

Discussion of *Taiji*¹
(*Taiji shuo* 太極說)
by Zhu Xi

Activity and stillness have no starting points, *yin* and *yang* have no beginnings; this is the Way of heaven. Beginning in *yang*, completing in *yin*, rooted in stillness, flowing in activity; this is the human Way. But as *yang* returns to its root in *yin* and stillness returns to its base in activity, [human beings'] activity and stillness also have no starting points, and their *yin* and *yang* also have no beginnings. So humans are never separate from heaven, and heaven is never separate from humans.

"*Yuan* and *heng* are the penetration of authenticity" is activity. "*Li* and *Zhen* are the recovery of authenticity" is stillness.² *Yuan* (originating) is the starting point of activity, rooted in stillness. *Zhen* (being correct) is the material of stillness, which is expressed in activity. The alternation of activity and stillness is an endless cycle. And yet *zhen* is the how myriad things achieve their ends and achieve their beginnings. Thus, although humans cannot be inactive, establishing the peak of being human (*renji*) requires emphasizing stillness. Only by emphasizing stillness can their expression in activity always be measured and never lack their fundamental stillness.

Stillness is how the nature (*xing*) is established; activity is how the endowment (*ming*) proceeds. But in fact stillness is the cessation of activity. Therefore the alternation of activity and stillness is always the procession of the endowment, and its procession through activity and stillness is the reality of the nature. Therefore [the *Zhongyong*] says, "What heaven endows is called the nature."³

¹ *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu wengong wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集 [Zhu Xi's collected papers], ch. 67, in Zhu Jieren, Yan Zuozhi, Liu Yongxiang, eds., *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 [Zhu Xi's Complete Works], 27 vols. [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002], vol. 23: 3274.

² Quoting Zhou Dunyi, [Tongshu 1\(f\)](#). Zhu Xi's commentary is: "'*Yuan*' is originating, '*heng*' is penetrating, '*li*' is carrying out, '*zhen*' is being correct: the Four Virtues [characteristic powers] of Qian. ['*Yuan heng li zhen*'] is the hexagram text of Qian, the first hexagram of the *Yijing*.] 'Penetration' (*tong*) is just at the point when it appears and is bestowed on things, the 'issuing' of goodness. 'Recovery' (*fu*) is when each one receives it and stores it within, the 'fulfillment' of the nature."

³ *Zhongyong* 1.

The unmanifest feelings are the nature; this is what is called equilibrium/centrality (*zhong*), "the great root of all under heaven."⁴ The manifest nature is the feelings; when they are all measured they are called harmony (*he*), "the pervasive way of all under heaven."⁵ This is all the natural [Way] of heaven. The wondrous virtue of the nature and feelings is the mind/heart, which brings about equilibrium and harmony and establishes the great root. What makes the pervasive Way proceed is the ruler (*zhuzai*) of the natural order.

Being still and lacking any impropriety is the equilibrium of the nature; this is "silent inactivity" (*jiran budong*).⁶ Being active and in equilibrium is the feelings being expressed correctly; this is "penetrating when stimulated."⁷ That which is always aware in stillness and always stopped (still) in activity is the mystery of the heart/mind: silent and yet stimulated, stimulated and yet silent.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See [Tongshu 4\(a\)](#), quoting *Yijing*, *Xici* A.10.4.

⁷ *Ibid.*