vol. 21, Ch. 35:30B–34B.

⁹³¹ Waltner 1987: 105.

⁹³² Wang Shizhen’s father was Wang Yu 王忬 (1507–1560).

⁹³³ DMB: 1400.

⁹³⁴ DMB: 1401. For a careful study of Wang Shizhen’s position in the literati society see Hammond’s dissertation, 1994. For the relation between Zhang Juzheng and Wang Shizhen see Sun 2006: *passim*.

transferred from his positions, Wang became interested in Buddhism and Daoism and a devotee of Tanyangzi, or Wang Daozhen 王燾貞 (1558–1580) as her real name was.⁹³⁵ She was a daughter of a friend of Wang Shizhen.⁹³⁶ Tanyangzi learnt religious tracts by heart. It seems that they were both Buddhist and Daoist texts. When her fiancé died, a separate house was built for her in her father's residence in Beijing, where she engaged in worship and received her disciples.⁹³⁷ It is said that close to the site of her fiancé's grave a shrine (*kan* 龕) was built, and in 1580, she entered it and ascended to immortality.⁹³⁸ Besides Wang Shizhen, another of her disciples wrote a biography of her.⁹³⁹

The roles of Wang Shizhen, Tanyangzi and Yan Jun turn ingrained ideas about religion, social class and gender upside down. A common idea is that the Neo-Confucians had a conservative view of women and women's role in society. Theresa Kelleher argues, like so many scholars have done before, that this was because Confucianism was a patriarchal religious tradition.⁹⁴⁰ After marriage the woman's bond to the new family entailed that after her husband's death she still had duties to his family and his ancestors. These social restrictions hardened when Neo-Confucian ideas become influential, she claims. "Though women were encouraged not to remarry, the social sanctions against those who did, in classical and medieval Chinese history, were not nearly as heavy as they were to become in later Chinese history under the influence of Neo-Confucianism."⁹⁴¹ The view on women in Daoism is generally described at diametrically opposite way. In works on Daoism the Daoist classic *Daode Jing* is frequently cited and especially its praise of the "Mysterious Female". Barbara E. Reed has a typical comment "Taoism view even women's body and sexuality positively".⁹⁴² In line with this, one might expect that the female Daoist Female Tanyangzi had an ideal far from the standard Neo-Confucian morally exemplary women as described in Neo-Confucian biographies praising chaste women. However, as Waltner has shown in her research on Wang's biography of her *Tanyang Dashi Zhuan* 曇陽大師傳 (Biography of the Great Master Tanyang), this woman embodies the ideal of the chaste widow, or rather exceeds these ideals by being a chaste fiancée. She never married the man she was betrothed to, and, contrary to the opinions of her family, she did not want to marry someone else. Her moral

⁹³⁵ Tanyangzi has an entry in DMB: 1425–1427.

⁹³⁶ DMB: 1426. Tanyangzi's father was Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (1534–1611). Like Wang Shizhen, he did not get on well with Zhang Juzheng.

⁹³⁷ DMB: 1426.

⁹³⁸ DMB: 1426.

⁹³⁹ This biography is entitled: *The Biography of the Immortal Master Tanyang* (*Tanyang xianshi zhuan* 曇陽仙師傳) and written by Fan Shouji 范守己 (*jinshi* 1574)

⁹⁴⁰ Kelleher 1987: 135.

⁹⁴¹ Kelleher 1987: 144.

⁹⁴² Reed 1987: 172.

character is one reason why Wang Shizhen adores her, and he praises her ascetic practices, which were extreme, including not eating grain for five years and meditation for twenty days at a stretch.⁹⁴³

There are different possible explanations of Wang Shizhen's appraisal of Tanyangzi and his criticism of Yan Jun. One is that, as a representative of the literati layer, Wang incorporated the moral attitude of this segment of society, which was formed by Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism during Song and Ming, despite his attraction towards this Daoist woman. As in the case with his criticism of Yan Jun, he described Zhang Juzheng's indulgence in carnal debauchery, at least if we are to believe Wang Xijue's biography of Wang Shizhen.⁹⁴⁴ The educational level of Wang Shizhen's family was higher than both Zhang Juzheng's and Yan Jun's. Zhang's grandfather and father were military men but became impoverished. Zhang Juzheng had been successful in the examinations, but probably still had a feeling of inferiority. Both Wang and Zhang were aware of their difference in background which Zhang admitted in public.⁹⁴⁵ However, the main difference lay in the fact that Wang was interested in art and poetry while Zhang was not; he was wholeheartedly engaged in politics. It is tempting to argue that Wang, who was aware of his cultural capital both despised men of a "rawer" character, like Zhang and Yan and connected their lack of cultural refinement with low moral standards. In line with this, Wang's criticism of Yan would be a question of cultural self-confidence and not a question of affiliation with Daoism or Confucianism. Another explanation would be that, in the time of late Ming, there were no differences between the three traditions of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism on moral issues. That the female Daoist Tanyangzi also embodied ideas of ascetic strictness would support the latter alternative. It would be possible to combine the two explanations, arguing that as an exponent of the literati layer, Wang embodied the moral values of his social background, and a part of its moral values was a strict view on desires, no matter whether the persons in question were of Buddhist, Daoist or Confucian inclination. A third explanation would be that both Wang and Tanyangzi were exceptional cases, and in some way, they obviously were; nevertheless, it is quite likely that the view on ethics did not differ as much between Buddhists, Daoists and Confucians during the Ming as we tend to believe today. This conclusion might be extended to pre-Ming times as well but is a question outside this thesis.

Another common view of Daoism is that it was more connected to the popular level of society than to the higher levels of literati scholars. This is

⁹⁴³ Waltner 1987: 108. She also had a pet snake (hulong 護龍) for her own protection. See DMB: 1426. In other words, we have a man who hates other men's sexuality and adores a chaste woman, who cherishes a snake as her favourite pet.

⁹⁴⁴ Waltner 1987: 107.

⁹⁴⁵ Waltner 1987: 107.

also true of Buddhism, and if people of higher strata of society became Buddhists and Daoists, they were usually women, according to common arguments. Tanyangzi, who had a literati background, would fit into this scheme as a woman. However, the picture is most likely much more complicated, which Wang Shizhen is a very good example of. Yan Jun, who was a commoner, should accordingly probably be a Buddhist or a Daoist, but he was more a Confucian than a Daoist or a Buddhist, although he is rather eclectic, as most Taizhou practitioners were. (See my argumentation in Chapter 7). Without any examination degree in his luggage, he is much less educated than Wang Shizhen.

We might wonder if Wang Shizhen had some sort of personal inclination to be attracted by a teenage girl with strong charisma, but it is not easy to find any substantial information on his relations with women, whether his mother, wives, concubines or daughters. About his mother Kenneth Hammond has the short comment: “His mother’s surname was Yu”.⁹⁴⁶ The only information on his mother in the official History of Ming is that she mourned his father.⁹⁴⁷ Hammond, however, tells us that she followed Wang Shizhen to Beijing when his father was staying there.⁹⁴⁸ The most emotional writing related to a woman beside Tanyangzi is a poem about his daughter, revealing his mixed feelings when he leaves her for Beijing to take part in the Metropolitan examinations. The poem is silent about his feelings about leaving her mother.⁹⁴⁹

The art historian Richard Barnhart has also found contradictory traits in Wang Shizhen’s thoughts; on the one hand he has a favorable attitude to the “wild and heterodox” painters,⁹⁵⁰ on the other hand he criticizes the learning discussion movement and the Taizhou practitioners. Barnhart explains the contradiction in this manner: “. . .the realm of art occupied a separate sphere, and / . . ./ the categories of scholarship, art, literature, and philosophy had such different statuses, goals, traditions, and ideals that they did not closely overlap.”⁹⁵¹ Hammond does not believe in this; on the contrary, he argues that Wang Shizhen was consistent, and that “What unites his view of literature and art with his view on the philosophical *jiangxue*⁹⁵² is just this, that where writers and artists succeeded in mastering the positive models of the past and transforming them into original creative styles of their own, the practitioners of *jiangxue* abandoned the cultural tradition, did not steep themselves in the Classics, and took their own, undisciplined impulses as the guide to correct

⁹⁴⁶ Hammond 1994: 74.

⁹⁴⁷ *Mingshi*: Ch. 287.

⁹⁴⁸ Hammond 1994: 75.

⁹⁴⁹ Hammond 1994: 76.

⁹⁵⁰ The painters referred to are, for instance, Wu Wei 吳偉 (1459–1508) and Zhang Lu 張路 (ca. 1490–1563).

⁹⁵¹ Barnhart 1993: 391.

⁹⁵² That is, the learning discussion movement.

behavior.”⁹⁵³ I would suggest that he was not as consistent as Hammond argues. Wang Shizhen might have harboured a more antagonistic view on “heterodox” ideas in his early career, than he had after the hard experiences he went through during the latter part of his life, facing the fact that Tanyangzi was posthumously condemned for witchcraft and that he himself, Wang Shizhen’s brother and Tanyangzi’s father were accused of heterodoxy in 1581 since they all became her disciples.⁹⁵⁴ However, we know nothing about this. What we do know is that Tanyangzi obviously went too far in her ascetic endeavours, and that her impact on important intellectuals of her time was too deep. For a ruler it might have been a goal to prevent women from indulging in sexual frivolity, but the other extreme, which Tanyangzi exemplifies, was not acceptable either. In this example, we clearly see how different levels of orthodoxies clash. It was the Supervising Secretary Niu Weibing 牛惟炳 (dates unknown, *jinshi* in 1577)⁹⁵⁵ who accused Tanyangzi of witchcraft *yaowang* 妖妄. A few days later, the censor Sun Chengnan 孫承南 (dates unknown)⁹⁵⁶ repeated the charges adding that Wang Shizhen’s text about her seduced men’s minds.⁹⁵⁷ Whether the two men were following the instructions of the Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng or possibly the instructions of the Emperor is difficult to say. At this time, Zhang’s own position became unstable due to criticism of him. He would probably have been dismissed by the Wanli Emperor very soon, but since he died already in 1582 this never happened. In 1584, the Wanli Emperor confiscated all his property and his family members were purged. Nevertheless, from the Censorate or even higher levels of the imperial government, formulations on heterodoxy included persons like Tanyangzi and her disciples including Wang Shizhen, his brother and her own father. What was perceived as a threat might have been a growing uncontrollable cult of this woman, disruptions of hierarchal order and ideas not congruent with ancestral obligations. Since entering Chinese soil, Buddhist celibacy has been regarded as a kind of unfilial behaviour. As a leading intellectual, Wang Shizhen’s formulations on heterodoxy were different. For him, identification with the *shidafu* ideal (士大夫), that is, the ideal of the scholar officials made him despise and criticize men like Yan Jun, a criticism which was harmless, at least when it came to his own position and career, but his relation to Zhang Juzheng, his “stubbornness” or “integrity” – whatever we choose to call it – had more serious implications.

In my view, Wang Shizhen was inconsistent in his admiration of the wild painters and his criticism of Yan Jun and He Xinyin, but the reason was not that art and philosophy occupied two different spheres. Wang Shizhen

⁹⁵³ Hammond 1994: 225–226.

⁹⁵⁴ Wang Shizhen’s brother was named Wang Shimou 王世懋 (1536–1588).

⁹⁵⁵ Niu Weibing has no entry in DMB but is mentioned in *Mingshi*: Ch. 232.

⁹⁵⁶ No entry in DMB.

⁹⁵⁷ Waltner 1987: 109.

understood clearly that it was dangerous to be associated with those people, and in a vain attempt to avoid persecution he criticized them for something which pertained to himself. That he associates them with the Daoist rebellions Five Pecks of Rice and the Yellow Turbans underscores this fear.⁹⁵⁸ He probably drew the correct conclusion that the actions and the organization of the Taizhou practitioners would be regarded as a stronger threat by the imperial administration compared with individual artists who wanted to express themselves in a free manner.

Gu Xiancheng (1550–1612) is another scholar beside Wang Shizhen who is critical of Yan Jun and He Xinyin. Gu is regarded as the founder of the Donglin group and a follower of the School of Principle.⁹⁵⁹ Gu wrote a text entitled “Small commentary on fasting of the mind” (*Xiao xinzhai zhaji* 小心齋劄記)⁹⁶⁰ in which he criticizes He Xinyin saying: “He Xinyin and those like him were glued on profit and desire as if sitting in a basin of paint. So they were able to attract others and, although they had a kind of intelligence, they could not reach everywhere.” Gu Xiancheng expresses a traditional Confucian idealism and criticism of profit seeking, which made Confucians despise merchants. Gu Xiancheng says that Geng Dingxiang once gave his four servants 200 taels of silver to see how they managed the money. One of them went to He Xinyin “to ask the immortal for advice” (*wen xian* 問仙) and thanks to his “skill of mind” (*xinshu* 心術) the money of this servant increased rapidly in a few days. Here Gu uses the word “immortal” for He Xinyin ironically. The criticism formulated by Gu Xiancheng against He Xinyin goes back to Zhu Xi’s criticism of Cheng Liang 陳亮 (1143–1194). In fact Gu reuses the same expression “glued on profit and desires as sitting in a basin of paint” which Zhu Xi formulated when criticizing Cheng Liang for his utilitarianism.⁹⁶¹ Gu’s expression is later quoted in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* by Huang Zongxi.⁹⁶² Huang Zongxi, however, distances himself from Gu Xiancheng’s point of view arguing that it was not their cleverness that was their advantage but their learning, and then he most probably did not mean the high level of their theories but their ability to propagate their learning and convince a broad audience. In evaluating He Xinyin, Huang Zongxi agrees with the criticism formulated by Gu Xiancheng but thinks he goes too far. In his picture of Gu Xiancheng, Huang sketches an overzealous man who is almost obsessive in his ritual correctness. After having read Han Yu’s *On Name Taboos* (*Hui bian* 諱辯) he even refrained from using the name of his own father (*Xue* 學 ‘to study’), a frequent character

⁹⁵⁸ HXYJ: 143. When linking Yan Jun and He Xinyin to these Daoist rebellions he might also have had in mind that the leader of the Five Pecks of Rice, Zhang Daoling, came from Longhu Mountain in Jiangxi. See Hahn 2004: 684.

⁹⁵⁹ MRXA: 1376.

⁹⁶⁰ HXYJ: 126–127.

⁹⁶¹ For Zhu Xi’s criticism of Chen Liang, see Tillman 1982: *passim*.

⁹⁶² MRXA: 703.

which must have been difficult to avoid. This, however, made his father angry, who said to his son that if he regarded the character for ‘study’ as taboo it meant he did not take studies seriously.⁹⁶³ Nevertheless, Huang is not without appraisal for Gu Xiancheng and the Donglin scholars. He praises their courage in criticizing the Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng for not observing the mourning period of his father but, contrary to Confucian ethical rules, remaining in office.⁹⁶⁴ Huang’s stance is hardly surprising, since his father belonged to the Donglin group.

Although Gu Xiancheng disliked He Xinyin, he seems to have disliked Zhang Juzheng more. In the preface to the reprinted version of “In memory of my Master”, Gu even contrasts He Xinyin with Zhang Juzheng. When He Xinyin is described as the one who is falling into commoner status (*luoluo buyi* 落落布衣), Zhang is rising to the halls of Prime Minister (*tangtang xiangjun* 堂堂相君). He Xinyin “could not make anyone rich or poor; he could not make anyone noble or humble”, whereas Zhang “could make anyone rich or poor; he could make anyone noble or humble.”⁹⁶⁵ Towards the end of the text his last antonyms are the animals; chicken and pigs (He) and jackals and wolves (Zhang). Gu Xiancheng does not blame Zhang personally for the killing of He, but says:

Alas! There was a time when [someone], for the sake of ingratiating himself with Zhang Juzheng, killed He Xinyin like one kills a chicken or a pig, and in this way covered his pettiness. Today, to wipe out the injustice against He Xinyin, people hate Zhang Juzheng like one hates jackals and wolves, like covering one’s fear, [saying that] the Prime Minister does not even equal the common man!⁹⁶⁶

Perhaps, not even a Donglin scholar like Gu Xiancheng stayed very far from He Xinyin, but admired him and his disciples whom he describes as follows: “they sacrificed their lives for each other and went for [what they believed in], they even dared to be boiled alive, and although they trod on a naked sword they would not be worried.”⁹⁶⁷ Was Gu correct in his judgment that it was not Zhang Juzheng who personally killed He Xinyin, but someone else who wanted to ingratiate himself with Zhang? This question will be discussed after the judicial case of Yan Jun.

⁹⁶³ MRXA: 1376.

⁹⁶⁴ MRXA: 1375.

⁹⁶⁵ HXYJ: 126.

⁹⁶⁶ HXYJ: 126.

⁹⁶⁷ HXYJ: 126.

The arrest and punishment of Yan Jun

In 1567, Yan Jun encountered great hardships of life. Ten years earlier, in 1557, he had been in Beijing together with Luo Rufang, where he gave lectures at a hall called Lingji gong (靈濟宮).⁹⁶⁸ According to Huang Xuanmin, he was given the status of extraordinary talent (異人) of martial art (知兵法) the following year. He was enlisted for the service of the Zhejiang army.⁹⁶⁹ During this time, he lived together with another Taiping follower⁹⁷⁰ in the governor's residence in Ningbo and participated in a punitive expedition against Japanese pirates.⁹⁷¹

In 1566, Yan Jun bought a boat in Yangzhou to travel to Taiping (in today's Anhui Province, Ma'anshan 馬鞍山) to attend lectures organized by Geng Dingxiang.⁹⁷² Three days later he was put in prison for three years in Nanjing, and was beaten severely, so he almost died. Luo Rufang and others spent large amounts of money to pay the fines, and possibly also on bribes. This resulted in a change of punishment to exile in Shaowu (邵武) in Fujian Province. After the involvement of the army, he was sent back to his native county Yongxin in 1571 where he stayed until his death in 1596 at the age of 92.

The sources are not concordant regarding the reason for the arrest and punishment of Yan Jun. According to Yan's autobiography, Geng Dingxiang incited the government to arrest him in 1566. These records further tell us that Geng was the disciple of He Xinyin, which means that Geng was the "grandson" of Yan in the teaching lineage. Currently, Yan was travelling around teaching. When he arrived at Yangzhou, the County Magistrate Gong Yizheng 龔以正,⁹⁷³ from the Taiping Prefecture Dangtu County (*Taiping Fu Dangtu Xian* 太平府當塗縣) came and listened to him as an inspection of his teaching activities. Yan met him with pleasure but was arrested. According to Yan's autobiography, he knew that Geng lay behind this.⁹⁷⁴ Yan was accused of having manned a boat at Huai'an, and that he had stolen and sold what he found. He was sued for theft and fined 350 taels, and furthermore beaten so [the flesh] became like "rotten sauce" (*jianglan* 獎爛) and put to starve for seven days in prison (the same duration as his practice of seclusion).⁹⁷⁵ He lost

⁹⁶⁸ YJJ: 140. This according to Yan Jun's autobiography. YJJ 27–28.

⁹⁶⁹ The man who did this was the governor Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲.

⁹⁷⁰ Cheng Xueyan 程學顏 (dates unknown). In MRXA, Cheng Xueyan is counted as a disciple of Yan Jun, belonging to the third generation of the followers of Wang Gen according to Huang Zongxi. That he was a disciple of Yan Jun must be correct since he is called "Study Yan" 學顏.

⁹⁷¹ Huang Xuanmin in YJJ: 2. YJJ: 140.

⁹⁷² Huang Xuanmin in YJJ: 2.

⁹⁷³ Yin Gong was from Nanchang, Jiangxi.

⁹⁷⁴ YJJ: 27. Wu 2009a: 24–25.

⁹⁷⁵ YJJ: 28. Perhaps, "seven days" only mean "about a week".

consciousness three times, and was infected by epidemic diarrhea, which made him sick for a long time. His disciple Luo raised money for the fines. In 1569, he was sent to a frontier garrison in Fujian, Shaowu. It is said that the famous general Yu Dayou 俞大猷 (1503 – 1579) became aware of the duration of the corvée duty, and that after two years Yan was released and sent back home thanks to the general’s intervention.⁹⁷⁶ Yu also mentions Yan in his writings, so it is likely that the autobiography at least on this point is correct. Yu has the interesting comment that Yan’s learning was not mixed up with Buddhism and Daoism, and that he argued that when it came to military [actions] it is necessary to be rooted in humaneness and righteousness, that is, in Confucian values.⁹⁷⁷ This might, however, have been a necessary argument from Yu’s side to rehabilitate Yan.

He Yisun tells a different story in “the Biography of Yan Shannong (i.e. Yan Jun)” (*Yan Shannong Xiansheng Zhuan* 顏山農先生傳).⁹⁷⁸ Here, the boat mentioned in the earlier record, was a gift from the provincial governor He Qian 何遷 (1501 – 1574) to Yan, facilitating his teaching travels. The reason he was arrested was that he was framed by a fellow from his home town, Yin Tai 尹臺 (1506 – 1574), who invented the story of the stolen boat. That is why Yan was arrested in Nanjing and sentenced to death. This source says nothing of Geng Dingxiang.

A third source, the “Inherited Collection of Yan Shannong (i.e. Yan Jun)” (*Yan Shannong xiansheng yiji fan lie* 顏山農先生遺集凡列) by Yin Jimei 尹繼美, questions that Geng was involved in the matter.⁹⁷⁹ This source is later than the autobiography which Yin refers to.

The editor of the *Collected writings by Yan Jun* (*Yan Jun Ji* 顏鈞集), Huang Xuanmin, has pointed out that Yan’s autobiography is not very well written. The characters are often wrong and the line of thought incoherent. He suggests that if Yan had not become senile at that age (between the age of 80 and 90) the later editors must have made a mess of the text.⁹⁸⁰ In a similar way, Wu Zhen does not believe that Geng Dingxiang was behind the arrest of Yan. He argues that Geng Dingxiang and Luo Rufang were teaching friends and that they were very close. Luo was the disciple of Yan. There would be no reason for Geng to have Yan arrested. If this was true, the relationship between Geng and Luo would have been infected.

The later disagreements between Geng Dingxiang and Li Zhi, might have influenced scholars’ views on the arrest of Yan Jun, and might have influenced Yan’s autobiography as well. The correspondence between Geng and Li which shows the erosion of their friendship started in 1584.⁹⁸¹ In 1566, they

⁹⁷⁶ The autobiography of Yan Jun, YJJ: 27–28.

⁹⁷⁷ YJJ: 92.

⁹⁷⁸ YJJ: 82–84.

⁹⁷⁹ YJJ: 96–97.

⁹⁸⁰ Zhong 1998: *passim*.

⁹⁸¹ This correspondence is referred to in Brook 2010: 179–182.

were still friends, so there is reason to support Wu Zhen's belief that Geng had no reason to have Yan arrested. Yan died in 1596, and wrote his autobiography late in life, probably after 1584. At that time, he must have been aware of the murder of He Xinyin in 1579 as well as of the conflict between Geng and Li in 1584.

However, it is impossible to reach a solid conclusion from these contradicting sources about the historical facts in Yan Jun's judicial case. My assumption is that it is unlikely that any of these three stories gives us the truth, but that the truth is a forth unknown story. What it is possible to infer is that Yan Jun must have been a soldier with rather good connections, since General Yu Dayou protected him. Without good connections he would hardly have been released from corvée duty. That Yan did accuse Geng Dingxiang of being behind his arrest might be related to the famous conflict mentioned between Geng Dingxiang and Li Zhi, and the latter's accusation of Geng not to protect He Xinyin, which led to He's arrest and death. It is not far fetched to say that Yan Jun as a former master of He stayed on Li's side against Geng. Furthermore, this judicial case might be related to He Xinyin's, which I will turn to now.

The arrest and punishment of He Xinyin

Like Yan Jun, He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517–1579) was born in Ji'an Prefecture in Jiangxi Province, but in another county, Yongfeng 永豐. His original family name was Liang 梁 and he was given the name Ruyuan 汝元. He later changed his name to He Xinyin, literally 'to hide [my] mind' or 'to hide [my] heart'. This change took place at the same time as his escape to southern China where he tried to hide from the authorities. According to Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣, the local officer who followed He's case, He Xinyin changed his name repeatedly during the Wanli period. The names he mentions are He Fushan 何夫山 (the mountain man), He Liangchuan 何兩川 (the two rivers), Liang Wuji 梁無忌 (without fear/envy), Liang Gangyi 梁鋼一 (thoroughly made of steel), and Liang Guangyi 梁光益 (good light), names that are phonetic variations on a theme, and at the same time describing him as a superman.⁹⁸² Information on his family background and childhood is very scarce, but Li Zhi mentions that

⁹⁸² Wang Shizhen 王士禎. My political career *Li Shi Lu*, in: YJJ: 145–146. Wang Shizhen is the grandson of Wang Zhiyuan. He should not be mixed up with the relative of Wang Gen mentioned in Chapter 6. Their names are identical and written with the same characters.

the Liang clan was very wealthy.⁹⁸³ This is also the picture given by Geng Dingxiang.⁹⁸⁴

He Xinyin is usually regarded as a disciple of Yan Jun who formed the same line of thought as his teacher.⁹⁸⁵ In contrast to Wang Gen and Yan Jun, he tried to take examinations. According to most scholars, he even won first place in the Jiangxi provincial examinations in 1546.⁹⁸⁶ This information seems to originate in the obituary of He Xinyin written by Zou Yuanbiao 鄒元標, but it is not supported by any other source of results from provincial examinations. The Yongfeng County Gazetteer lists three successful candidates for 1546 of the provincial examination (*xiangshi* 鄉試) examination,⁹⁸⁷ but He Xinyin is not among them.⁹⁸⁸ He Xinyin (or Liang Ruyuan) is not listed in the previous examination in 1543⁹⁸⁹ or in the next examination that Yongfeng County had a successful candidate which was in 1555.⁹⁹⁰ The Jiangxi Province Gazetteer from 1683 does not mention that He Xinyin took any examination in 1546, nor the Jiangxi Province Gazetteer from 1732 either. The latter two Qing sources instead mention that Luo Rufang took his provincial examination in 1543, but neither He Xinyin nor Luo Rufang is mentioned in the lists of the examination of 1546. Zou Yuanbiao might have mixed Luo Rufang up with Liang Ruyuan, or that there are some other rumours about He Xinyin in late Ming, which made Zou Yuanbiao write that He Xinyin came out first in the

⁹⁸³ There is an entry on He Xinyin in DMB written by Wu Pei-yi and Julia Ching, but it says nothing of his family background. Li Zhi mentions in “He Xinyin Lun” (何心隱論) in: *Fen Shu* (焚書) that He Xinyin’s family was wealthy. See Li Zhi *Fen Shu*, *Xu Fenshu* [2011: 196]. Both Rong Zhaozu 1971 and Dimberg 1974 refer to this text. He Xinyin Lun is written in 1588 in Macheng. See *Fen Shu*, *Xu Fen Shu* [2011: 195]

⁹⁸⁴ Wu 2009a: 301. (Note 2, which refers to 耿天台先生文集卷一六 “家累万金, 族众数千指”.)

⁹⁸⁵ Huang Zongxi established this view, following Wang Shizhen’s criticism of Yan Jun and He Xinyin. See Wu 2009a: 291. Ji Wenfu and Hou Wailu also regarded Yan Jun and He Xinyin as belonging to the same line of thought. See Hou 2004: 1005 (1960).

⁹⁸⁶ Wu Zhen claims he came out as number one in the provincial examination (*zhongxiang* 中鄉). See Wu 2009a: 290. The entry on He Xinyin in DMB written by Julia Ching states that he took an examination at district level in 1546. Ching gives several sources of information in the entry on He Xinyin in DMB, such as Dimberg who mentions that he was placed first in the prefectural examination to take the *shengyuan* degree. See Dimberg 1974: 40. However, Dimberg misread Rong Zhaozu, who tells us that as a young boy became a government student, but later won first place in the Jiangxi provincial examination, which was equal to the the degree of a provincial student (*juren* degree) below the degree of presented scholar (*jinsshi* degree) which was a national examination awarded in the capital. Rong Zhaozu, who seems to follow Zou Yuanbiao, says in the foreword of HXYJ that He Xinyin never tried for the highest examination. See HXYJ: 1. He could of course be awarded the degree of presented scholar (*jinsshi*), since he probably did not even pass the examination at the provincial level.

⁹⁸⁷ Jiajing reign, year 25.

⁹⁸⁸ Yongfeng County Gazetteer 永豐縣志 16: 30b. The successful candidates were Song Yiwang 宋儀望, Xiao Hao 蕭浩 and Qiu Wenxue 邱文學.

⁹⁸⁹ Jiajing 22.

⁹⁹⁰ Jiajing 34.

provincial examinations of 1546. Furthermore, the obituary by Zou Yuanbiao in *The Collected Works of He Xinyin* from 1971 is not found in *The Complete writings of Zou Yuanbiao*, which merely mentions that Luo Rufang defended He Xinyin, but does not say anything else about He Xinyin. What it does mention is the three examinations taken by Luo.⁹⁹¹ He Xinyin's obituary might be corrupt and if not, there is good reason to believe that Zou either made a mistake or that the hagiography was a deliberate measure to exaggerate the positive sides of He Xinyin. Zou might have mixed up Luo Rufang and Liang Ruyuan, since the two names Rufang 汝芳 and Ruyuan 汝元 are similar. According to scholars taking this information for granted, He gave up an official career inspired by the teaching of Wang Gen and Yan Jun.⁹⁹²

For the reasons mentioned above, I find it unlikely that He Xinyin took an examination, and if he did not, he could not work in the governmental administration. Under such circumstances it was better for him to create his own arena of activity on the local level. Geng Dingli says that there is no information on his education, and that he knows nothing about his commoner status.⁹⁹³ Whether this was in answer to an accusation that he lacked education and was only a commoner is difficult to say, but that might be the case. Geng Dingli further claims that He Xinyin strongly advocated the “learning of the sages, taking the world as his home”. Dingli compares He Xinyin with Zilu, a disciple of Confucius who was killed.⁹⁹⁴ Dingli's elder brother, Geng Dingxiang, also claims that his learning came from Confucius and his words and acts were of the same kind as Mencius.⁹⁹⁵ Neither Dingli nor Dingxiang, however, says anything about He having taken any provincial examination. Li Zhi furthermore calls He Xinyin “a commoner”,⁹⁹⁶ which he could not have done if he was a *juren*. He Xinyin might have been a *shengyuan* trying to take the provincial examination without success. That the family was rich might have been related to commercial activities, which in that case would make him similar to other Taizhou practitioners.

He Xinyin was outspoken towards elder scholars and men of power, a tendency which made his life complicated. Another tendency was that, like Yan Jun, he would do whatever he could to help friends in trouble.⁹⁹⁷ This is a similarity with the Buddhist leader Zibo Zhenke, who criticized the government for sending his friend Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623) into exile.⁹⁹⁸ Showing solidarity with friends against the authorities was

⁹⁹¹ *Yuanxue Ji* 願學集 (*Siku quanshu* edition).

⁹⁹² de Bary 1970: 179. In this regard, de Bary seems to follow Hou Wailu. I presume Hou is the first to talk about He Xinyin's thoughts as utopian.

⁹⁹³ HXYJ: 142.

⁹⁹⁴ HXYJ: 143.

⁹⁹⁵ HXYJ: 140.

⁹⁹⁶ Li Zhi 1588 (2011:73).

⁹⁹⁷ For a discussion on male friendship see Huang 2007: 2–33.

⁹⁹⁸ Cleary 1985: 124–127.

obviously not appreciated.⁹⁹⁹ However, it seems as if Zibo Zhenke's and Hanshan Deqing's main problem was that they became involved in court politics.¹⁰⁰⁰

To return to the friendship between Yan Jun and He Xinyin, how close was the relationship between them? Wang Shizhen, who criticizes both Yan and He, says:

As for He Xinyin, he was more talented than Yan Jun but harboured more delusions than he did. When He Xinyin was young, he had treated Yan Jun as his teacher. If someone wanted to become Yan Jun's disciple he had a rule; first they were punched three times, and then they had to give him their courtesy bow. After He Xinyin had started to serve Yan Jun, he observed this behaviour, and regretted [that he became his disciple]. One day, when Yan Jun had a licentious affair with a village woman, He Xinyin went to a hidden place and waited until he came out, and then he clutched him. This time He Xinyin punched Yan Jun three times, and forced him to pay him his respect. He Xinyin's name was cut out from the disciple record.¹⁰⁰¹

It is difficult to determine how reliable Wang Shizhen is, but the relation between Yan Jun and He Xinyin might not have been as close as has been claimed. The closeness between Yan and He is questioned by, for instance, Wu Zhen.¹⁰⁰²

As mentioned above He Xinyin organized a utopian community, which took up taxes among its members and delivered them collectively to the tax authorities. When He Xinyin was 40, local officials of the Yongfeng County imposed special taxes on the community He had established, which became a burden for the community and for the common people living in it. When He remonstrated against this, he was arrested and put in prison. It was thanks to the efforts of his friend Cheng Xueyan that he was released in 1559.¹⁰⁰³ After

⁹⁹⁹ Cleary 1985: 103–104.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Hsu 1979: 74–75.

¹⁰⁰¹ Wang Shizhen, "The Knight-errants of our country in the Jiajing and Longqing eras" (1522–1572). In HXYJ: 143. Since the subject is omitted in the last sentence, it is difficult to say if Yan Jun cut He Xinyin's name, or if He Xinyin cut it himself. Kenneth Hammond renders it in the latter way in his dissertation on Wang Shizhen, which in a way makes sense, but I have decided to leave the question open in my translation.

¹⁰⁰² Wu 2009a: 291. Wu Zhen also mentions that Yu Ying-shih questions the closeness of thought between Yan Jun and He Xinyin. As related above, Wang Shizhen describes how Yan and He disagreed and parted from each other. It is not evident that Luo Rufang and He Xinyin were close friends either.

¹⁰⁰³ Wu 2009a: 291. Wu Zhen informs us that Yan Jun praised Cheng Xueyuan (dates unknown), Z. Zongfu 宗復, H. Houtai 後臺. He came from Xiaogan 孝感 county in Hubei. Yan said that his knowledge surpassed Luo Rufang's. Cheng Xueyuan was also a very close friend of Geng Dingxiang. He has written a text elucidating the meaning of *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* printed in YJJ: 76. In YJJ: 10–11, there is also a text praising Cheng Xueyan's mother. This text states that men and women are equal and that both sexes are produced or born by Dao.

being released he went to Beijing. It was on this occasion he opened a guild-hall, which has already been discussed in Chapter 6.

In Beijing he met Geng Dingxiang who,¹⁰⁰⁴ in his writings, notes that his impression of He Xinyin was that the man was insane (*diankuang* 癡狂) but that one or two words he said were worth listening to.¹⁰⁰⁵ Despite this, they became friends and Geng Dingxiang introduced He Xinyin to Zhang Juzheng, then a rising star in Ming politics and at the time Director of the National University. This was approximately in 1560. The meeting between He Xinyin and Zhang Juzheng made them both unhappy. Geng Dingli refers to a conversation between Zhang Juzheng and He Xinyin, in which He Xinyin asked Zhang Juzheng with sarcasm: “Do you know the Dao of the National University?” (*Zhi Taixue Dao hu?* 知太學道乎?), whereupon Zhang said: “You would very much like to fly, but you cannot even leave the ground”, and then Zhang left the place in great anger.¹⁰⁰⁶ According to the writings of Geng Dingxiang, at this meeting He Xinyin uttered the prediction: “This man, whom I will not see many times with my own eyes, will in the future become [the head] of the country. This is the man, who will kill me.”¹⁰⁰⁷

What was more serious for the time being was that He Xinyin took part in a movement against the Prime Minister Yan Song. It was for this reason he changed his name to He Xinyin and escaped to the south, where he travelled, made friends and engaged in teaching. Furthermore, he argued against the destruction of the independent academies and the prohibition of free teaching by Zhang Juzheng, who had become Chancellor. Yan Song was dismissed in 1562, but his clique made He move from place to place in the central and southern parts of China.¹⁰⁰⁸ Zhang’s campaign against the free academies reached its climax when the authorities were chasing He. In 1576, He was charged for banditry. He then moved about the countryside, protected by friends, but he continued to teach and stirred up discussions in the free academies. In 1579, He Xinyin was arrested for a second time and killed by the jailers in Wuchang prison six months later.¹⁰⁰⁹ According to the obituary

¹⁰⁰⁴ Huang Zongxi adds Geng Dingxiang to the Taizhou School, and places him in the first generation. Wu argues that even though Geng Dingxiang admired Wang Gen, he criticized strongly the followers after Wang Bi, especially Yan Jun and He Xinyin. Therefore, he could not be counted as a follower of the Taizhou School. See Wu 2009a: 29.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *The Collected Works by Geng Dingxiang* (耿天臺先生文集), Ch.16.

¹⁰⁰⁶ HXYJ: 142. Huang Zongxi, who probably had read Geng Dingli quote the same conversation in MRXA: 704. See also Dimberg 1974: 48.

¹⁰⁰⁷ 耿天臺先生文集, from Wu 2009a: 26.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Huang Zongxi further says that he helped Cheng Xuebo 程學博 (dates unknown) in his pacification campaign of rebels in Chongqing in 1567. See MRXA: 707. This might not be true, but no matter, He Xinyin knew Cheng Xuebo, who was a younger brother of Cheng Xueyan. Cheng Xuebo also wrote an obituary of He Xinyin in 1584, five years after the death of He Xinyin. See HXYJ: 135–137.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Dimberg 1974: 51. He Xinyin wrote a letter to the official of military defence for the Lingbei circuit. See HXYJ: 91–93. (上嶺北道項太公祖書)

of Cheng Xuebo 程學博 (dates unknown), He had expressed the wish to share the grave of his disciple Cheng Xueyan (brother of Xuebo), a wish Cheng Xuebo fulfilled.¹⁰¹⁰ This follows the same pattern as Xu Yue, who is said to have wished to be buried with Wang Gen, which Yan Jun is said to have fulfilled. (See Chapter 4.)

As with the case of Yan Jun, there are several theories why He Xinyin was arrested and later killed in prison. The governor of Huguang, Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣,¹⁰¹¹ was the man who followed He Xinyin's case. He would later be accused of the murder of He Xinyin by the censor Zhao Chongshan (御史趙崇山). In self-defence he wrote his version of the story as follows:

In Huguang, there is the evil man He Xinyin, alias He Fushan, He Liangchuan, Liang Wuji, Liang Gangyi, Liang Guangyi. His real name is Liang Ruyuan, and he was originally registered in Jiangxi Province, Yongfeng County. He was prosecuted because he appropriated silver for purchasing timber for the imperial family, and he escaped from arrest, and [then] murdered and wounded altogether six persons including Wu Shanwu 吳善五. He was initially sentenced to death by strangulation, but later his sentence was reduced to exile in Guizhou to do military service. He joined the army, but soon deserted from the army and escaped from province to province. He reached Xiaogan County 孝感縣 (Hubei) and left as soon as he arrived. Under the pretext of gathering disciples for lectures, he disturbed and jeopardized the locale. During this time, he was engaged in many illegal activities. In every province they searched for him for several years without capturing him, although there was a file of cases.¹⁰¹²

Another suspected person was, of course, Zhang Juzheng. His prohibition of the free academies in 1579 is easily connected with the murder of He Xinyin. Two years earlier, another Taizhou practitioner, Luo Rufang, was dismissed from his official post by Zhang. The reason was that he held public discussions in an academy near the capital. Luo was a disciple of Yan Jun and some scholars believe he was a friend of He Xinyin.¹⁰¹³ Zhang obviously had objections to the learning discussion movement and all who participated in it.

Zhang Juzheng could certainly have had motives for murdering He Xinyin, but having motives is not evidence enough of murder. Li Zhi argues in a letter to a certain Deng Mingfu 登明府 (Answer to Da Mingfu *Da Deng Mingfu* 答登明府) that Zhang had nothing to do with the killing of He. Li Zhi recognizes that they disagreed, and that two such heroes as Zhang and He cannot be in the world at the same time. Li further argues that He feared Zhang, but that Zhang in fact did not hate him. Li proclaims in this letter that

¹⁰¹⁰ HXYJ: 135. (祭梁夫山先生文, 1584)

¹⁰¹¹ This Wang Zhiyuan has the same name as the grandson of Wang Gen, but whereas Wang Zhiyuan, the governor came from Shandong Province, the grandson of Wang Gen came from Taizhou.

¹⁰¹² Wang Zhiyuan, "My political career", *Li Shi Lu*, in: HXYJ: 145–146.

¹⁰¹³ Dimberg 1974: 52.

both men could be regarded as his teachers.¹⁰¹⁴ Li does not blame Wang Zhiyuan for the killing of He either. Instead he points out Li Youzi 李幼滋 (1514–1584)¹⁰¹⁵ who was one of Zhang's henchmen and Minister at the Ministry of Works.¹⁰¹⁶ Li also criticized Geng Dingxiang for being totally unconcerned about He Xinyin's circumstances, and for not helping him.¹⁰¹⁷ This criticism is later recounted in the writings of Huang Zongxi.

According to Geng Dingli 耿定理, Dingxiang's younger brother, the local authorities changed the charge against He Xinyin, following an order from the capital, making it appear as if He belonged to a band of rebels. This charge was much harder and led to his death.¹⁰¹⁸ Dimberg does not believe in this but draws the conclusion that the local authorities played a major role in He's fate. Since he had a reputation for stirring up the people, the authorities were anxious not to have him around jeopardizing the order of society.¹⁰¹⁹ It might be true that the local authorities took a leading role in arresting He, but they would not have acted as they did if the politicians at a higher level were not hostile towards the Taizhou practitioners. He Xinyin was provocative, and officials at different levels had good reasons to circumscribe his activities.

A brief comment on the case of Li Zhi

As one of the most controversial intellectuals in Chinese history, Li Zhi is well known even to Western readers. He was born in Jinjiang 晉江 County, Quanzhou 泉州 Prefecture in Fujian Province, and his family was of Hui nationality and thus Muslim by tradition. The family had for generations been engaged in domestic and overseas commercial activities. In the middle of the sixteenth century the government forbade all overseas communications (*haijin* 海禁), a policy which deprived Li's family of their livelihood.¹⁰²⁰ It was probably the financial situation that made him pursue a career as an official. He gained his *juren* degree in 1552 at the age of 26.

Li Zhi said about himself that as a child he was stubborn and hard to educate. He did not believe in Confucianism, Daoism, or in Buddhism. Therefore, when he met a Daoist, he disliked him; when he met a Buddhist monk, he disliked him; and when he met a Confucian scholar, he disliked him

¹⁰¹⁴ Li Zhi 1588 (2011: 71–75).

¹⁰¹⁵ H. Yihe 義河, *jinshi* 1547.

¹⁰¹⁶ Li Zhi 1588 (2011: 72). Li Youzi has no entry in DMB.

¹⁰¹⁷ Brook 2010: 181.

¹⁰¹⁸ HXYJ: 141–143.

¹⁰¹⁹ Dimberg 1974: 53.

¹⁰²⁰ Franke 1982: 141.

too.¹⁰²¹ From 1561, when he was appointed to a post at the National University in Beijing, he had different positions within the imperial administrations for a period of 20 years although on a lower level. However, he always felt restrained, and conflicts with other officials created resentment.¹⁰²²

Li Zhi's acquaintance with Buddhism, the learning of Wang Yangming and Wang Ji was a turning point for him. Between 1571 and 1576 he served at the Ministry of Punishment in Nanjing. He met Geng Dingxiang and his brother Dingli, as well as Luo Rufang, Wang Ji and the late Taizhou practitioner Jiao Hong in this city.¹⁰²³ Li respected Luo Rufang and Wang Ji and became a good friend of Jiao Hong's.

Li Zhi's relationship with Geng Dingli was close. He lived in his home in 1584, the year Dingli died. After this, he settled at the Longhu 龍湖 monastery, where he built the Zhifo temple (*zhifoyuan* 芝佛院).¹⁰²⁴ In 1588, he shaved his head, an act which has been discussed and criticized from that time up until today. Ming and Qing scholars such as Gu Yanwu, Xu Fuguan, and Huang Zongxi regard this as proof that he was a Buddhist. To his friends, however, he gave the explanation that he suffered from the heat and that his hair had the "smell of a cadaver".¹⁰²⁵

Li Zhi believed he could stay at the Longhu monastery without being disturbed engaging in meditation and pursuit of the Way. One of the monks at the monastery was a close associate, and Li also associated with intellectuals from Macheng who visited the monastery. However, his interest in meditation did not make him stop his intellectual activities.¹⁰²⁶ During his 20 years in Macheng, he composed his most important writings, such as *A Book to be Burned* (*Fenshu* 焚書) *A Book to be Hidden* (*Zangshu* 藏書), *Continuation of a Book to be Burned* (*Xu Fenshu* 續焚書) and *The Origin of the Changes* (*Yiyin* 易). Later a group of people was organized who spread rumours and slander about Li and destroyed the Zhifo temple.¹⁰²⁷

A censor named Zhang Wenda 張問達¹⁰²⁸ submitted a memorial to the Emperor accusing Li Zhi of three acts of misconduct: 1) writing and circulating books whose unorthodox evaluation of historical personalities

¹⁰²¹ 王陽明年譜後語 Appendix in 王陽明先生導學鈔. Quoted in Hou Wailu, *Songming lixue shi*, reprint 2005 (1987): 466.

¹⁰²² Hou 2005 (1987): 466.

¹⁰²³ Nanjing, or Jinling as it was usually called, had been the capital at the beginning of the Ming dynasty until 1421, but during the third reign of the Ming dynasty the capital was moved to Beijing. In the sixteenth century there were two sets of ministries, one in the southern capital, Nanjing, and one in the northern, Beijing.

¹⁰²⁴ Hou 2005 (1987): 468.

¹⁰²⁵ Billeter 1979: 201–202.

¹⁰²⁶ Billeter 2009: 201.

¹⁰²⁷ Hou 2005 (1987): 467.

¹⁰²⁸ Zhang Wenda became a presented scholar in 1583 and died in 1625. He was at the time of Li Zhi's arrest the chief supervising secretary in the Ministry of Rites.

confused people's minds. 2) living a licentious life, consorting with prostitutes, and seducing the daughters of local gentry families with his teachings 3) that he as a scholar-official shaving his head and defiling himself with Buddhism, thus, failing to observe the family rules of Confucius (*Kongzi jiafa* 孔子家法).¹⁰²⁹ Soon after this (in 1602), the Wanli Emperor ordered Li to be arrested and his books burned. The charge was “daring to advocate disordered teaching, deluding the world and duping the people”.¹⁰³⁰ Li was taken to the capital. According to the *Official Record of Emperor Shenzong of Ming dynasty*,¹⁰³¹ Li starved himself to death in prison, but Yuan Zhongdao's 袁中道 (1570–1624) biography of Li Zhi (*Li Wenling zhuan* 李温陵傳) says that Li asked for a barber's razor to cut his hair, but instead cut his throat and died two days later. Yuan also describes how Li cut his throat, so he could not speak, and instead wrote his last word on the palm of his hand saying: “What can a man in his seventies ask for?”¹⁰³²

As in the case of Yan Jun, I claim that neither the official record of Emperor Shenzong nor Yuan Zhongdao's biography can be trustworthy but that the true story is a third unknown one, and that we cannot be sure that Li Zhi was not killed in prison as He Xinyin. The Emperor would not, of course, admit that they killed him and Yuan Zhongdao's story that he used the shaving razor to cut his throat and writing in his palm after having done so, sounds too well written to be reliable. Why would he cut his throat where the organs of speech are located and not on the side where the vein is? It would be more likely that the jailors were asked to do that to stop the man from speaking. Yuan Zhongdao's text is a hagiographical text more suitable for the local opera scene than an objective recount of what actually happened. I find the prosaic official history more trustworthy, depicting Li's hunger strike as his last protest. However, reality was most probably much filthier. It is in fact fascinating that nobody has questioned the saying that Li Zhi committed suicide. It is only Hou Wailu who argues that Li was killed by feudalism, but then Hou is talking in a figurative sense and not literally.¹⁰³³ Perhaps Li was not even killed in prison but taken somewhere else where he was eliminated.

One similarity between Yan Jun and Li Zhi is accusations of sexual misconduct. This seems to be a common criticism of non-conforming individuals. Li's friend Ma Jinglun 馬經倫 (*jinsi* 1589) regarded the accusation of Li for sexual misconduct as ridiculous. In defending him, Ma argued that it was far-fetched to accuse an old, sick and dying seventy-five-year-old man of seducing the daughters of gentry's families. The background, according to him, was a widowed daughter of a high-ranking official, Mei

¹⁰²⁹ Jin 2001: 5.

¹⁰³⁰ Hou 2005 (1987): 467.

¹⁰³¹ *Mingshi lu* 1602 (明神宗顯皇帝實錄: Ch. 369)

¹⁰³² *Kexuezhai jinji* 珂雪齋近集 7:24a.

¹⁰³³ Hou Wailu 2005 (1987): 467.

Guozhen 梅國楨 (*jinshi* 1583). In Ma's view, this man was jealous and wanted to damage Li's reputation.¹⁰³⁴

Degree of persecution

One may wonder why the authorities chased Yan Jun and He Xinyin but did not care about Wang Gen. Yan and He, as well as Wang, all travelled around engaged in teaching activities. Wang's eccentricities came to expression in his behaviour, especially his clothing and the chariot he constructed according to ancient descriptions. If we consider the Ming Code and its regulations, clothing was not a simple matter left to individuals to decide about. The odd outfit Wang made for himself, when travelling to the capital, was also one reason why Wang Yangming's other disciples forced him to return to Taizhou. They might not only have been anxious to keep the Wang Yangming movement in a favorable light but were probably also trying to prevent a fellow disciple from ending up in tragic circumstances caused by a conflict with the authorities, which might lead to some sort of punishment.

With the scarce and contradicting information about the case of Yan Jun it is difficult to judge the rationale the authorities had for his arrest and imprisonment. The society he organized seems to have been rather harmless, at least compared with He Xinyin's organization, but that could also be the reason why He Xinyin was treated harsher. The local authorities must have felt obliged to act vigorously, when He Xinyin remonstrated against the taxes. That taxes were collected within his society must have been a real threat to the government. A local community collecting taxes for internal purposes was to create a state within the state and this could of course not be tolerated.¹⁰³⁵ This is also the case of the Buddhist leader Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1604). Zibo Zhenke was accused of having criticized government politics for the mine tax imposed on the people to finance the building of three palaces.¹⁰³⁶ It was not a small matter to raise objections to taxes. Compared with the tax issue of He Xinyin, the eccentric clothing of Wang Gen must have been something the state could overlook. The local writings about Wang Gen do not indicate that the local authorities feared him. On the contrary, they seem to have been rather proud of him as the only example of a famous Confucian scholar from their native county. If someone felt ashamed of his naïve style, they probably found his fame for ridicule better than no fame at all.¹⁰³⁷

¹⁰³⁴ Jin 2001: 6.

¹⁰³⁵ They must have collected taxes for both internal purposes as well as for the local authorities, as I understand it.

¹⁰³⁶ Cleary 1985: 124–127.

¹⁰³⁷ *The Taizhou County Gazetteer* (1633), *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* (1817).

Another factor behind the differences might be that the culture of the local authorities in Taizhou might have differed from those counties in Jiangxi where Yan Jun and He Xinyin came from. Beginning with Yan Jun, Jiangxi Province became a new geographic centre of the Taizhou movement, and it remained so during the period He Xinyin and Luo Rufang were active there. People from Jiangxi had a reputation of not following rules and regulations and easily becoming rebellious. The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang had made his way to power in this province, and wise from his own experience he was vigilant about the actions of people from this area. In his *Third Grand Pronouncement* (*yuzhi dagao sanbian* 御製大誥三編) he complains: “Now in Jiangxi among the misguided people, the wives do not remonstrate with their husbands [when they do wrong] and the husbands do not take the mistakes of those who preceded them as a warning. The husbands and wives fool their families, teaching their sons and grandsons to chant: ‘I trust the Venerable Maitreya Buddha.’”¹⁰³⁸ He had been active in an eschatological Maitreya movement himself, so he knew that it was dangerous.

Anne Gerritsen has made a study of the Ji’an Prefecture, where both the native county of Yan Jun (Yongxin) and that one of He Xinyin (Yongfeng) are located. According to her study there were over one thousand successful candidates in the palace examinations from the Ji’an prefecture during the Ming dynasty, which was more than any other prefecture in the whole country.¹⁰³⁹ Another interesting fact is that there was also another prominent group of Wang Yangming followers located in this area, namely the Jiangyou group.¹⁰⁴⁰ One of them, Nie Bao, was born 30 years earlier than He Xinyin in the same county (Yongxin), so there was obviously a tradition to follow in the area – and to rebel against. Already in 1510, Wang Yangming had used the Jingju Monastery 靜居寺 in the Qingyuan Mountains for his teaching activities.¹⁰⁴¹ According to Luo Hongxian, the West bank of the river (Jiangyou) “was known throughout the realm” and he also says that the chanting of the scholars filled “the forests and valleys”.¹⁰⁴²

Another assumption could be that the harsher treatment of Yan Jun and He Xinyin was related not to place but to time. In that case, there are two

¹⁰³⁸ Zhu Yuanzhang, *Yuzhi Dagao Danbian* (御製大誥三編): 46b. (今江西有等愚民。妻不諫夫。夫不戒前人所失。夫婦愚於家，反教子孫一槩念訟“南無彌勒尊佛。”) (CADAL 98–99)

¹⁰³⁹ Gerritsen 2007: 9. That this area had many successful candidates in the civil examinations has also been pointed out by Elman and Dimberg. See Elman 1984: 12 (but he is talking of Jiangnan) and Dimberg 1974: 38.

¹⁰⁴⁰ The Jiangyou group is represented by famous figures such as Zou Shouyi (1491–1562) Anfu County, Ouyang De (1496–1554), Taihe County, Nie Bao (1483–1563), Yongfeng County, Luo Hongxian (1505–1564) Jishui County, and Hu Zhi (1517–1585) Taihe County, all of them with biographies in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning*.

¹⁰⁴¹ Gerritsen 2007: 212.

¹⁰⁴² Luo Hongxian, ‘Xia you ji’, *Nian’an wenji* 5.22a, quoted in Gerritsen 2007: 213.

possibilities: the first that the authorities became more anxious about heterodox teachings towards the end of the sixteenth century and even more in the seventeenth century; the second that the authorities needed some time before they felt that they had to act against the Taizhou practitioners.

The Donglin group was persecuted more the third decade of the seventeenth century compared with the Taizhou practitioners. Twelve of the Donglin members were secretly murdered during 1625 and 1626. Gao Panlong (1562–1626), who is regarded as a founder of the Donglin group together with Gu Xiancheng,¹⁰⁴³ committed suicide by drowning himself in a pond when the order for his arrest was made.¹⁰⁴⁴ Huang Zongxi's father Huang Zunsu (1584–1626), was one of those who were killed. His biography was written by Huang Zongxi and placed in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* in the Donglin section.¹⁰⁴⁵ The Donglin scholars were high officials, and they criticized the eunuch Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627) and those linked to him for immoral behaviour.

It must be recognized that the Taizhou practitioners were not persecuted more than other Confucian groups during the Ming dynasty. The Taizhou practitioners were in fact persecuted less than the Donglin scholars. What were the reasons for the Donglin scholars being persecuted more than the Taizhou practitioners? There are three important differences between the Donglin scholars and the Taizhou practitioners. First, the Donglin scholars had higher positions in the imperial administration. Second, they tried to persuade the Emperor and his eunuchs to restrain their desires for wealth and power. The Taizhou practitioners did not work in the same arena, and although they argued for certain ethical values such as filiality and humaneness, they were not moralists in the same way as the Donglin scholars. As shown in Chapter 5, Yan Jun, on the contrary, often argued for recognizing desires and emotions. In a similar vein, He Xinyin went against the Song Confucian Zhou Dunyi's (1017–73) rejection of desires, arguing that desires cannot be eliminated. In the essay "Arguing about having no desires" (*Bian wu yu* 辯無欲), he claimed that the wish to be without desires is a desire in itself. "The mind cannot be without desires" said He Xinyin,¹⁰⁴⁶ and cited Mencius: "To love fish and to love bear paws are desires. To discard fish and to take bear paws are reduction of desires. To love life and to love righteousness are desires. To discard life and hold to righteousness are reductions of desires."¹⁰⁴⁷ However, the Taizhou practitioners were no libertines either, although their critics sometimes used

¹⁰⁴³ Gu Xiancheng wrote a text entitled "Small reflections on Fasting of the Mind" (*Xiao Xinzhai Zhaji* 小心齋札記), where he criticized He Xinyin for his attitude to doing business. See Gu 1964: *passim*.

¹⁰⁴⁴ MRXA 2008: 1398–1495. For an English translation see Ching 1987: 234–240. For the repression of the Donglin movement see Dardess: 2002 *passim*.

¹⁰⁴⁵ MRXA 2008: 1490–1495.

¹⁰⁴⁶ HXYJ: 42. For a discussion on He Xinyin's view of desires see Dimberg 1974: 61.

¹⁰⁴⁷ HXYJ: 42

that argument against them. Yan Jun and He Xinyin may not have appreciated the self-indulgent behaviour of the Emperor and the eunuchs, but they did not openly criticize them. The Taizhou practitioners most probably did not feel they had to take responsibility for the actions of the Emperor and his eunuchs. What they regarded as their responsibility was the situation of people on lower levels of society. They wanted to change the conditions for commoners and might have had as their goal the building of a strong organization which would serve as an alternative for corrupt governing. However, as I have claimed in Chapter 6, such an organization never became a full-fledged reality. The third difference between the Donglin group and the Taizhou practitioners is the time factor. The most active Taizhou practitioners had passed away at the time of the Donglin suppression. The Donglin suppression came at a time when the Ming dynasty was reaching its end and the pressure from the Jurchens (later Manchus) became stronger.

This was a totally different situation from that in the middle of sixteenth century when Yan Jun and He Xinyin were imprisoned. However, despite the more favourable situation at this time compared with the final decades of the Ming dynasty, that is, the beginning of the seventeenth century, one might argue that the Taizhou practitioners were successful in protecting themselves from persecution. They had built a relative vast and resilient network – which, however, was not strong enough to produce a long-term success.

Although the time and place differences had bearing on the course of events, and although it was dangerous to become involved in court politics and to criticize the Emperor, I find it likely that the persecution of Yan Jun and He Xinyin had to do with their ideas and especially their actions. The son of Wang Bi, grandson of Wang Gen, organized a clan society, and inspired his clansmen to help poor members pay the taxes in time.¹⁰⁴⁸ Local authorities cannot possibly have regarded this as a threat, compared with the actions of He Xinyin. If the problem was that the authorities felt that the time was ripe for crushing the Taizhou movement, why did they not charge Luo Rufang? And if Jiangxi was a harder place in which to survive, why was not Luo Rufang persecuted by the authorities, while a person like Li Zhi was imprisoned, a man that came from Fujian Province? The reason for the authorities to persecute Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Li Zhi must have been that they were more provocative than Wang Gen, Wang Bi and Luo Rufang. From Wang Gen they inherited the idea of self-respect and that it was better to interpret the Confucian Classics from one's own experience and understanding than to accept in the earlier commentarial tradition. The importance of self-protection was also a heritage from Wang Gen, but Yan Jun and He Xinyin added to this basis a more developed organization of common men at the local level. They created cells not dependent on

¹⁰⁴⁸ Cheng 1996: 164. Cheng refers to Wang Pu, Ming Wang Tung-jih hsian-sheng ts'an -kao, 1:51a.

governmental organization, and those cells might have been united into a larger organization if they had the possibility to do so, but an institutionalization of their organization was never realized.

Conclusion

The Taizhou practitioners of the sixteenth century who were persecuted most were Yan Jun and He Xinyin, and especially He Xinyin. Yan Jun was arrested in 1566, but released from prison thanks to the help of friends. He Xinyin was arrested in 1579 and murdered in prison later the same year. Wang Gen and his sons do not seem to have been persecuted at all, and Luo Rufang was never imprisoned but suffered administrative measures such as being demoted from higher positions in the governmental administration. Li Zhi was inspired by the Taizhou ideas but was never an integrated force in their organization. He is said to have committed suicide in prison in 1602.

As mentioned, there was from the very beginning of the Taizhou movement an outspoken striving to respect oneself and believe in one's own judgment, experience and interpretation of the Confucian Classics. There was at the same time a striving to protect oneself, not only the mind but the whole person including the body. These ideas are expressed by Wang Gen in his major writings. As the popular network grew, so did their mutual protection.

Jie Zhao argues in his dissertation on Zhou Rudeng that the reason why He Xinyin and Li Zhi became victims of persecution, but Wang Ji, Luo Rufang and Zhou Rudeng did not, was that the former two were not "representatives of the elite type as scholar-officials" compared with the latter three.¹⁰⁴⁹ This idea is attractive but does not bear closer scrutiny.

What is shown in this thesis is that He Xinyin, contrary to the general idea of most scholars from Rong Zhaozu's writings in the 1980s and onward, did not come out first in the provincial examinations. His family background is furthermore obscure. Li Zhi only had a *juren* degree but worked as an official for 20 odd years. This would support Jie Zhao's argument that they were vulnerable due to their lack of success in the highest examinations. However, although Li Zhi had difficulties in his relations with other officials, he was not totally without official success. Contrary to Jie Zhao's argumentation, it is a fact that He Xinyin and Li Zhi had a network that protected them for a very long time. In addition, it is often an advantage to be without scholarly and official success. Neither Wang Gen nor his sons, who all stayed away from scholarly careers, were persecuted. He Xinyin and Li Zhi begged to be

¹⁰⁴⁹ Zhao 1995: 167.

martyrs. For them, Wang Gen's idea of protecting the self had a limit, or to paraphrase He Xinyin: the desire to do what he believed in became stronger than the desire to live; and in the case of Li Zhi, the desire to express what he regarded as the truth was compelling. They made a conscious choice, and their persecution followed their own decisions: He Xinyin for the building of an independent organization and Li Zhi for his religious convictions and acts. Contradicting narrations in the Ming sources about Li Zhi's death make the common assumption that he committed suicide questionable. One suggestion is that he was murdered in the same vein as He Xinyin, and that this was an example of religious persecution in the Ming dynasty.

Yan Jun and Luo Rufang were also victims of religious persecution although they did not have to pay with their lives. Wang Shizhen's accusation of Yan Jun and He Xinyin that they organized something like the Daoist rebellions of the Yellow Turbans and the Five Pecks of Rice is interesting since he himself was a Daoist. For him, as a disciple of a female Daoist woman, it was necessary not to be associated with Daoist rebellions, so he probably drew the conclusion that attack is the best form of defence. However, in his case it was enough to belong to the cult of a female Daoist Immortal to be accused of heterodoxy.

The most important threat for the Taizhou practitioners came from the highest level of the government, that is, the grand secretaries. First, Yan Song and later Zhang Juzheng, but actions from officials at the local level were also important. Decisions taken by local officials could be crucial, but their decisions were not taken in a vacuum. They were customized in relation to politics on the higher level. The fear of both higher levels of government and local officials concerned for instance criticism of taxes and judicial decisions. This is shown by the similarity between He Xinyin, who was killed in prison and the Buddhist leader Zibo Zhenke, who also died in prison; in his case after being tortured. They both openly criticized governmental taxes. Li Zhi and Zibo's friend Hanshan Deqing criticized the punishment of He Xinyin and Zibo. Criticism targeting the taxes and judicial decisions was to question the authority of the Ming state.

Arguments among rivalizing scholars did not directly lead to persecution but might have had an indirect impact on the administrative and legal decision makers. This criticism had a stronger bearing on the later evaluation of the Taizhou movement. There are several reasons why the Donglin scholars were persecuted more than the Taizhou practitioners. The Donglin scholars were on a higher social level than the Taizhou practitioners – another fact which goes against Jie Zhao's arguments. They directly criticized the Emperor and the eunuchs. The fact that the Buddhist leaders Hanshan and Zhenke became involved in court politics shows that this was dangerous. The persecution of the Donglin scholars is, however, strongly related to the question of time. The Emperor felt more pressured at the end of the dynasty with the Jurchens showing power at the northern border.

A question that arises is whether the persecution of the Taizhou practitioners was religious or political in kind. It is in a strict sense impossible to determine if the persecution of the Taizhou practitioners should be defined as foremost religious, ideological or political, since those aspects were intimately interwoven. In a similar way, it is not possible to judge if it was the beliefs, the teaching, the actions or the organizations of the Tazhou practitioners that were perceived as a threat. The conviction that they were all interrelated was something that united both the Taizhou practitioners and the rulers of the country. I find it therefore appropriate to regard the persecution as religious, ideological and political in combination. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the concept of religion did not exist in a strict sense in the Ming period, although I use “religion” as an operational concept and describe the activities and ideas of the Taizhou practitioners as “religious”. Everyone, who was perceived as a threat to the order of the Empire ran the risk of being persecuted. However, the emperors and high officials in the Ming knew that popular movements backed up by religious or spiritual convictions could create disturbances in the country and even shake the foundations of the dynasty. Therefore, they could not take the risk of letting them develop freely or establish organizations without governmental control, and if they did, they crushed them. What they feared was the strength of a unified body of individuals with strong determination, which was the goal of the Taizhou movement. They feared the force which Yan Jun described in the words: “If we come together and send out friends who have joined us, we will become a wind which moves the whole country.”¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁵⁰ YJJ: 38.

10. Overall conclusion

This thesis is a study of a Neo-Confucian movement in sixteenth-century China which I call the Taizhou movement. The aim has been to define and analyze the kinds of groups the Taizhou practitioners formed, the ideas they developed and what they did, that is, their religious praxis and organization.

The founder of the Taizhou movement, Wang Gen (1483–1541), came from the salt districts of Taizhou in today's Jiangsu. His thoughts are a continuation of Wang Yangming's, but he adds some ideas new to Wang Yangming's philosophy and to Neo-Confucianism in general, expressed by the concepts of "securing the self" and "respecting oneself". These ideas corresponded very well with people's anxieties and yearning in the turbulent time of mid and late Ming, something which must be one reason why Wang Gen's ideas became highly popular. Wang Gen laid the foundation of a broad network and acted as a charismatic religious leader, as did several of his followers such as Yan Jun (1504–1596) and Luo Rufang (1515–1588). The force behind this network made it a popular movement. The religious character of their activities is not always evident. The political utopian project of He Xinyin (1517–1579) for instance, does not seem to have a strong religious character. However, they all worked intensively to change local customs and local organizations, albeit in different ways. Since Yan Jun, Luo Rufang and He Xinyin came from Jiangxi Province, this became the movement's second centre beside Taizhou. It also spread to the provinces of Guangdong, Yunnan, Sichuan and other places, so it is possible to talk of a nationwide influence of their activities, although the number of Taizhou practitioners probably did not exceed a few thousand.

Through the writings of Wang Gen, he emerges as a person with strong self-confidence believing he would be a saviour for humankind. In concrete terms this could, for instance, mean introducing a land reform in the salt district of Taizhou to make distribution of land equal and thus reduce conflicts between salt producers. Beside arguing for securing and respecting oneself, the very idea of friendship became another core idea among the Taizhou practitioners. He Xinyin placed the bond between friends higher than the other four social bonds, that is, the relationships between ruler and ruled, father and son, husband and wife and elder and younger brother. Conventional Confucian officials steeped in social hierarchies saw this as a critique of traditional values. The Taizhou practitioners' emphasis on the joy of learning and the

rejection of learning without joy gave them a different character from Confucianism elaborated in the civil service examinations and among officials within the imperial administration.

Earlier research has emphasized that the Taizhou practitioners came from a very low social level, but my study shows a slightly different picture. Even though Wang Gen was described as a commoner in all sources, he was not a poor man financially. The definition of a commoner was one who did not belong to the ruling class of high officials. Even a rich merchant without any degrees from the civil examinations would be classified as a commoner along with lower officials, craftsmen and peasants. Wang Gen was registered as a salt producer, a category which was inherited. However, not even this contradicts his relatively strong social heritage. In earlier generations, his forebears had been rather powerful. *The Chronological Biography* tells us that he dropped out of school at eleven because of poverty, but Wang Gen's work as a salt dealer made him able to regain an economically favourable situation in adult life. His wide correspondence shows that he had connections with several influential officials. A more nuanced conclusion is that the Taizhou movement had a broader social base compared with other Confucian groups, and that merchants were a strong force within the movement, actively searching for knowledge outside the civil service examination system. As for He Xinyin, I have found that scholars have described him as having a higher educational level than he actually had. Scholars have repeated that he was a provincial graduate, but according to my research he never attained such a degree. There is no evidence in the sources that he took the provincial examination. It would be possible to argue that since he did not was a provincial graduate, it was easier to persecute him than other scholars like Luo Rufang, Wang Ji and Zhou Rudeng who all had the degree of presented scholars. However, as shown in Chapter 8, contrary to the argument that those with high social status within the administration would be more protected and safe, I claim that there was no such relation. The Donglin scholars who had very high positions were even more harshly persecuted, and Wang Gen and his sons who had no examination at all were neither imprisoned nor killed. The reasons for persecution were religious and political convictions openly expressed and realized in concrete actions.

The map of schools, sketched by the scholar Huang Zongxi (1610–95) in his influential work *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* does not fit reality, which was much more complicated. As many scholars have pointed out before, Huang Zongxi was rather biased and contradictory in his description of the Ming scholars. As a follower of the Wang Yangming line of Ming Confucianism, he had his own agenda. It is, for instance, very difficult to draw a sharp line between the Taizhou network and the network of scholars labelled as the Jiangyou School by Huang Zongxi. The disciples of Wang Yangming were close friends. They met often, engaged in correspondence and helped each other in various ways, not least financially and judicially.

However, they also disagreed about both ideas and praxis. Some were inclined to a life in seclusion, others to a life full of social activities. Some were more intellectual, others more practical. Some were influenced by Daoism, Buddhism and ideas about the compatibility of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism; others were polemic against Daoism and especially against Buddhism. The Taizhou practitioners tended towards social activism and a practical non-theoretical approach. As for their relationship with Buddhism and Daoism, the picture is more complex.

Although previous scholarship criticizes Huang Zongxi, there is no fundamental criticism of the school concept per se. There are merely suggestions about a different mapping. In my opinion, it is necessary to do away with the school concept to be able to come closer to the real situation of the Confucians during mid and late Ming, as well as how they thought and acted. The conclusion of this study is that there are several reasons why the school concept fails to describe the reality of the Taizhou practitioners. First, there is no straight line of succession, and in many cases, it is not even possible to determine clear master-disciple transmission which is the usual way to define a school in Chinese scholarship. Second, the Taizhou practitioners were not primarily interested in philosophical theory but in praxis. Third, I have found the lines between the Taizhou network and other Neo-Confucian so-called “schools” of mid and late Ming Confucianism extremely porous. Even the demarcation lines between Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism are unclear in the Ming material. Therefore, I claim that it is more relevant to talk of a movement instead of a school. The heterogeneity of the Taizhou practitioners and their ideas has puzzled many scholars. The background of their heterogeneity was a free mind, and this liberty is something the Taizhou practitioners inherited from Wang Yangming himself.

In Wang Gen’s view, it was necessary to be humane and love others to be able to protect oneself. He and his followers all argued for an ethical attitude and for engagement in charitable works. I conclude that they tried to counteract the negative aspects of liberty such as egotism, laziness and lost focus with an organization where humaneness, charitable works and equality were central. At the same time, they wanted the organization to protect their spiritual freedom. Their organizations which included discussion meetings as well as the strivings for a free mind were inherited from Wang Yangming and their purpose was to give the participants an opportunity to be free in a social setting. This means that the Taizhou movement stood on two legs: first, an emancipating ideology that talked of protecting and respecting oneself, and whose aim was to reach a mental state of spiritual freedom and joy. Practice of meditation was the way to reach this state of mind. Second, they relied on ideas of morality and brotherhood. The practice linked to this activity was charitable works and community compacts, which regulated the ethical life style by implementing vows of ethical behaviour. The praxis of free

discussions in the academies embraced singing, meditation, community compacts and praise of moral deeds.

Scholars easily tend to perceive a contradiction between meditation and social activism, but this idea does not harmonize with the sources. Yan Jun explicitly did not regard them as contradictory but as mutually supportive. For him the achievements of meditation practice were something which helped him and his followers to be determined and motivated in their social activism: at the same time, he believed that reshaping society was a prerequisite for reaching a mental state of stillness and quietude. This was his way to solve the dichotomy of the Neo-Confucian philosophical concepts of “movement” and “stillness” in a practical manner. Furthermore, meditation did not necessarily mean that one chose a life in seclusion, since meditation was practised both individually and in groups. It is not possible to determine whether Wang Gen gave up meditation later in life, since the sources neither verify nor contradict this. We know that his son Wang Bi was deeply interested in questions of the mind, so there are reasons to believe that Wang Gen regarded meditation practices as important throughout his whole life.

It is mentioned above that the Taizhou practitioners’ relations to Buddhism are complicated. Although they criticized traditional ethical values in many ways, their discussion circulated around ethical questions such as filiality in a similar vein as Wang Yangming. At the same time there is a strong criticism of moralism within the Taizhou movement. Both Yan Jun and He Xinyin questioned the conventional Neo-Confucian views of desire. In this regard, there are similarities between their thoughts and those found in Chan Buddhism and in tantric traditions. They share the ideas with these traditions that desires make man less free and the conviction that to suppress natural human feelings is contra-productive and will in the end only exchange one desire for another. In the view of the Taizhou practitioners, overzealous restraint of desires makes humans unhappy and sick, not enlightened. Therefore, although like other Neo-Confucians, they have a negative view of desires, they have another idea of how to overcome them.

The Taizhou practitioners tried to build a strong coherent and nationwide organization. The cells they formed had a similar pattern, and the connections between them were frequent. There is however no evidence that the different organizations of Wang Bi, Yan Jun, He Xinyin and Luo Rufang were linked to each other on an organizational level. The members were registered, and there were records of members, but the organizations and membership were voluntary. Therefore, it is more correct to speak of organizations than one overarching organization. Institutionalization never occurred.

Officials looked at their activities with fear and tried to repress them. This repression was successful, and the Taizhou organization did not develop as much as the Taizhou practitioners wished. Critical reactions against them came from officials at both higher and lower levels of the imperial administration. This was criticism from scholars and concrete restrictions and

judicial measures taken by men of power. However, the criticism was harsher against Yan Jun and He Xinyin than against Wang Gen and Luo Rufang. The reasons why He Xinyin was killed were his teaching activities and his ability to build up a strong organization; the reason for persecuting Li Zhi was his provocative writings. It is possible to talk of religious persecution of the Taizhou practitioners and Li Zhi, but the persecution also had political and judicial reasons.

The best known criticism is formulated by Huang Zongxi in *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* written at the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). Huang criticizes both Wang Gen and another disciple of Wang Yangming for attributing Buddhist ideas to the teaching of Wang Yangming. The other Wang Yangming disciple was Wang Ji (1498–1583), who Huang places in what he calls the Jiangyou School. Several scholars agree with his criticism of Wang Ji but find his criticism of Wang Gen groundless. It is true that Wang Gen did not read Buddhist sutras, did not worship any bodhisattvas or Buddhas, did not visit Buddhist temples or have connections with Buddhist monks, and this pattern is followed by Yan Jun and He Xinyin. Wang Gen even threw out Buddhist figures from the family shrine. However, they were interested in Buddhist questions of the mind and its meditation techniques, in the same way as many Ming intellectuals were interested in Chan Buddhism and Chan Buddhist meditation. The same could be said of their relation to Daoism. They did not worship Daoist divinities, visit Daoist temples or study Daoist canonical literature, but Yan Jun's seven-day meditation program had strong Daoist traits. This attitude was not very different from Wang Yangming's. Huang Zongxi's criticism of Wang Gen and Wang Ji for adding Chan Buddhist elements to the learning of Wang Yangming is not correct, because there was no need to add them, since those elements were already inherent in his learning. Thus the problem with Huang Zongxi is not that he falsely accuses Wang Gen of this Chan Buddhist inclination, as several scholars have claimed, but that he conceals that Wang Yangming also had such inclinations. To understand why Huang Zongxi did so, we would need to investigate his situation under Manchu rule, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Huang Zongxi's harshest criticism was fired at Yan Jun and He Xinyin. With them Taizhou learning went beyond the limits of Confucianism, in Huang's opinion.

Ming criticism of the Taizhou movement came from officials and from free intellectuals and leading politicians on local and national levels. Wang Shizhen (1526–1590), an influential literati scholar and a contemporary of Yan Jun and He Xinyin likens them to the Yellow Turbans and the Five Pecks of Rice, two Daoist rebellions during the late Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Wang Shizhen, a disciple of a young female Daoist master called Master Tanyang, did not have any objections to Daoism per se but expressed fear of the rebellious side of the Taizhou movement. Wang Shizhen does not mention any Buddhist inclinations. Like Huang Zongxi, he could stand Wang Gen, but

he said that his teaching declined when it reached Yan Jun and He Xinyin. Wang Shizhen disdained the unlearned and uncultivated style of Yan Jun and feared the radicalism of He Xinyin. However, like He Xinyin, Wang Shizhen had a bad relationship with the Grand Secretaries Yan Song and Zhang Juzheng, and as a practitioner of Daoism he had some similarities with Yan Jun. It became important for him to disassociate himself from them. His own beliefs and practices were easily perceived as heterodoxy, and as a matter of fact, he was accused of heterodoxy in 1581, and his Master Tanyang was condemned for witchcraft.

Another Ming scholar, Gu Xiancheng, is also famous for his criticism of the Taizhou practitioners. In his case, the criticism is exaggerated. In the same breath as he criticizes them, he expresses his admiration of their courage. Another interesting fact is that Wang Shizhen, Gu Xiancheng and He Xinyin all had the same enemy, namely Zhang Juzheng.

The son of Wang Zhiyuan, the official who sent He Xinyin to prison, describes Yan Jun and He Xinyin as criminals; He Xinyin for murdering and injuring six persons, stealing money, inciting rebellion and several other illegal activities and Yan Jun for being a swindler and having affairs with village women. Wang Zhiyuan's stance is different from that of Wang Shizhen and Gu Xiancheng. He was not afraid of being associated with them, and he had no hidden admiration of their courage. He had sent He Xinyin to prison and became anxious when he was accused of his murder. This accusation made his son rewrite Wang Zhiyuan's version of how "the criminal He Xinyin" had acted to defend his father against posthumous condemnation.

However, the most devastating blow against the Taizhou movement and the whole teaching discussion movement inaugurated by Wang Yangming came from Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582). He became Grand Secretary in the Ming government, and forbade all private academies in 1579. Thus he crushed the whole learning discussion movement with one stroke. This happened the same year as He Xinyin was killed in prison. Whether or not Zhang Juzheng lay behind the murder of He Xinyin is not proved, but Zhang was accused of his death by critical contemporaries. Zhang furthermore demoted Luo Rufang from a high position to a post in a remote area in South China. Zhang had two motivations for his work as a Grand Secretary: to strengthen the Ming dynasty and to create a state based on law. He initially admired Wang Yangming, probably as a strategist and a man of action. However, Zhang Juzheng was primarily a pragmatist, and when his aims clashed with the idealism of the Wang Yangming movement, and especially the liberating tendencies of the Taizhou practitioners, he felt obliged to control their movement and organizations; this he did by forbidding the free academies and the discussion meetings.

After the invasion of the Manchus and the fall of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Taizhou movement lost its influence. There are indications that its ideas survived in an undercurrent movement during the Qing dynasty (1644–

1912), something which would make an interesting subject for a future research project.

To summarize, the Taizhou practitioners chose Buddhist questions of the mind and posed these questions to a few short and easily read Confucian classics such as *The Analects*, *The Book of Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. The answers they interpreted from the classical texts were linked to ethical values and some Daoist practices. Finally, they created suitable social organizations to strengthen their ideas of a free and unrestrained mind, which was their general goal. This was not very different from other Neo-Confucians in the Ming dynasty. What distinguishes them from other groups is their practical attitude and that they broadened the social basis of the Neo-Confucian movement. Another difference is their unlearned and sometimes provocative interpretations of the Classics resulting in a renewed ethic. They also seem to be more convinced of an imminent transformation of the world compared with other contemporary Neo-Confucians. Yan Jun was convinced it would take only three years.

This thesis has presented a more nuanced picture of the Taizhou movement and the ideas and religious praxis of its practitioners. It shows that the Taizhou practitioners reacted against oppressive structures in society and self-denigrating mental ideas. At the same time, they inspired people on all levels of society to attempt a change and gave them both the responsibility and the methods for this transformation. This transformation occurred at both the individual and the societal level and was sufficiently noticed to attract official repression. This thesis, however, has not continued to examine the question of what happened to the movement in the seventeenth century and during the Qing dynasty. While it is difficult to accept that the ideas and praxis of the Taizhou movement simply faded away, what actually occurred is a question for coming research to answer.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Avhandlingen definierar, analyserar och kontextualiserar en rörelse i Kina som jag kallar Taizhou-rörelsen, men som i tidigare forskning oftast har kallats Taizhou-skolan. Rörelsen grundades av Wang Gen (1483–1541), som var en salthandlare från Taizhou i nuvarande Jiangsu-provinsen. Han fick en upplysningsupplevelse när han besökte Konfucius tempel i dennes hemstad Qufu, och började då studera de konfucianska klassikerna trots att han bara hade gått några få år i en vanlig byskola. Han blev så småningom lärjunge till den store filosofen Wang Yangming (1472–1529), och byggde en egen skola där han samlade sina egna lärjungar runt sig. Rörelsen spreds senare till framför allt Jiangxi-provinsen där ett flertal karismatiska Taizhou-ledare levde och verkade, bland annat Yan Jun (1504–1596), He Xinyin (1517–1579) och Luo Rufang (1515–1588). Avhandlingen avgränsas till 1500-talet och fokuserar på Wang Gen och dessa tre Taizhou-anhängare från Jiangxi.

I introduktionskapitlet presenteras en rad nyckelbegrepp, framför allt operationella termer som används av forskare för att diskutera och definiera de religiösa och filosofiska idéerna, men också några termer som förekommer i det kinesiska källmaterialet. I detta kapitel förklarar jag varför jag anser att begreppet ”rörelse” passar bättre än ”skola” för att definiera vad dessa personer sysslade med. Vidare argumenteras för att begreppet ”tradition” är en lämplig term när man talar om konfucianismen, en tradition som har både filosofiska och religiösa aspekter, men att denna term även lämpar sig väl för buddhismen och daoismen.

I kapitel 2, presenteras forskningsmetoden och källorna. Metoden för undersökningen är historiskt-filologisk, och i arbetet har ingått ett studium av de äldsta primärkällorna från 1500-talet. Förutom texter av dessa Taizhou-anhängare har också texter av deras samtida kritiker utgjort viktiga sidodokument. En viktig källa är ”The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning” skriven av Huang Zongxi (1610–95) och som har färgat all senare forskning. Huang Zongxi ger inte en objektiv och neutral bild av Taizhou-rörelsen, och det gör inte andra källor heller. Över huvud taget är narrativen om vad som hände mycket spretiga, där man antingen heroiserar Taizhou-anhängarna – det gäller till exempel biografierna – eller nedvärderar dem och i vissa fall skapar rena nidbilder. Diskrepanserna finns redan i de tidigaste källorna från 1500-talet, vilket visar att ryktesspridningen var stark redan från start. I kapitel 2 presenteras också forskningslitteraturen. Det stora intresse för rörelsen och dess anhängare som finns i Folkrepubliken Kina, Taiwan och

Japan avspeglas inte i den västerländska forskningen. I avhandlingen finns flera texter som aldrig blivit översatta till engelska tidigare.

Kapitel 3 tecknas den historiska bakgrunden och den religiösa kartan under 1500-talet. Det var en omvälvande tid då stora förändringar i samhället ägde rum. Att en salthandlare som Wang Gen hade möjlighet att ägna sig åt studier är ett tecken på att vanliga människor kunde skaffa sig en ganska bra ekonomisk situation på kort tid. Men det motsatta var inte heller ovanligt, det vill säga att människor hade svårt att hitta en försörjning och att naturkatastrofer och svält var kännbara problem i många människors vardag. En grundläggande hypotes i avhandlingen är att instabiliteten i samhället är en viktig faktor bakom det faktum att Taizhou-anhängarna betonar vikten av att hitta ett mentalt tillstånd av lugn, propagera moral och att skapa system för ömsesidig hjälp.

Wang Gen's idéer presenteras i kapitel 4. Dit hör hans syn på kunskap som glädje och kritiken av glädjelösa studier inom examinationsväsendet vilka inte anses ge sann kunskap. Den sanna kunskapen finns enligt Wang Gen att finna i det egna sinnet och nås genom att man återvänder till sitt ursprung i meditationen. Han betonar också vikten av att skydda och respektera sig själv. Han kritiserar gängse idéer om förtjänsten av att offra sitt eget liv för andra och för överordnade i samhället. Enligt hans synsätt utgör den egna individen och alla andra människor i grunden en enhet med *Dao* – Vägen. Det gäller att upptäcka det, en erfarenhet som är personlig. När man fått den kan man förstå de klassiska texterna på rätt sätt. Genom att älska och respektera andra, får man kärlek och respekt av andra vilket i sin tur bidrar till att skapa säkerhet för i livet för den egna personen.

I kapitel 5 beskrivs hur Wang Gen's nätverk växer. Rörelsen är mycket heterogen och avgränsningar mot andra neokonfucianska grupperingar är svåra att dra. Huang Zongxi definierar sina så kallade "skolor" utifrån vilka platser de kommer ifrån, mästar-lärjunge-relationer och filosofiska idéer. Detta stämmer inte särskilt väl in på Taizhou-anhängarna, som inte kom utslutande från Taizhou utan framför allt från Jiangxi-provinsen men även andra provinser i hela södra Kina. Deras mästar-lärjunge-relationer är inte heller entydiga och deras idéer skiftande. Ett exempel på dessa avgränsningsproblem är att Wang Gen anförtror sin andra son Wang Bi (1511–1587) som elev till Wang Ji (1498–1583), en person som var en av Wang Yangming's främsta lärjungar och som räknas till en helt annan skola av Huang Zongxi.

Taizhou-rörelsens religiösa praxis och sociala organisationer beskrivs i kapitel 6 utifrån de använda primärkällorna. Anhängarna träffades för att lyssna på föreläsningar, diskutera och debattera filosofiska och etiska frågor i de privata akademierna eller på andra platser såsom familjehelgedomar, tempel eller lokaler som användes av olika yrkesgrupper, men sammankomsterna var inte utslutande intellektuella utan appellerade även till människors känslor. Man sjöng och spelade musik, reciterade dikter och andra för rörelsen viktiga texter och man mediterade tillsammans. Yan Jun har en

beskrivning av en sjudagarsretreat som finns översatt i detta kapitel. Man kunde också bli medlem av lokala kommuniteter genom att signera ett kontrakt där man förband sig att följa ett antal etiska regler. De lokala organisationerna verkar inte ha haft en övergripande organisation, men syftet är att ena människor och skapa en samhällelig kraft. Yan Jun uttrycker att det finns ett dialektiskt förhållande mellan strävanden i den individuella meditationen och den sociala organisationen, två aspekter som han menar stödjer varandra.

Kapitel 7 diskuteras en idé om att konfucianismen genomgår en ”religionisering” under sen Ming-tid. Kapitlet fokuserar i anslutning till detta på svårigheten att definiera rörelsen som religiös. Rörelsens idéer och praxis appliceras på två olika definitioner, en bunden och en obunden. Den bundna definitionen kräver att ett visst antal karaktäristika ska uppfyllas för att man ska kunna tala om en religion, den obundna definitionen är öppen och kräver inte att alla aspekter eller dimensioner som finns med stämmer med den undersökta traditionen utan att det räcker med att en stor del av dem gör det. Resultatet är att en bunden definition såsom Bruce Lincolns inte stämmer in på Taizhou-rörelsen eftersom där förväntas att det ska finnas en institution. En obunden definition fungerar bättre, men flera typiska drag, som är typiska i många religioner saknas, till exempel dyrkan av gudar eller gudalikhande väsen samt förekomsten av religiösa specialister såsom prästerskap eller andra religiösa eliter. Andra religiösa drag finns, vilket gör att man ändå kan betrakta rörelsen som en religion utifrån en sådan religionsdefinition. Om definitionen tar fasta på emotionella och erfarenhetsaspekter fungerar definitionen bättre för Taizhou-rörelsen. Slutsatsen är att konfucianismen inte blir mer ”religiös” under sen Ming-tid, utan att de religiösa dragen förändras. Taizhou-rörelsen är karismatiskt emotionell. Karaktären av religiös mystik finns hos Taizhou-rörelsen med gäller hela neokonfucianismen.

Taizhou-rörelsens relation till ”de tre traditionerna” (*sanjiao*), det vill säga, konfucianismen, buddhismen och daoismen, är komplicerad, något som analyseras i kapitel 8. I likhet med sin lärare Wang Yangming, refererar inte Wang Gen till buddhistiska texter. Han förhöll sig också starkt kritisk till dyrkan av buddhor och bodhisattvor. Han talar också om konfucianismen som ”min”, ett uttryck för att han ville få tillträde till den konfucianska kulturen trots att han inte var en lärd ämbetsman. Samtidigt är han influerad av buddhismens intresse för sinnet och hur det fungerar. Ännu starkare buddhistiska drag syns i dikter skrivna av hans son Wang Bi, och en hypotes i avhandlingen är att detta förmodligen har att göra med att Wang Bi gått i lära hos Wang Ji, vars idéer är tydligt Chan-buddhistiska med tal om de tre ”icke-existenserna”. Påståendet att Wang Yangming inte skulle vara påverkad av Chan-buddhismen på grund av referenser till buddhistiska sutror saknas stämmer inte, eftersom Chan-buddhister själva hade en kritisk hållning till text-studier. Denna text-kritiska hållning är i själva verket en gemensam nämnare mellan Chan-buddhismen, Wang Yangming och Wang Gen. De talade alla om att sutror eller klassiker är fotnoter till det egna sinnet. En allt

större öppning gentemot buddhismen kan skönjas över tid inom Taizhou-rörelsen och hade avhandlingen inkluderat senare Taizhou-anhängare som Jiao Hong (1540–1620) och Zhou Rudeng (1547–1629) hade detta förmodligen blivit ännu tydligare. Yan Jun är eklektisk i förhållande till de tre traditionerna, och är kritisk till praktiker inom alla de tre traditionerna. Flera Taizhou-anhängare inklusive Yan Jun framhåller ”de heliga männens lära” som den ursprungliga och korrekta. Med de heliga männen avses förhistoriska härskare som agerade spontant etiskt. Även daoistiska sidor finns hos Wang Gen såsom strävan efter att skydda det egna livet och den egna kroppen, och Yan Jun’s sjudagarsmeditation har daoistiska drag.

Kap 9 visar att förföljelse av Taizhou-anhängarna kom från lokala och även högt uppsatta ämbetsmän. De var bland annat kritiska till att Taizhou-ledarena åkte runt och ordnade föreläsningar och diskussioner. Luo Rufang blev degraderad och förflyttad till ett avlägset område, Yan Jun fängslades men lyckades tack vare ett starkt kontaktnät blir frisläppt. He Xinyin fängslades 1579 efter att ha flytt från plats till plats under lång tid. Han mördades i fängelset samma år som premiärminister Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582) förbjöd de fria diskussionerna i de privata akademierna, vilket var ett avgörande slag mot Taizhou-rörelsen. Narrativen i Ming-källorna kring vilka som låg bakom förföljelserna är motstridiga. Vissa pekar ut Zhang Juzheng som He Xinyin’s mördare, medan andra hävdar att det är lokala ämbetsmän som agerar på eget bevåg. Ämbetsmän själva beskriver Yan Jun och He Xinyin som sedeslösa brottslingar och upprorsmän.

En övergripande slutsats i avhandlingen är att Taizhou-rörelsens idéer i förening med den religiösa praxisen och de sociala aktiviteterna upplevdes som ett hot mot makthavare på flera nivåer i den kejsrerliga administrationen.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Analects [*Lunyu* 論語]. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.

The Book of Changes [*Yijing* (*Zhouyi*) / 易經 (周易)]. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.

The Doctrine of the Mean [*Zhongyong* 中庸]. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.

The Dongtai Gazetteer [*Dongtai Xian Zhi* 東臺縣志]. 1817. In: *Zhongguo Fangzhi Congshu, Jiangsu sheng* 中國方志叢書, 江蘇省, vol. 27.

Geng Dingxiang 耿定向. 1598. 'Wang Xinzhai Xiansheng Zhuan'. In: *Geng Tiantai Xiansheng Wenji* 耿天臺先生文集, (preface 1598), Juan 14: 1a–10a. Japanese National Archives, Naikaku Bunko, Tokyo. (online in CADAL)

The Great Learning [*Daxue* 大學]. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.

Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成. *Xiaoxinzhai zhaji* 小心齋劄記. 1964. Edited by Feng Congwu 馮叢吾 & Gao Panlong 高攀龍. Taipei: Guangwen shuju 廣文書局.

He Xinyin 何心隱, *He Xinyin Ji* 何心隱集. 1960. Edited by Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju. (HXYJ)

Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, *Mingru Xuean* 明儒學案 (1693). 2008. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju. (MRXA)

Ji'an Fu Zhi 吉安府志. In: *Zhongguo Fangzhi Congshu, Jiangxi sheng* 中國方志叢書, 江西省, vol. 272.

- Jiangxi Sheng Zhi*. 江西省志. 1683. Kangxi reign.
- Jiangnan Tongzhi* 江南通志. Zhao Tian'en 趙田恩 ed., *Siku quanshu*.
- Jiangxi Sheng Zhi*. 江西省志. 1732. Yongzheng.
- Li Zhi 李贄. *Chutan Ji* 初潭集. 1974 (1588). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Fenshu Xu Fenshu* 焚書繼續焚書. 2011 (1590). Translated into modern Chinese and annotated by Zhang Jianye 張建業, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.
- Luo Rufang 羅汝芳. *Luo Rufang Ji* 羅汝芳集. 2007. Edited by Fang Zuyou and others. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe.
- Mencius [Mengzi 孟子]*. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.
- Mingru Wang Dongruan Dongyu Dongri Tianzhen si xiansheng cangao* 明儒王東塿東隅東日天真四先生殘稿. Appendix to *Ming ru Wang Xinzhai xiansheng yiji* 王心齋先生遺集 (1912). Stored in Kyoto University Library.
- Mingshi* 明史. 1999. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju [Qing: edited by Zhang Tingyu and others].
- Mingshi lu* 明實錄. (1961). Taipei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo.
- The Book of Rites [Liji 禮記]*. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.
- The Book of Songs [Shijing 詩經]*. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.
- Taizhou Zhi*. 泰州志. 1633. In: *Siku quanshu Cunmu Congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書: 史部, vol. 210.
- Wang Bi 王裊, *Xinjuan Dongya Wang Xiansheng Yiji*, 新鐫東厓王先生遺. 1611 (1545). (In: *Siku Quanshu Cunmu Congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書: 集部, vol. 146.
- Wang Gen 王艮. *Chongjuan Xinzhai Wang Xiansheng Quanji* 重鐫心齋王先生全集. 1604. Stored in National Archives of Japan, Tokyo. (XZW)
- *Mingru Wang Xinzhai Quanji* 明儒王心齋先生全集 1912.

- *Wang Xinzhai Quanji* 王心齋全集. 2001. Edited by Chen Zhusheng 陳祝生. Nanjing: Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe. (WXZQJ)

Wang Shizhen 王世貞. “Jialong Jianghu daxia” 嘉龍江湖大俠. In: HXYJ: 143–144. *Jiajing yilai neige shoufu zhuan* 嘉靖以來內閣首輔傳, in: *Siku Quanshu*.

Wang Yangming 王陽明. *Wang Yangming Quanji* 王陽明全集. 1992 (reprint 2006), edited by Wu Guang 吳光, Qian Ming 錢明, Dong Ping 董平, Yao Yanfu 姚延福. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe.

- *Wang Yangming Quanshu* 王陽明全書. In: *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊.

Wang Zhiyuan 王之垣. *Li Shi Lu* 歷仕錄 (Record of my official career). 1702. In: *Siku Quanshu Cunmu Congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書: 史部, vol. 127. Xunzi 荀子. 1919. *Sibu Zongkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.

Yan Jun 顏鈞. *Yan Jun Ji* 顏鈞集. 1996. Edited by Huang Xuanmin 黃宣民. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe. (YYJ)

Yongfeng Xian Zhi. 永豐縣志. 1874. Tongzhi 13 [1874]; ed.: Liu Yi 劉繹.

Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道. *Ke Xuezhai Jinji* 珂雪齋近集. In: *Xuxiu Siku Quanshu* 續修四庫全書 vol. 1376.

Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 1586. “Wang Xinzhai xiansheng muzhiming” 王心齋墓志銘. In: *Zhao Wenxiao Gong Wenji* 趙文肅公文集 (preface 1586), Ch. 18:4a–8a. Japanese National Archives, Naikaku Bunko, Tokyo. (online in CADAL)

Zhu Xi 朱熹 *Jinsi lu* 近思錄. In: *Siku quanshu*.

Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋. *Yuzhi Dagao Sanbian* 御製大誥三編. CADAL: 98–99.

Zhuangzi 莊子 [*Nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經]. 1919. *Sibu Congkan* 四部叢刊, Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuaguan.

Literature

Alitto, Guy, S. 1986. *The Last Confucian; Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*. Berkely: University of California Press.

Araki, Kengo 荒木見悟. 1975. “Confucianism and Buddhism in the Late Ming”, in: *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, New York and London: Columbia University Press: 39–66.

- 2008. (1993) *Fojiao yu rujiao 佛教与儒教*, translated by Liao Zhaoheng 廖肇亨, Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi.

Ashiwa, Yoshiko and Wank, David L. (eds). 2009. *Making Religion: Making the State*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Baldrian-Hussein, Farzeen. “Inner elixir, inner alchemy” (Neidan 内丹), 2008. *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, edited by Fabrizio Pregadio, London: Routledge: 762–766.

Barnes, J.A. 1954. “Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish”, *Human Relations*, vol. 7, 1. 39–58. First Published Feb 1, 1954.

Barnhart, Richard. 1993. *Painters of the Great Ming: The Imperial Court and the Zhe School*, Dallas: The Dallas Museum of Art.

Barrett, Timothy H. 2008. “Taoism and Neo-Confucianism”, in: *The encyclopedia of Taoism*, edited by Fabrizio Pregadio, London: Routledge.

Batchelor, Stephen. 2012. “A Secular Buddhism”, *Journal of Global Buddhism* 13 (2012): 87–107.

Bell, Catherine. 2008. “Folios of the Most High on Retribution” (*Taishang ganying pian 太上感应篇*), in: *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, edited by Fabrizio Pregadio, London: Routledge: 948–951.

Berling, Judith A. 1998. “Taoism in Ming Culture”, in: *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 8, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, edited by Twitchett and Mote: 954–955.

Billeter, Jean-Francois. 1979. *Li Zhi, Philosophe Maudit (1527-1602)*, Genève: Droz.

Bol, Peter, K. 1992. *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Brook, Timothy. 1993a. "Rethinking syncretism: The unity of the Three Teachings and their joint worship in late-Imperial China", *Journal of Chinese Religions*, No 21 (Fall 1993): 13–44.

- 1993b. *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series, 0073-084X: 38.

- 1996. "The Building of School Libraries in Ming China", *Late Imperial China* 17:1 (June 1996).

- 1999. *The Confusions of Pleasure; Commerce and Culture in Ming China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- 2010. *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Buber, Martin. 1950, *Der Weg des Menschen nach der chassidischen Lehre*, Haag: Pulvis viarum.

Buswell, Robert, E, Jr. 1992. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Chan, Wing-tsit. 1962. "How Buddhistic is Wang Yangming?" *Philosophy East and West*, 12: 3 (Oct. 1962): 203–215.

- 1963a. "Introduction", in: *Instructions for practical living and other Neo-Confucian writings* by Wang Yangming, New York: Columbia University Press: xviii–xli.

- 1963b. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, translated and Compiled by Wing-tsit Chan, Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- 1967. *Reflections on things at hand: the Neo-Confucian anthology: compiled by Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-ch'ien with Notes by Wing-tsit Chan*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Chase, Michael. 2013. "Introduction: The Life of Pierre Hadot". In: *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns: Essays in Honor of*

Pierre Hadot, 2013, Chase, Michael and others, ISBN 978-1-118-60921-7, John Wiley and Sons.

Chen, Lai 陈来. 2008. *Songming Lixue* 宋明理学 [Learning of Principles in the Song and Ming dynasties], Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue Chubanshe.

Cheng, Yu-yin 1996. *Sagehood and the Common Man: Tai-chou Confucianism in Late Ming Society*. Ph.D. Dissertation. California Davis University.

- 2001. "Selected writings by Luo Rufang". In: *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Chiang, Tao-chang. 1975. "The Salt Industry of Ming China". *Geographical Review*, 65:1 (Jan. 1975) 93–106.

Ch'ien, Edward T. 1986. *Chiao Hung and the Reconstructing of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ching, Julia. 1976. *To Acquire Wisdom: the Way of Wang Yang-ming*. New York and London: Columbia University Press.

- 1987. "Introduction". In: Huang Zongxi, *The Records of Ming Scholars*, A selected translation. Julia Ching ed. with the collaboration of Chaoying Fang, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2000. *The Religious Thought of Chu His*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chow, Kai-wing. 2004. *Publishing, Culture, Power in Early Modern China*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi 1994, translated by Richard John Lynn, New York: Columbia University Press.

Cleary, Jonathan Christopher. 1985. *Zibo Zhenke, a Buddhist leader in the late Ming China*. PhD dissertation, Harvard University.

Crawford, Robert. 1970. "Chang Chu-cheng's Confucian Legalism". In: *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, Wm. Theodore de Bary ed., New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970: 367–414

- D'Costa, Gavin. 1986. *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Dai, Lianbin. 2012. *Books, Reading, and Knowledge in Ming China*. PhD dissertation, University of Oxford.
- Dardess, John W. 2002. *Blood and History in China; the Donglin faction and its Repression 1620–27*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Dennis, Joseph. 2015. *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- de Bary, Wm Theodore. 1970. "Individualism and Humanitarianism", in: *Self and Society in Ming Thought*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 145–248.
- 1993. "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism: A Response to Professor Tillman", *Philosophy East and West* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 43:3 (Jul., 93): 541–556.
- de Bruyn, Pierre-Henry. 2004. "Daoism in the Ming", in: *Daoism Handbook*, Vol 2, edited by Livia Kohn, Boston & Leiden: Brill: 594–622.
- Démieville, Paul. 1956. "La pénétration du bouddhisme dans la tradition philosophique Chinoise", *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, Vol. 3. (1956): 13–40.
- 1973. "Le miroir spirituel", in: *Choix D'études bouddhiques*, Leiden: Brill.
- Deng Zhifeng 邓志峰. 2004. *Wangxue yu wanming de shidao fuxing yundong* 王学与晚明的师道复兴运动. Beijing: Dongfang Lishi Xueshu Wenku.
- Dennis, Joseph. 2015. *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.\
- Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644*, L.C. Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., N.Y.: Columbia U.P., 1976, 2 vols. (DMB)
- Dimberg, Donald G. 1987. *The Sage and Society: The Life and Thought of Ho Hsin-yin*. Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, No. 1, the University Press of Hawaii.

Ebrey, Patricia B. 1991. *Chu Hsi's 'Family Rituals': A Twelfth-Century Manual for the Performance of Cappings, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites*. Translation with annotation and introduction by Ebrey. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eichman, Jennifer. 2014. "Intertextual Alliances: Huang Hui's Synthesis of Confucian and Buddhist Paths to Liberation". *T'oung Pao* 100 (2014):120–163.

- 2016. *A Late Sixteenth-Century Chinese Buddhist Fellowship: Spiritual Ambitions, Intellectual Debates, and Epistolary Connections*. Leiden: Brill. Sinica Leidensia Vol. 127.

Elman, Benjamin. 1984. *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge (Mass.): Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University.

- 2000. *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

- 2013. *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Encyclopedia of Religion 2005, edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 2, Second edition, Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA.

Faure, Bernhard. 1991. *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*, Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Fingarette, Herbert. 1994. *Confucius: the Secular as Sacred*, New York: Harper & Row.

Fontana, Michela. 2011. *Matteo Ricci: a Jesuit in the Ming Court*, Electronic resource.

Fung, Yu-lan and Bodde, Derk. 1942. "The Rise of Neo-Confucianism and its Borrowing from Buddhism and Daoism", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol 7. No 2 (Jul., 1942).

Fung, Yu-lan 馮友蘭. 1973. *A History of Chinese Philosophy: Vol 2, the Period of Classical Learning (from the Second Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gardner, Daniel K. 1990. *Learning to be a sage: selections from the conversations of Master Chu*, arranged topically by Chu Hsi; translated with a commentary by Daniel K. Gardner, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Geiss, James. 1988. "The Chia-ching Reigns, 1522–1566". In: *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7, 1988: 440–510.

Gentz, Joachim. 2013. *Understanding Chinese religions*, Edinburgh: Dunedin.

- 2011. "Rational choice and the Chinese discourse on the Unity of the Three Religions" (*Sanjiao Heyi* 三教合一), *Religion* 42 (2011): 535–546, Taylor & Francis online.
- 2006. " 'Ritual': A lexicographic survey of some related terms from an emic perspective", in: *Theorizing Rituals*, vol. 1, Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts, edited by Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers: 51–100.

Gerritsen, Anne. 2007. *Ji'an Literati and the Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China*, Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Ginzburg, Carlo 1992. *The cheese and the worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller*. Translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (First published in Italian: *Formaggio e i vermi*, 1975.)

Gethin, Rupert. 2011. "On some Definitions of Mindfulness", in: *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12:1 (May 2011): 263–279.

Gong, Jie 龚杰. 2001. *Wang Gen pingzhuan* 王艮评传 [A critical Biography of Wang Gen]. Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chubanshe.

ter Haar, Barend J. 1992. *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese religious History*, Leiden: E.J. Brill.

- 2009. "Yongzheng and his abbots". In: *The People and the Dao: New Studies of Chinese Religions in Honour of Prof. Daniel L. Overmyer*, edited by Philip Clart and Paul Crowe, Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica: 435–477.

- 2016. “From Field to Text in the Study of Chinese Religion”, *Religion and Orientalism in Asian Studies*, Kiri Paramore ed. London: Bloomsbury: 85–105.

Hadot, Pierre. 2002. *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre*, Paris: Albin Michel.

Hahn, Thomas H. 2004. “Daoist sacred sites”, in: *Daoism Handbook*, Vol 2, edited by Livia Kohn, Boston & Leiden: Brill: 683–708.

Hammond, Kenneth. 1994. *History and literati culture: Towards an intellectual biography of Wang Shizhen (1526–1590)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University.

Hanyu Da Cidian 漢語大詞典, Luo Zhubian 罗竹风 ed. Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 1986. (HDC)

Han, Yu 韓愈. 1979. “Memorial on the Bone of Buddha” (Lun Fogu Biao 論佛骨表) In: *Chinese Classical Prose: the Eight Masters of the T'ang-Sung Period*, selected and translated by Shih Shun Liu, with notes and Chinese texts, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Harbsmeier, Christoph. 2013. “The Birth of Confucianism from Competition with Organized Mohism”, *Journal of Chinese Studies* [中國文化研究所學報], No. 56, Jan. 2013.

Hartman, Charles. 1986. *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Hauf, Kandice. 1996. “The community covenant in sixteenth century Ji'an prefecture, Jiangxi”. *Late Imperial China*. 17:2.

Ho, Ping-ti. 1954. “The Salt Merchants of Yang-chou: A study of Commercial Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century China”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 17:1 (June 1954): 130–168.

- 1962. *The Ladder of Success in imperial China: Aspects of social Mobility, 1368–1911*, New York: Columbia of University Press.

Hou, Wailu. 侯外廬. 1987 (reprint 2005). *Songming lixueshi* 宋明理學史 [History of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties], Vol 2. Beijing: Renming chubanshe.

Hsiao, Kung-chuan. 1979. *A History of Chinese Political Thought. Vol. 1. From the Beginnings to the Sixth Century A.D.* Translated by F.W. Mote. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Hsu, Sung-peng 徐頌鵬. 1979. *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China: The Life and Thought of Han-Shan Te-Ch'ing*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Huang, Martin W. 2007. *Male Friendship in Ming China*, Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Huang, Ray. 1975. (Online publication 2014). "The Salt Monopoly" in:

Huang, Ray 2014. *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 189–224.

Huang Xuanmin 黄宣民. 1996. "Introduction" (*Qianyan* 前言), in: YYJ: 1–10.

Hucker, Charles O. 1985. *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. Stanford, California: Stanford California Press.

Ji, Fangtong 李芳桐. 2005. *Taizhou Xuepai Xinlun* 泰州学派新论 [New discussions on the Taizhou School]. Chengdu: Badu shushe.

Ji, Wenfu 嵇文甫. 1933 (reprint 1996). *Wanming sixiangshi lun* 晚明思想史論. (Reprint: Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe 1996)

- 1934. *Zuopai Wangxue* 左派王學 [The left wing of the Wang Yangming learning]. (Reprint: Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore 1990).

Jin, Jiang. 2001. "Heresy and Persecution in Late Ming Society: Reinterpreting the Case of Li Zhi". *Late Imperial China*, 2001 (22.2) Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1-34.

Jochim, Christian. 1986. *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs.

Karlgren, Bernhard. 1972. *Grammatica Serica Recensa*. Kungsbacka: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag. (Reprinted from The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities Stockholm. Bulletin No 29, Stockholm, 1957)

Kang, Youwei. 1956 (reprint 1959) *Datong Shu* 大同書, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

Kelleher, Theresa. 1987. "Confucianism". In: *Women in World Religions*, edited by Sharma, Arvind, Albany: State University of New York Press. 1987.
King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and religion: post-colonial theory, India and 'the mystic East'*. London: Routledge.

Koh, Khee Heong, 2011. *A Northern Alternative: Xue Xuan (1389-1464) and the Hedong School*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Asia Center.

Lau, Din Cheuk 劉殿爵. 1979. *The Analects*. London: Penguin Books.

Lee, Pauline C. 2012. *Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lee, Sheng-kuang. 1990. *Commoner and Sagehood: Wang Ken and the T'ai-chou School*. PhD Diss., University of Arizona.

Lewis, James R, and Hammer, Olav. 2007. *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, edited by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lidén, Johanna. 2011. "Buddhist and Daoist influences on Neo-Confucian thinkers and their claim of orthodoxy". *Orientalia Suecana*, Vol. LX (2011): 163-184.

Lincoln, Bruce. 2003. (Reprint 2006). *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Littrup, Leif. 1981. *Sub-bureaucratic Government in Ming Times: A study of Shandong Province in the Sixteenth Century*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Liu, Ts'un-yan. 1970. "Taoist Self-Cultivation in Ming Thought", In: *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, de Bary ed, New York and London: Columbia University Press.

Lodén, Torbjörn. 2006. *Rediscovering Confucianism*, Folkstone: Global Oriental LTD.

Lu, Miaw-fen. 1997. *Practice as Knowledge: Yang-ming Learning and Chiang-hui in Sixteenth-Century China*, PhD Dissertation University of California, Los Angeles.

Lye, Hun Y. 2011. "Yuqie Yankou in the Ming-Qing", in: *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Charles D. Orzech (general editor). Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Ma, Yung-fen. 2011. *The Revival of Tiantai Buddhism in the Late Ming: On the Thought of Youxi Chuandeng 幽溪傳燈 (1554-1628)*. PhD Dissertation, Columbia University.

Mabuchi, Mayasaki. 2016. "'Quiet Sitting' in Neo-Confucianism, in: *Asian Traditions of Meditation*, edited by Halvor Eifring. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Makeham, John. 2003. *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*, Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Asia Center.

- 2008. *Lost Soul; "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse*. Cambridge (Mass): Published by the Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, Harvard-Yenching Institute monographs; 64.

-

- 2010. *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

McGuire, Beverley Foulks. 2014. *Living Karma: the Religious Practices of Ouyi Zhixu*, The Sheng Yen Series in Chinese Buddhist Studies, Columbia University Press. E-book.

McRae, John. 2003. *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- 2005. "Chinese Buddhism", in: *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Lindsay Jones, Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 1235-1241.

Meskill, John. 1982. *Academies in Ming China: A Historical Essay*. The Association for Asian Studies Monograph No XXXIX, Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press.

Meynard, Thierry. 2011. *Religious Philosophy of Liang Shuming: The Hidden Buddhist*, in the Serie: Modern Chinese philosophy, Vol 3, edited by John Makeham, Leiden & Boston: Brill.

Ng, On-Cho. 2001. *Cheng-Zhu Confucianism in Early Qing: Li Guangdi (1642–1718) and Qing learning*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Nylan, Michael. 2001. *The five "Confucian" Classics*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Okada, Takehiko. 1970. "Wang Chi and the Rise of Existentialism", in: *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, New York and London: Columbia University Press: 121–144.

- 2010. "Guanyu tiyong de lishi" 关于体用的历史 In: *Sixiang yu wenxian; Riben xuezhe Song Ming ruxue yanjiu* [Thought and Literature; Research on Confucian thought during Song and Ming by Japanese Academics], ed. Wu Zhen, Shanghai: Huadong Shifan daxue Chubanshe: 44–54.

Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upanisads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peng, Guoxiang. 彭国翔 2001. "Zhou Haimen de xuepai guishu yu 'Mingru xuean' xiangguan wenti zhi yantao" *Journal of Chinese Studies* 31.3: 339–372.

- 2004. "Wang Xinzhai hou ren de sixiang yu shijian- Taizhou xuepai yanjiu zhong bei hulue de yimai". *Zhongguo Yanjiu*, 14: 75–114.
- 2005. *Liangzhi xue de zhankai: Wang Longxi yu zhong wan ming de Yangming xue*. Beijing: Sanlian Shudian.

Peterson, Mark F. and Pike, Kenneth L. 2002. "Emics and Etics for Organizational Studies: A Lesson in Contrast from Linguistics". *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*. Vol. 2 (1): 5–19.

Pregadio, Fabrizio. 2008. *Encyclopedia of Taoism*. 2008. (E-book) London: Routledge.

- 2004. "Elixirs and Alchemy". In: *Daoism Handbook*, vol. 1, edited by Livia Kohn, Boston & Leiden: Brill: 165–195.
- 2008. "Dantian", in: *Encyclopedia of Taoism*. London: Routledge, e-resource: 302–302.

Poceski, Mario. 2009. *Introducing Chinese Religions*. London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis group.

Qian, Mu 錢穆. 1973. *Zhongguo shixue mingzhu* [Famous works in Chinese Historiography], Taipei: Sanmin Shuju.

Reed, Barbara. 1987. "Taoism", in: *Women in World Religions*, edited by Sharma, Arvind, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Robinet, Isabelle. 1997. *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- "Overview", in: *The Encyclopedia of Taoism 2008*, edited by Fabrizio Predagio, London: Routledge.

Robson, James. 2010. "Sin, Sinification, and Sinology: On the notion of Sin in Buddhism Chinese Religion", in: *Sin and Sinners: Perspective from Asian Religions*, edited by Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, Leiden: Brill, 73–93.

Rong, Zhaozu 容肇祖. 1959. "Preface", in: HXYJ.

- 1989. *Rong Zhaozu Ji* 容肇祖集 [The Collected Works of Rong Zhaozu], Jinan: Jilu Shushe.

Saler, Benson. 1993. *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories*, Leiden, New York, Köln: E.J. Brill.

A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy. 1963. Translated and Compiled by Wing-Tsit Chan. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Schneewind, Sarah. 2001. "Visions and Revisions: Village Policies of the Ming Founder in Seven Phases, " in *T'oung Pao* 87 (2001): 1–43.

- 2006. *Community Schools and the State in Ming China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Sharf, Robert H. 1995. "Buddhist modernism and the Rhetoric of meditative experience", in: *Numen*, Vol. 42 (1995), Leiden: E.J. Brill: 228–283.

- 2002. *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. *Serie: Studies in East Asian Buddhism*; 14.

Schopen, Gregory. 1984. "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of 'Sinicization' viewed from the other side". *T'oung Pao*, Second series, Vol. 70, Livr. 1/3 (1984), 110–126.

Shimada Kenji 岛田虔次. 2010. *Sixiang yu wenxian: Riben xueszhe Song Ming Ruxue yanjiu* 思想与文献日本学者宋明儒学研究, ed. Wu Zhen, Shanghai: Huadong Shifan daxue Chubanshe.

Shin, Leo K. 2006a. "The Last Campaigns of Wang Yangming." *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 92: 1–3, 101–128.

- 2006b, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Siewert, Hubert. 2003. *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History*, in collaboration with Ma Xisha, Leiden: Brill.

Smart, Ninian. 1996. *Dimensions of the Sacred: an Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*. London; Berkeley: HarperCollins: University of California Press.

Snoek, Jan A.M. 2006. "Defining Rituals", in: *Theorizing Rituals*, vol. 1, Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts, edited by Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Soothill, William Edward 1975. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index*. Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company.

Souryal, S. Sam. 1987. "The Religionization of a Society: The Continuing Application of Shariah Law in Saudi Arabia". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 26, No. 4 (Dec. 1987): 429–449.

Southwold, Martin. 1978. "Buddhism and the Definition of Religion". *Man*, New Series, Vol. 13, No 3; 362–379, published by Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Struve, Lynn A. 1988. "Huang Zongxi in Context: A Reappraisal of His Major Writings". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 47 (3) (August): 474–502.

- 2011. "Modern China's Liberal Muse: The Late Ming", *Ming Studies* 63, 38–68.

Sun, Weiguo. 2006. "Different types of Scholar-official in Sixteenth-century China: The interlaced Careers of Wang Shizhen and Zhang Juzheng". *Ming Studies* 54, 4–50.

Taylor, Romeyn. 1998. "Official religion in the Ming", in: *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8: 840–892.

Thompson, Laurence G. 1979. *Chinese Religions: An Introduction*, third edition, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Tillman, Hoyt Cleveland. 1982. *Ch'en Liang's challenge to Chu Hsi*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- 1992. "A New Direction in Confucian Scholarship: Approaches to Examining the Differences between Neo-Confucianism and Tao-Hsüeh, *Philosophy East and West*, 42:3 (Jul., 1992): 455–474.

Turner, Ralph H. and Smelser, Neil J. 2017. "Social movements", in: *Britannica Online*. (2017-10-20)

Übelhör, Monika. 1986. *Wang Gen [1483-1541] und seine Lehre: eine kritische Position im spätem Konfuzianismus*, Berlin: Reimer.

Waley, Arthur. 1937 (1978). *The Book of Songs*, translated by Arthur Waley, New York: Grove Press, INC.

Waltner, Ann. 1987. "T'an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen: Visionary and Bureaucrat in the late Ming", *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 8, No. 1, June 1987.

Wang Fan-sen 王凡森. 1999. "Mingdai xinxuejia de shehui jiaose yi Yan Jun de ji jiu xinhuo wei li" 明代心學家的社會角色 以顏鈞的急救心火為例. In: *Zheng Qinren jiaoshou rongtui jinian lun wenji* 鄭欽仁教授榮退紀念論文集 Taibei: Daoxiang Chubanshe. 249–266.

- 2004, "Mingmo Qingchu Ruxue de Zongjiaohua, yi Xu Sanli de gao tian zhe xue wei li" 明末清初儒學的宗教化以許三禮告天之學為例, In: *Wanming Qingchu sixiang shilun* 晚明清初思想十論. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe.

Wang Yangming 王陽明. (1963). *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*. (Chuanxi lu 傳習錄) Translated by Chan, Wing-tsit. New York and London: Columbia University Press.

Wasserman, Stanley and Faust, Katherine. 1999. *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Application*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1994), Reprint 1999.

Watson, Burton. 1968. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, New York: Columbia University Press.

- 2007. *The Analects of Confucius*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Weber, Max . 1983. *Ekonomi och samhälle: förståendesociologins grunder. I, Sociologiska begrepp och definitioner*. Ekonomi, samhällsordning och grupper. (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.) Lund: Argos.

Weinstein, Stanley. 1987. *Buddhism under the T'ang*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Welch, Holmes H. 1970. "The Bellagio Conference", *History of Religions*, 1970, Vol 9, No 3/3, pp. 107–136.

- 1967. *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900–1950*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Will, Pierre-Etienne. 1986. "Local Gazetteers as a Source for the study of Long-term Economic Change in China: Opportunities and Problems", *Hanxue Yanjiu* [Sinological research], 3 (民國 74年 12月).

Wu, Zhen 吴震. 2009a. *Taizhou Xuepai Yanjiu* 泰州学派研究, Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daoxue chubanshe.

- 2009b. "‘Shitian’ yu ‘zuntian’ – Mingmo qingchu difang ruzhe de zongjiao guanhuai" [‘事天’ 與 ‘尊天’ – 明末清初地方儒者的宗教關懷], *Qinghua Xuebao* 清華學報 (Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies), New Series XXXIX, No 1.

- 2001. *Nie Bao Luo Hongxian Pingzhuan*. 聂豹罗洪先评传. Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue Chubanshe.

Yampolsky, Philip, B. 1967. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch; The Text of the Tun-huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction and Notes by Philip B. Yampolsky*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Yao, Tao-Chung. (Yao, ed.) 2004. "Quanzhen – Complete Perfection". In: *Daoism Handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn, Boston & Leiden: Brill: 541–566.
Yao, Xinzhong. 2000. *An Introduction to Confucianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yü, Chün-fang. 1981. *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- 1998. "Ming Buddhism", in: *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2, edited by Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yü, Ying-Shih. 余英時 1988. "The intellectual world of Chiao Hung revisited" (Book review of Edward Ch'ien, Chiao Hung and the Reconstruction of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming) *Ming Studies* 25 (spring 1988): 24–66.

- 2002 (reprint 2009). 士商互动与儒学转:向明清社会史与思想史之一方面 Shi shang hudong yu ruxue zhuanxiang: Ming Qing shehuishi yu sixiangshi zhi yi fangmian. In: *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士与中国文化. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe. 527–579.

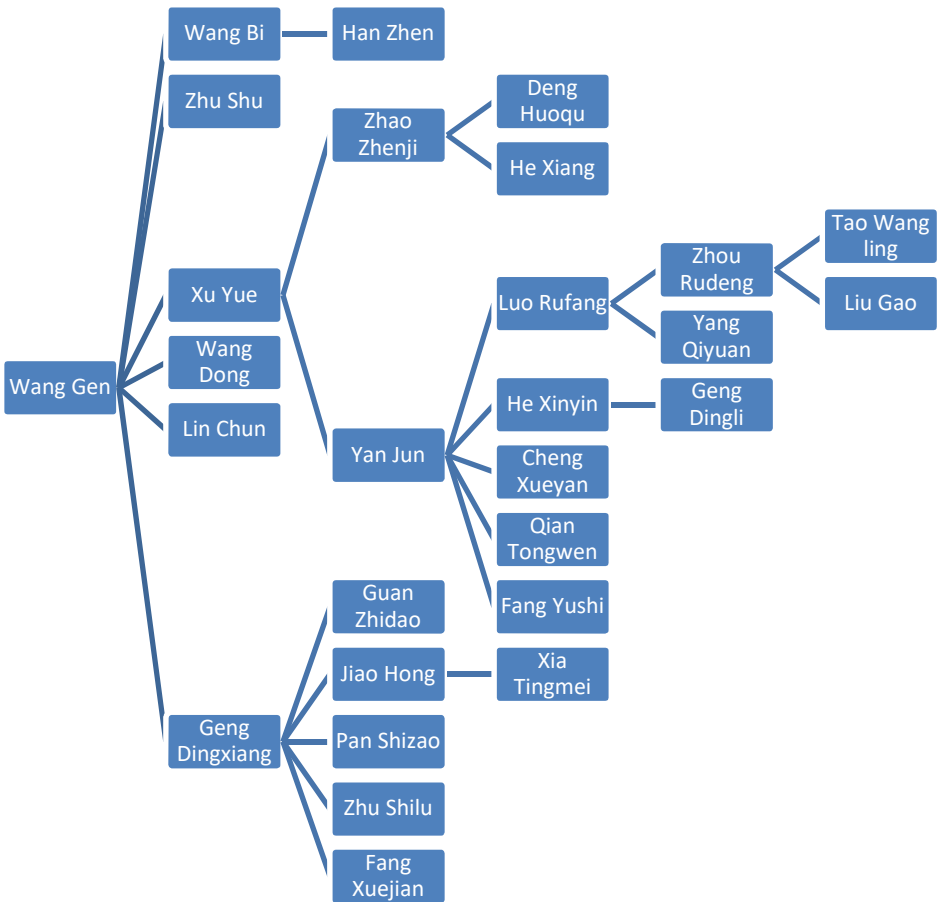
Zhao, Jie. 1995. *Chou Ju-Teng (1547-1629) at Nanking: Reassessing a Confucian Scholar in the late Ming intellectual World*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University.

Zhong Caijun 鍾彩鈞. 1998. "Taizhou xuezhe Han Shannongde sixiang yu jiangxue – ruxue de minjian yu zongjiao" (泰州學者顏山農的思想與講學—儒學的民間化與宗教化), *Zhongguo zhexue*, 19 (1998) Changsha: 22 – 44.

Zongjiao cidian 宗教词典. 2009. Ren Jiyu 任继愈 chief editor. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe.

Appendix A

Transmission of the Taizhou learning according to Huang Zongxi's *The Records of Ming Dynasty Confucian Learning* (1693):



Appendix B

Transmission of the Taizhou learning according to *The Dongtai County Gazetteer* (1817):

