

Notes on the Reconstruction of Zhou Dunyi's Library in Jiangzhou

(*Jiangzhou chongjian Lianxi xiansheng shutang ji*

江州重建濂溪先生書堂記)¹

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1177)

Translated by Joseph A. Adler

© 2009

[This piece is Zhu Xi's fullest discussion of what he would later call the *daotong* 道統, or "succession of the Way" – the series of sages, beginning with the primordial sage Fuxi, who transmitted the Confucian *dao* 道 – and in particular the problematic gap between Mencius (4th c. BCE) and the Northern Song period, when Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-1073) recovered it. Since the Chan school of Buddhism claimed to have a direct, unbroken line of succession – from the Buddha through Bodhidharma and the Sixth Patriarch to the current lineage holders – Zhu was particularly concerned with the metaphysical status of the *dao* during the periods when it was not being taught and how it could be revived after such gaps, as this question underlay the claim that Song Confucians had real access to the *dao*. His explanation of those gaps is the same as his explanation of the problem of evil in individuals: the clouding effect of the mind's *qi* 氣, which obscures the innate moral nature (*xing* 性).]

The *dao* has never been lost from the world. It is only that its being entrusted to man [to carry out] has sometimes been interrupted and sometimes been continuous. Thus in its practice in the world there have been periods of clarity and periods of obscurity. This is all the result of the Decree of Heaven (*tianming* 天命); it is not something that the power of human wisdom is capable of achieving.

Of the variety of individual things produced and supported by the two [modes of] *qi* [i.e. *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽] and the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行), in their mixed and confused rising and falling and coming and going throughout Heaven above and earth below, not one lacks a definite pattern/order/principle (*li* 理). The greatest of these are the human nature [consisting] of humanity, rightness, propriety and wisdom,² and the human relations of master and servant, father and son, brothers, husband and wife, and friends.³

¹ *Hui'an xiansheng Zhu wengong wenji wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集 (Zhu Xi's Collected Papers) 78, 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. 24: 3739-3741. I have omitted two short sections in which Zhu Xi discusses the local officials responsible for the rebuilding of the library.

² The "four constant virtues" in *Mencius* 2A.6 and 6A.6.

³ The "five human relations," in *Mencius* 3A.4 and *Zhongyong* 20.

This being the case, the cyclical flow [of the *dao*] is completely full, leaving out nothing.⁴ So how can we think that the [alternation of] order and disorder from ancient times to the present is [evidence for] the existence and perishing [of the *dao*]?⁵ In the circulation of *qi* there are inequalities [in terms] of homogeneity and heterogeneity and discontinuity and unity, so in the human endowment there are differences [in terms] of purity and turbidity, dullness and clarity. Therefore, how the *dao* is entrusted to man and carried out in the world is only due to what Heaven confers and humans receive.⁶ It is certainly not due to the clever and presumptuous individual's ability to speculate and conjecture. [For example] the River Chart (*Hetu* 河圖) came out [of the Yellow River] and the Eight Trigrams were drawn; the Luo Writing (*Luoshu* 洛書) appeared and the Nine Regions were arranged.⁷ Confucius, in reference to the flourishing and decline of "this culture" (*siwen* 斯文),⁸ never failed to attribute it to Heaven. It is clear that the Sage did not deceive us in regard to this.

⁴ That is, the *dao* is the dynamic flow of cosmic order (*li*), which is immanent throughout the natural and social worlds.

⁵ Although social and political order can break down, it is nevertheless the case that things happen for reasons. Thus the presence of disorder in society does not mean that the natural and moral order (*li*) has ceased to exist.

⁶ This is the answer to the question of the *dao*'s metaphysical status during periods when it is not being taught: it still resides in human nature, although that nature is obscured by the impure physical natures (*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性) with which people are endowed at birth. The variations in physical endowments are due to factors beyond human control – i.e. they are due to Heaven – such as the position of the five planets (see below).

⁷ The River Chart was a numerological diagram that appeared to the mythical sage Fuxi on the back of a dragon horse coming out of the Yellow River, and was used by him in his creation of the hexagrams and divination system of the *Zhou Yi* 周易 (or *Yijing* 易經, Scripture of Change). The Luo Writing was a similar drawing that appeared to the mythical Yu the Great (founder of the Xia dynasty) on the shell of a spirit-tortoise as he was controlling the flooding of the Yellow River, and figured into his laying out of the Nine Regions of ancient China. See Chu Hsi [Zhu Xi], *Introduction to the Study of the Classic of Change (I-hsüeh ch'i-meng)*, trans. Joseph A. Adler (Provo: Global Scholarly Publications, 2002): 1-14.

Zhu Xi's point here is that Fuxi and Yu were able to do what they did only because they happened to be exposed to the River Chart and Luo Writing. Similarly, the chance allotment of *qi* in each person's physical endowment determines "how the *dao* is entrusted to man and carried out in the world." Factors such as these, occurring either by chance or for unknowable reasons – i.e. factors beyond human control – are typically attributed to Heaven.

⁸ See *Analects* 9:5: "If Heaven intended this culture to perish, it would not have given it to those of us who live after King Wen's death" (trans. Edward Slingerland, *Confucius: Analects, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003]: 87).

As for Teacher [Zhou] Lianxi, if he did not receive the propagation of this *dao* conferred by Heaven, how did he continue it so easily after such a long interruption, and bring it to light so abruptly after such extreme darkness?

With the decline of the Zhou and the death of Mencius, the propagation of this *dao* was not continued; even less so from the Qin through the Han, Jin, Sui and Tang, until our Song. Then the Sage-ancestor [Taizu, founding father of the Song] received the Mandate. The Five Planets were in conjunction, marking a turning point in culture. Only then did the heterogeneous *qi* homogenize and the divided [*qi*] coalesce; a clear and bright endowment was received in its entirety by one man, and the Teacher [Zhou Dunyi] appeared. Without following a teacher (*shifu* 師傅), he silently registered the substance of the Way, constructed the Diagram and attached a text to it,⁹ to give an ultimate foundation to the essentials.

At that time, the Chengs¹⁰ were among those who saw and knew him, and they subsequently expanded and clarified his teaching. They caused the subtlety of Heavenly principle, the manifest human relations, the multitude of phenomenal things, and the mystery of ghosts and spirits all to be fully joined together into one [system]. Thus the tradition of the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, and Mencius was brilliantly illuminated again in that era. There were determined scholars who managed to study it and respectfully practice it, without losing its correctness. They were like those who appeared before the Three Dynasties. Ah! Such grandeur! Were it not for what Heaven conferred, how could we be part of this?

The Teacher was from the Zhou family. His taboo name was Dunyi,¹¹ his style name was Maoshu; his family was from Chongling.¹² He retired to the foot of Lushan, naming the river there after one from his old village, Lianxi (Lian Stream), took that as his honorific name, and built his library on its bank. His grave is now ten *li* south, in Jiuzhiang district, and has been

⁹ The "Explanation of the Supreme Polarity Diagram." See Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), vol. 1: 672-676.

¹⁰ Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107).

¹¹ He changed his given name, Dunshi 敦實, to Dunyi in 1063 to avoid the personal name of the new emperor, Zhao Zongshi 趙宗實 (Emperor Yingzong), even though Zhao Zongshi had changed his name to Zhao Shu 曙 in 1062.

¹² In modern Hubei province.

overgrown for years.

... I have been fortunate to have heard the teachings of the Chengs, and consequently read the Teachers writings and saw how he was as a man. ... I have inquired into how the Teacher received the Way from heaven and transmitted it to others, in order to likewise transmit the events of his life, to enable later gentlemen to contemplate, examine, and promote it. ...