

"Explanation of the Supreme Polarity Diagram"

(*Taijitu shuo*)

by Zhou Dunyi

Commentary by Zhu Xi

(*Zhuzi Taijitu shuo jie*)

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Note: This is a draft translation, which I am placing on the web only for consultation and comment by scholars. It includes the full text of Zhou Dunyi's *Taijitu shuo* (in bold-face type) and Zhu Xi's published commentary on it (1173), plus some additional discussions by Zhu Xi. The source text is Zhang Boxing (1651-1725), comp., *Zhou Lianxi xiansheng quanji* (Complete Collection of Master Zhou Dunyi, 1708), in *Zhengyi tang quanshu* (Library of Zhengyi Hall), *Baibu congshu jicheng* ed.

**Master Zhu's Commentary on the
Explanation of the Supreme Polarity Diagram
(*Taijitu shuo jie*)¹**

[Zhou's text:]

[A] Non-polar (*wuji*) and yet Supreme Polarity (*taiji*)!²

[Zhu's published commentary:]

"The operation of Heaven above has neither sound nor smell,"³ and yet it is the pivot (*shu-niu*) of the actual process of creation and the basis of the classification of things. Thus it says, "Non-polar and yet Supreme Polarity!" It is not that there is non-polarity outside of the Supreme Polarity.⁴

[Zhu's recorded comments, compiled by Zhang Boxing:]

- [1] *Master Zhu said: Ji* is the absolute peak/limit (*jizhi*) of the moral order (*daoli*).⁵ The principle of all things in Heaven and Earth is Supreme Polarity. Supreme Polarity is just the single actualized principle that runs through them and unifies them.
- [2] The Sage [Confucius]⁶ calls it Supreme Polarity because it indicates the basis of all things in the world. Master Zhou follows this and also calls it *wuji*, in order to make clear the mystery of its soundlessness and smelllessness [i.e. undifferentiation].

¹ Except where noted, footnotes are Zhang Boxing's interpolated notes.

² [Translator's note: The line reads simply, "*Wuji er taiji*." Since *er* can mean "and also," "and yet," or "under these circumstances," the precise meaning of the line is far from clear. Another possible translation would be, "The Supreme Polarity that is non-polar!" It seems to be an expression of awe and wonder at the paradoxical nature of the ultimate reality.]

³ This explains the two words "*wuji*." [Trans.: *Zhongyong* 33 (last line), quoting *Shijing*, no. 235.]

⁴ Being and non-being (*you* and *wu*) as one is what is meant by the Way.

⁵ [Trans.: I am translating *li* as "order" when it refers to the general concept (i.e. being ordered), and "principle" when it refers to a specific instance or type of order (e.g. the principle of polarity or the principle of humanity).]

⁶ [Trans.: Referring here to Confucius as the reputed author of the *Xici* appendix of the *Yijing*, where the term *Taiji* was first used.]

- [3] Speaking of it in terms of principle, it cannot be said to be existing [on its own].
Speaking of it in terms of things, it cannot be called nonexistent.
- [4] *Wuji er taiji* correctly means that there is no specific form but there is specific moral principle.
- [5] Calling it "non-polar" correctly clarifies (*zheng*) its non-spatial form. It exists prior to things, and yet at no time is it not established after the existence of things. It exists outside of *yin-yang*, and yet at no time does it not operate within things. It penetrates and connects the "complete substance;" there is nothing in which it does not exist.
- [6] [Master Zhou] does not say, "Non-polar, then Supreme Polarity." This would make it equivalent to a thing, which could not be the basis of the myriad transformations.
[Likewise he] does not say, "Supreme Polarity, then Non-Polarity." This would make it sink into empty silence, and it would be unable to be the basis of the myriad things. It is just this sentence [of Zhou's] that makes evident what he says below about the essential, subtle, and limitless, and addresses what he says about the multitudinous moral principles. Everything is arranged, nothing is out of order. Now this is right in front of our eyes, yet from antiquity to the present, it has not been seen through.
- [7] As for azure Heaven above, *li* should be before the word "operation." [I.e. the term "Heaven above" refers to the natural order, *tianli*.]
- [8] "The operation of Heaven above has neither sound nor smell" explains non-existence [of characteristics] within existence [of Heaven]. "Non-polar, yet Supreme Polarity" explains existence [polarity, or differentiation] within non-existence [non-polarity, or undifferentiation]. If we could actually see it, it would explain existence and non-existence – first one, then the other, neither one obstructing (*fang-ai*) [the other].
- [9] *Rao Shuangfeng*⁷ said: Heaven and Earth, through *yin-yang* and the Five Phases, close and open without limit, and this principle governs closing and opening. It is like the hinge (*shu-niu*) of a door. Male and female creatures produce and reproduce without

⁷ [Trans.: Rao Shuangfeng (Rao Lu) was a student of Zhu Xi's son-in-law and disciple, Huang Gan (Huang Mianzhai). See Huang Zongxi and Quan Zuwang, comps., *Song-Yuan xue'an* (Scholarly record of the Song and Yuan dynasties), chs. 63, 83.]

end, and this principle is the basis of production and reproduction, like the root of a tree. In reference to human beings, it is that by which the myriad good qualities are produced and the myriad affairs are settled. There is nothing that lacks this principle as its root and its hinge. If students understand its meaning and apply it daily, and with dignified stillness nourish themselves when [their feelings are] not yet aroused, and examine themselves after [their feelings are] aroused, then some of them might be able to silently understand the mystery of this principle.

[B] The Supreme Polarity in activity generates *yang*; yet at the limit of activity it is still. In stillness it generates *yin*; yet at the limit of stillness it is also active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other. In distinguishing *yin* and *yang*, the Two Modes are thereby established.

That in Supreme Polarity there is activity and stillness is the flowing forth of what is given by Heaven. It is what is meant by "the alternation of *yin* and *yang* is called the Way."⁸ "Being authentic is the foundation of the sage;"⁹ it is the Way of the ends and beginnings that are given (decreed) to things.¹⁰ Its activity is [what is referred to by the sayings,] "the penetration of authenticity,"¹¹ "what continues it is good,"¹² and "what the myriad things rely on for their beginnings."¹³ Its stillness is [what is referred to by the sayings,] "the recovery of authenticity,"¹⁴ "what completes it is human nature,"¹⁵ and the myriad things

⁸ [Trans.: *Tongshu* 1, quoting *Yijing*, *Xici* A.5.1.]

⁹ [Trans.: *Tongshu* 1.]

¹⁰ The first statement of the *Tongshu* clarifies the actualized principle (*shili*) of the Supreme Polarity. Therefore Master Zhu refers to it. *Yin* and *yang* are *qi*; its principle (*li*) is what is meant by the Way. Authenticity means actualized principle. [Trans.: Paraphrasing *Tongshu* 16 (g).]

¹¹ The outward manifestation of actualized principle. [Trans.: *Tongshu* 1.]

¹² [Trans.: *Ibid.*, quoting *Xici* A.5.2.]

¹³ [Trans.: Paraphrasing *Tongshu* 1, which quotes *Yijing*, *Tuan* commentary on hexagram 1.]

¹⁴ The inner storing of actualized principle. [Trans.: *Tongshu* 1.]

¹⁵ [Trans.: *Ibid.*, quoting *Xici* A.5.2.]

"each correct in its nature and endowment."¹⁶

"At the limit of activity it is still... at the limit of stillness it is active. Activity and stillness alternate; each is the basis of the other." This is how the endowment (*ming*) flows forth endlessly.¹⁷ "In activity it generates *yang*; in stillness it generates *yin*.... In distinguishing *yin* and *yang*, the Two Modes are thereby established." "Distinguishing" is how each is correctly defined (*zheng*) without overlap.¹⁸

Thus the Supreme Polarity is fundamentally mysterious;¹⁹ activity and stillness are the mechanism on which it rides (*cheng*).²⁰ The Supreme Polarity is the formless (metaphysical) Way;²¹ *yin* and *yang* are the formed (concrete) implements.²² In this way, observing from what is evident,²³ [one can see that] while activity and stillness are not simultaneous²⁴ and *yin* and *yang* are not the same,²⁵ nevertheless there is nowhere that the Supreme Polarity does not exist in them.²⁶ Observing it in terms of its subtlety²⁷ it is full of profundity,²⁸ and the principle of activity and stillness, *yin* and *yang*, is completely contained in it.²⁹ Though

¹⁶ [Trans.: *Tongshu* 1, quoting *T'uan* commentary on hexagram 1.]

¹⁷ The four sentences following "At the limit of activity it is still" refer to the flowing of *yin* and *yang*.

¹⁸ The four sentences following "In activity it generates *yang*" refer to the fixed positions of *yin* and *yang*.

¹⁹ Natural principle.

²⁰ Principle moves by riding (*da*) on *qi*.

²¹ Principle cannot be seen.

²² *Qi* can follow. The four sections above explain the distinction between *li* and *qi*.

²³ Viewing in terms of *yin* and *yang*.

²⁴ This phrase refers to their dynamic differentiation [lit. in flowing].

²⁵ This phrase refers to their static differentiation [lit. in fixed positions].

²⁶ One can see the subtlety of the Way without interruption.

²⁷ Viewing in terms of the Supreme Polarity.

²⁸ [Although] without sound or smell, it can be spoken of.

²⁹ One can see the single origin of the substance and function of the Way. The above two sections together discuss *li* and *qi*.

you push forward [into the past] you cannot see their original coming together;³⁰ pull back [into the future] and you cannot see a final separation.³¹ Therefore Master Cheng [Yi] said, "Activity and stillness have no ends, *yin* and *yang* have no beginnings."³² Were it not for those who understood the Way, how could we know it?³³

- [1] *Master Zhu said:* Within Heaven and Earth, there is only the principle of activity and stillness in an endless cycle; there is absolutely nothing else. This is called change. And since there is activity and stillness, there is necessarily a principle of activity and stillness. This, then, is called the Supreme Polarity.
- [2] Supreme Polarity generates *yin* and *yang*, and order (*li*) generates *qi*. Once *yin* and *yang* are generated, then Supreme Polarity is within them. And order, likewise, is within *qi*.
- [3] Supreme Polarity is distinguished simply by *yin* and *yang*. This embraces all things under Heaven.³⁴
- [4] Activity and stillness, *yin* and *yang*, are within form. But activity [according to Zhou] is the activity of Supreme Polarity, and stillness is likewise the stillness of Supreme Polarity. Still, activity and stillness are not Supreme Polarity.
- [5] "The Supreme Polarity in activity produces *yang*" does not mean that after there is activity then *yang* is produced. Rather, once there is activity, this is classified as *yang*; and once there is stillness, this is classified as *yin*. The original ground (*chu-ben*) of the *yang* produced by activity is stillness. Likewise, for stillness there must be activity. This is what is meant by "activity and stillness without end." Moreover, if you look at where it says "[Supreme Polarity] in activity generates *yang*," this is actually that by

³⁰ The origin of the alternation of *yin* and *yang* has no beginning. Therefore we do not see them merged.

³¹ The alternation of *yin* and *yang* has no end. Therefore we cannot see their separation. The above two sections discuss the Way of incessant circulation.

³² [Trans.: From *Henan Cheng shi jing shuo* (Explanations of the Classics by the Chengs of Henan), in *Er Cheng ji* (Collection of the two Chengs) (Taibei: Hanjing wenhua shiye, 1983), v. 1: 1029. Also *Er Cheng quanshu* (Complete collection of the two Chengs), *Sibu beiyao* ed., 1:2a.]

³³ Thus clarifying the inexhaustibility of the Way.

³⁴ [Trans.: *Zhuzi yulei* 94 (§4): 3115.]

- which there is activity – it is produced from stillness. And stillness, above, is likewise produced from activity. This principle is simply that of cyclical production.³⁵
- [6] Within the stillness of *yin* is the basis of *yang* itself; within the activity of *yang* is the basis of *yin* itself. This is because activity necessarily comes from stillness, which is based in *yin*; and stillness necessarily comes from activity, which is based in *yang*.
- [7] *Yin* and *yang* are merely *qi*. When *yin qi* flows forth it becomes *yang*, and when *yang qi* congeals it becomes *yin*. They are not really two distinct things.
- [8] *Question*: "The alternation of *yin* and *yang* is called the Way" – is this Supreme Polarity? *Reply*: *Yin* and *yang* are simply *yin* and *yang*. The Way is Supreme Polarity – that by which there is the alternation of *yin* and *yang*.
- [9] *Question* about "Being authentic is the Way of ends and beginnings that are given (decreed) to things."³⁶ *Reply*: Being authentic is actualizing principle. Penetrating above and below there is simply this generation of things, all following that mode of operation. The myriad things flowing forth throughout heaven and earth all operate like this.

...

[C] The alternation and combination of *yang* and *yin* generate water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. With these five [phases of] *qi* harmoniously arranged, the Four Seasons proceed through them.

With the Supreme Polarity there is the alternation of activity and stillness, and the Two Modes are distinguished;³⁷ with *yin* and *yang* the alternation and combination of the Five Phases are set. But the material of the Five Phases is set in earth,³⁸ and *qi* is what circulates

³⁵ [Trans.: Partly from *Zhuzi yulei* 94 (§34): 3124.]

³⁶ [Trans.: From Zhu Xi's published commentary (above, p. 3).]

³⁷ Referring to the text above.

³⁸ Receiving the stillness of *yin* as its material.

through heaven.³⁹ Speaking of the sequence of their generation in terms of their material⁴⁰ we should say, "Water, fire, wood, metal, and earth," with water⁴¹ and wood⁴² as *yang*, and fire⁴³ and metal⁴⁴ as *yin*.⁴⁵ Speaking of the sequence of their circulation in terms of *qi*⁴⁶ we should say, "wood, water, earth, metal, and fire,"⁴⁷ with wood⁴⁸ and fire⁴⁹ as *yang*, and metal⁵⁰ and water⁵¹ as *yin*.⁵² In terms of their alternation, this is the active *yang* and still *yin*.⁵³

Thus the alternation of the Five Phases is inexhaustible,⁵⁴ so nothing happens that is not the Way of *yin* and *yang*.⁵⁵ As for what makes them *yin* and *yang*, nothing happens that is not the original nature of the Supreme Polarity.⁵⁶ How can there be any deficiency or

³⁹ Receiving the activity of *yang* as its *qi*.

⁴⁰ "Generation" here means first arising, not mutual generation.

⁴¹ The 1 of Heaven. [Trans.: This and the following three notes refer to *Yijing*, *Xici* A.9, which correlates the odd numbers 1-9 with *yin* and the even numbers 2-10 with *yang* (*Zhouyi benyi* 3:9b).]

⁴² The 3 of Heaven.

⁴³ The 2 of Earth.

⁴⁴ The 4 of Earth.

⁴⁵ This takes the odd and even numbers of heaven and earth and divides them into *yin* and *yang*.

⁴⁶ "Circulation" means circular movement, i.e. the Five Phases generating each other.

⁴⁷ This is the sequence of the Five *Qi* in their harmonious arrangement.

⁴⁸ Flourishing spring.

⁴⁹ Flourishing summer.

⁵⁰ Flourishing autumn.

⁵¹ Flourishing winter.

⁵² This takes the Four Seasons' flourishing growth and divides them into *yin* and *yang*.

⁵³ This takes activity and stillness and divides them in *yin* and *yang*.

⁵⁴ Its substance has no fixed category.

⁵⁵ Nothing outside of the two [modes of] *qi*.

⁵⁶ Nothing apart from the one order (*li*).

discontinuity!⁵⁷

[4] *Master Zhu said:* The material of water is *yin*, yet its nature is rooted in *yang*. The material of fire is *yang*, yet its nature is rooted in *yin*. Water is dark on the outside and bright on the inside; this is its basis in *yang*. Fire is bright on the outside and dark on the inside; this is its basis in *yin*. This is [demonstrated by the fact that] within the activity of *yang* in the Supreme Polarity Diagram is a dot, and within the stillness of *yin* it is clear.

[5] Supreme Polarity is simply a principle. Spinning about, it divides into the two *qi*. The activity within is *yang*, and the stillness is *yin*. It also divides in the five *qi*, and separates into the myriad things.

[D] The Five Phases are simply *yin* and *yang*; *yin* and *yang* are simply the Supreme Polarity; the Supreme Polarity is fundamentally Non-polar. [Yet] in the generation of the Five Phases, each one has its nature.⁵⁸

With the Five Phases worked out, production and flourishing are worked out and there is nothing that is not complete.⁵⁹ Therefore this extends the fundamental [substance] and clarifies the entire unified substance. There is nothing that is not the mystery of the non-polar,⁶⁰ and the mystery of the non-polar has always been contained within each thing.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Yin-yang* and the Five Phases are completely contained in the midst of the Supreme Polarity. Redividing into the Two and Five, *yin* and *yang* together are the one Supreme Polarity without deficiency [i.e. *yin* and *yang* are completely embodied in the Supreme Polarity], and the Five Phases each embody a single [configuration of] polarity without discontinuity [i.e. the particular phases of *qi* are continuous with the overall process of transformation].

⁵⁸ [Trans.: In other words: seen as a whole system, the Five Phases are based on the *yin-yang* polarity; the *yin-yang* polarity is the Supreme Polarity; and the Supreme Polarity is fundamentally Non-polar. However, taken individually as temporal phases, the Five Phases each have their own natures (as do *yin* and *yang*).]

⁵⁹ Referring to the previous section.

⁶⁰ Explaining the above three sentences.

⁶¹ Explaining the following two sentences.

Now the Five Phases are different material,⁶² the Four Seasons are different *qi*,⁶³ yet nothing can be other than *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* have different positions,⁶⁴ activity and stillness occur at different times,⁶⁵ yet nothing can be apart from the Supreme Polarity. As for what makes it the Supreme Polarity, from the beginning it can be said that it has no sound and smell;⁶⁶ this is the fundamental substance of the nature [of humans and things]. Under heaven, how can there be things apart from the nature?⁶⁷

But the generation of the Five Phases accords with the received inequalities of their physical material [*qizhi*]. This is what is meant by "each one has its nature."⁶⁸ As each has its [or this] nature, the complete substance of the whole Supreme Polarity is contained within each and every thing,⁶⁹ and we can see that there is nowhere that this nature does not exist.⁷⁰

[2] *Question about* "in the generation of the Five Phases, each one has its nature." Are their principles the same? *Reply*: They are the same, and their physical material is different. *Question*: Since you say that their physical material is different, then their principles do not interpenetrate. *Reply*: Definitely. Humanity cannot produce rightness, and rightness cannot produce humanity.⁷¹

⁶² When first generated.

⁶³ In revolution.

⁶⁴ Fixed positions.

⁶⁵ In revolution.

⁶⁶ Non-polar.

⁶⁷ The nature (*xing*) is the Supreme Polarity. From the perspective of its being the principle of heaven and earth and the myriad things all together we call it the Supreme Polarity. From the perspective of its being received by humans and things we call it the nature [of humans and things]. Since all living beings in heaven and earth are things, they must have patterns. Therefore [Zhu Xi] says that under heaven there are no things other than the nature.

⁶⁸ The word "nature" here implies physical material.

⁶⁹ Viewing in terms of physical material, while there are individual particularities, still in actuality they contain the principle of the complete substance.

⁷⁰ The word "nature" here has the specific meaning of principle.

⁷¹ [Trans.: The apparent contradiction between the first answer and the second can be explained by

[3] The physical nature is simply principle fallen (*duò*) into the midst of physical material. Therefore it accords with the physical material and becomes a nature. What Master Zhou calls "each having its nature" is as if originally there were no fundamental nature, and then the physical nature came from somewhere. [??]

[E] The reality of the Non-polar and the essence of the Two [Modes] and Five [Phases] mysteriously combine and coalesce. "The Way of Qian becomes the male; the Way of Kun becomes the female;"⁷² the two *qi* stimulate each other, transforming and generating the myriad things.⁷³ The myriad things generate and regenerate, alternating and transforming without end.⁷⁴

Under heaven there are no things outside the nature, and there is nowhere that the nature does not exist.⁷⁵ That by which the non-polar, the two [*yin-yang*], and the five [phases] pervade everywhere is what is meant by "mysteriously combine." "Reality" refers to principle, meaning without error. "Essence" is a non-dualistic word referring to *qi*.

"Coalesce" means to gather, as *qi* gathers to become forms.

Thus as the nature acts as master, and *yin-yang* and the Five Phases become order out of chaos, each [thing] coalesces according to its kind to become forms.⁷⁶ The creative *yang* becomes the male and the Way of the father; the obedient *yin* becomes the female and the Way of the mother. This is the origin of people and things as they are generated by the

assuming that in the first Zhu is referring to the universal order of things, while in the second he is referring to specific principles. In other words, this is an application of Cheng Yi's dictum, "Order/principle is one, its manifestations are many."

⁷² [Trans.: *Yijing* (Classic of Change), *Xici* (Appended Remarks), A.1.4 (*Zhouyi benyi*, 3:1b). Qian and Kun are the first two hexagrams, symbolizing pure *yang* and pure *yin*, or Heaven and Earth, respectively.]

⁷³ [Trans.: Paraphrasing *Yijing*, *Tuan* commentary to hexagram 31 (Xian): "The two *qi* stimulate and respond in mutual influence, the male going beneath the female.... Heaven and Earth are stimulated and the myriad things are transformed and generated" (*Zhouyi benyi*, 2:1a-b).]

⁷⁴ [Trans.: Cf. *Xici* A.5.6, "Generation and regeneration are what is meant by *yi* (change)" (*Zhouyi benyi*, 3:6a).]

⁷⁵ This continues from the above text.

⁷⁶ Heaven transforms and generates the myriad things by means of *yin-yang* and the Five Phases; *qi* thereby becomes forms, and order thereby is bestowed.

transformations of *qi*.⁷⁷ As *qi* gathers to become things,⁷⁸ the forms interact and the *qi* stimulates, and so through the transformation of forms people and things are generated and change and transformation occur without end.⁷⁹

From the perspective of male and female, the male and female each has its nature, yet the male and female are the one Supreme Polarity.⁸⁰ From the perspective of the myriad things, the myriad things each have their nature, yet the myriad things are the one Supreme Polarity.⁸¹ Speaking of them combined, the myriad things together embody the one Supreme Polarity;⁸² speaking of them separately, each thing contains the one Supreme Polarity.⁸³ What I mean by saying [above], "Under heaven there are no things outside the nature,⁸⁴ and there is nowhere that the nature does not exist"⁸⁵ can be seen in its entirety even more so in this.⁸⁶ Master Zisi said, "[I]f the noble person speaks of its greatness, there is nothing in the world capable of bearing it up,⁸⁷ while if he speaks of its smallness, there is nothing in the

⁷⁷ When people are first generated, even before they are differentiated into kinds, they still receive the pure *qi* of heaven and earth, and their spontaneous generation into male and female is like that of male and female animals and birds. Thus [Zhu Xi] speaks comprehensively about people and things.

⁷⁸ When forms have already come into being through the transformations of *qi*.

⁷⁹ After people and things have differentiated into kinds, the interaction and mutual generation of formed *qi* and its silent reception of the transforming and nourishing order (*li*) is how they endlessly generate and regenerate.

⁸⁰ Taking place amidst the transformations of *qi*.

⁸¹ Taking place amidst the transformations of forms.

⁸² The whole is the nature given by heaven.

⁸³ Each person and thing itself contains the nature given by heaven.

⁸⁴ Together embodying the Supreme Polarity.

⁸⁵ Each containing the Supreme Polarity.

⁸⁶ In the previous statement, "in the generation of the Five Phases, each one has its nature," we have seen that there is nowhere that the nature does not exist. Now in [the statement] about "becoming the male ... becoming the female ... transforming and generating the myriad things" even more so we can see the entirety of the nature.

⁸⁷ The Way includes what is outside heaven and earth; this testifies to its completely embodying the Supreme Polarity.

world capable of breaking it down."⁸⁸ This is what it means.

- [1] *Question*: Master Zhou spoke of the reality of the Non-polar, but did not speak of the Supreme Polarity. Why? *Master Zhu replied*: The reality of the Non-polar must already have Supreme Polarity within it. The word "reality" (*zhen*) is this Supreme Polarity.
- [2] The sentence, "The reality of the Non-polar and the essence of the Two [Modes] and Five [Phases] mysteriously combine and coalesce" is very mysterious. It is *qi* and *li* combining to become the nature (*xing*).
- [3] What makes the Way of Heaven's flowing out and nourishing of the myriad things creative is nothing but *yin-yang* and the Five Phases. And what we call *yin-yang* and the Five Phases requires that there be *li* and then *qi*. The generation of things is the gathering of this *qi*, and only then is there form. Thus the generation of humans and things must receive this *li*; and only then do they have the nature that soundly accords with humanity, rightness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.⁸⁹ They must receive this *qi*; only then do they have a body consisting of the *hun* and *po*,⁹⁰ five organs, and hundred structures. This is just what Master Zhou calls "the essence of the Two [Modes] and Five [Phases] mysteriously combining and coalescing."

...

[F] Only humans receive the finest and most spiritually efficacious [*qi*]. Once formed, they are born; when spirit (*shen*)⁹¹ is manifested, they have intelligence; when their five-fold natures are stimulated into activity, good and evil are distinguished and the myriad affairs

⁸⁸ The Way connects the centrality of people and things; this testifies to each one containing the Supreme Polarity. [Trans.: Quoting the *Zhongyong* (The Mean in Practice), ch. 12. Trans. Irene Bloom, in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 335.]

⁸⁹ Mencius' "four constant virtues" (*Mencius* 2A.6 and 6A.6).

⁹⁰ [Trans.: The *yang* and *yin* souls.]

⁹¹ [Trans.: The word *shen* can refer either to a deity or to the finest form of *qi* (psycho-physical substance), which is capable of penetrating and pervading things and accounts for human intelligence. See *Tongshu* (below), chs. 3, 4, and 16.]

ensue.⁹²

This refers to ordinary people containing the principle of activity and stillness, yet commonly losing it in activity. Now, when human beings are born, none lack the Way of Supreme Polarity. Thus people individually receive the finest of the physical interaction of *yin-yang* and Five Phases, and therefore their mind/hearts are the most spiritually efficacious⁹³ and they have the means not to lose the entirety of their nature; this is called the mind/heart of heaven and earth and the peak of humanity.⁹⁴

However, form is generated in *yin*⁹⁵ and spirit arises in *yang*;⁹⁶ the nature of the five constant [virtues] stimulates things and acts;⁹⁷ the goodness of *yang* and the evil of *yin* are differentiated by kind;⁹⁸ and so the different aspects of the five-fold nature are scattered among myriad affairs.⁹⁹ Thus the transformation and generation of the myriad things from the two *qi* and Five Phases is like this in humans.¹⁰⁰ Were it not for the sage's ability to settle the complete substance and Supreme Polarity, then the activity of desires and being overcome by feelings, interacting to produce benefit and harm,¹⁰¹ there would be no peak of

⁹² [Trans.: The five-fold nature consists of the "five constant virtues," which correspond to the Five Phases. The five are Mencius' four – humanity (*ren*), rightness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*) – plus trustworthiness (*xin*). For incipient activity and the differentiation of good and evil, see *Tongshu* (below), section 3.]

⁹³ This is what is meant by "what is given by heaven is called the nature" [*Zhongyong* 1].

⁹⁴ This is what is meant by "following the nature is called the Way" [*Zhongyong* 1]. [Trans.: *Renji*, lit. peak of being human; see *Taijitu shuo*, next section.]

⁹⁵ Corresponding to the stillness of *yin* in the Diagram.

⁹⁶ Corresponding to the activity of *yang* in the Diagram.

⁹⁷ Corresponding to the Five Phases in the Diagram.

⁹⁸ Corresponding to "the Way of Qian becomes the male; the Way of Kun becomes the female" in the Diagram.

⁹⁹ Corresponding to "transforming and generating the myriad things" in the Diagram.

¹⁰⁰ The idea of all [humans] receiving the basic parts.

¹⁰¹ The cause of illness, as we are accustomed to seeing, always comes from the physical material.

humanity and we would be "not far removed from animals."¹⁰²

[1] *Master Zhu said:* The two *qi* and Five Phases interact in myriad changes. Thus in the generation of humans and things¹⁰³ there are differences in their purity and coarseness. In terms of the one *qi*, humans and things are both generated by receiving this *qi*. In terms of purity and coarseness, humans get the correct (*zheng*) and penetrating (*tong*) *qi*, while things get the *qi* that is partial (*pian*) and blocked (*sai*). Only humans get the correct [*qi*], so their *li* is penetrating and not blocked. Things get the partial [*qi*], so their *li* is blocked and unaware. ...¹⁰⁴

[4] *Question on* "when their five-fold natures are stimulated into activity, good and evil are distinguished." *Reply:* The nature of Heaven and earth is order. As soon as there are *yin-yang* and Five Phases, there is the physical nature. In this there is differentiation of dark and clear, thick and thin.

[8] *Yin* and *yang* refer to activity and stillness. In terms of good and evil, this is the moral order (*daoli*). When followed by humans this is how it can be seen.

[G] The sage settles these [affairs] with centrality, correctness, humaneness and rightness (the Way of the sage is simply humaneness, rightness, centrality and correctness) and emphasizes stillness.¹⁰⁵ (Without desire, [he is] therefore still.)¹⁰⁶ In so doing he establishes

¹⁰² Animals embody form but cannot penetrate principle. If humans do not recognize moral principle, then are no different from animals. [Trans.: A reference to *Mencius* 6A.8.]

¹⁰³ From the following discussion it is clear that Zhu is thinking of "living things."

¹⁰⁴ [Trans: The rest of this passage gives examples of the similarities and differences between humans and animals, including some interesting observations of quasi-moral behavior in birds (who "know filiality") and otters (who "know ritual"). For more on this see Yung Sik Kim, *The Natural Philosophy of Chu Hsi, 1130-1200* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2000): 175-77, 194-97.]

¹⁰⁵ [Trans.: For Zhu Xi's discussions with his students on why Zhou Dunyi mentions humaneness and rightness but not ritual and wisdom (the other two of Mencius' four constant virtues), see *Zhuzi yulei* 94, §80-86. Zhu Jieren, Yan Zuozhi, Liu Yongxiang, eds., *Zhuzi quanshu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), v. 17: 3135-3136.]

¹⁰⁶ [Trans.: The two parenthetical notes are by Zhou; they are taken from *Tongshu*, sections 6 and 20. The terms "without desire" and "emphasizing stillness" were questionable to many Confucians, who usually preferred to speak of limiting desires (especially selfish desires), but not eliminating them. Both terms had Buddhist as well as Daoist connotations.]

the peak of humanity.¹⁰⁷ Thus the sage's "virtue equals that of Heaven and Earth; his clarity equals that of the sun and moon; his timeliness equals that of the four seasons; his good fortune and bad fortune equal those of ghosts and spirits."¹⁰⁸

This refers to the sage's completion of the virtues of activity and stillness while always being based in stillness. While humans [all] receive the finest *qi* of *yin-yang* and the Five Phases at birth, the sage at birth gets the finest of the finest. Thus in acting he is centered¹⁰⁹ and at rest he is correct,¹¹⁰ his expression is humane¹¹¹ and his decisions are right.¹¹² Thus in the alternation of activity and stillness he is thoroughly in possession of the means to complete the Way of Supreme Polarity, without deficiency,¹¹³ and in regard to "the activity of desires and being overcome by feelings, interacting to produce benefit and harm" [from the previous section of commentary] he is settled.

But stillness is the return to authenticity and the reality of the nature. Were it not for this mind/heart's silent, desireless stillness, how could it respond to the changes of the myriad things and events and unify the activity of all under heaven?¹¹⁴ Thus the sage is central and correct, humane and right; his activity and stillness flow cyclically,¹¹⁵ and so in his activity he necessarily emphasizes stillness.¹¹⁶ This is how he achieves the central position, and heaven and earth, sun and moon, four seasons, and ghosts and spirits cannot

¹⁰⁷ [Trans.: *Renji*, lit. peak of being human.]

¹⁰⁸ [Trans.: *Yijing, Wenyan* (Remarks on the Text), under hexagram 1 (Qian) (*Zhouyi benyi*, 1:8b).]

¹⁰⁹ Centrality is activity that is ritually proper.

¹¹⁰ Correctness is stillness that is wise.

¹¹¹ Activity.

¹¹² Stillness.

¹¹³ The "complete substance and great function" [from Zhu Xi's commentary to the Great Learning, ch. 5].

¹¹⁴ The phrase "emphasizing stillness" refers to the sage's desirelessness in terms of principle, so his mind/heart itself is still. It is not that the sage focuses his thoughts on the necessity of emphasizing stillness. The stillness that is explained in the Diagram is always emphasized.

¹¹⁵ Revolving as one.

¹¹⁶ With a temporal sequence.

oppose him.¹¹⁷

So it is necessary that the substance be established before the function proceeds.¹¹⁸ It is like what Master Cheng said about Qian and Kun, activity and stillness: "Without focusing on unity one cannot proceed directly; without uniting everything one cannot express oneself broadly." [??] This is also the idea.¹¹⁹

- [1] *Master Zhu said:* The sage at birth receives a complete endowment [of *qi*]. His constitution (*qizhi*) is clear and pure, completely ordered (*li*). He is one with Heaven without depending at all upon cultivation.
- [2] The sage's manifestation of refinement and coarseness is entirely bright and penetrating. Although his form is that of a person, it is entirely natural order (*tianli*).
- [5] Although human nature is the same [in everyone], there must be different emphases in the endowment of *qi*. When wood-*qi* predominates, then the mind/heart of pity and grief will be greater and the mind/heart of shame and dislike, deference and yielding, and right and wrong will be blocked and not expressed.¹²⁰ When metal-*qi* predominates, then the mind/heart of shame and dislike will be greater and the mind/heart of pity and grief, deference and yielding, and right and wrong will be blocked and not expressed. The same is true for water and fire [*qi*]. Only when *yin* and *yang* combine their virtues and the five-fold nature is complete is there centrality and correctness, which is being a sage.
- [7] *Question about* "centrality, correctness, humaneness and rightness and emphasizing stillness." Centrality and humaneness are activity; correctness and rightness are stillness. As the Teacher [Zhu Xi] has explained [above], "Were it not for this mind/heart's desireless stillness, how could it respond to the changes of the myriad things and events and unify the activity of all under heaven?" Now in this mind's silent,

¹¹⁷ Heaven and earth, sun and moon, four seasons, and ghosts and spirits are all in accord with the principle of *yin* and *yang*, activity and stillness.

¹¹⁸ Stillness is the substance, activity is the function.

¹¹⁹ [Zhu Xi] refers to the statement by Cheng Yi to express again the theory of emphasizing stillness.

¹²⁰ [Trans: These are the four "seeds" of virtue in *Mencius* 2A.6 and 6A.6.]

desireless stillness, if one desired to see what was correct and right, how would one see?¹²¹ *Reply*: One simply sees the fixed structure/substance of order (*li zhi ding ti*).¹²²

- [9] The two words "emphasizing stillness" refers to what a sage does. They continue from the previous passage, "settles these [affairs] with centrality, correctness, humaneness and rightness," to clarify "centrality" among the four, as a "host-guest" [relationship]. Observing this, the student should apply effort, in a definite sequence. One should first establish a foundation and then examine oneself; then there will be progress. What is meant by stillness is not to apply absolutely no effort. If one does it like this one can apply effort.

...

[H] The noble person cultivates these and has good fortune. The petty person rejects these and has bad fortune.

Because of the sage's [possession of the] complete substance of Supreme Polarity, [in his] alternating between activity and stillness there is nothing that is not the peak of centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness. And this is done naturally, without artificial cultivation.¹²³ Not until reaching this level of cultivation¹²⁴ does the noble person have the means to experience good fortune.¹²⁵ Without knowing these [centrality and correctness, humanity and rightness] the petty person corrupts them¹²⁶ and experiences bad fortune.¹²⁷ The difference between cultivating them and corrupting them lies in the gap between reverent composure (*jing*) and reckless abandon (*si*).¹²⁸ With reverent composure

¹²¹ [Trans: i.e. since seeing is an activity.]

¹²² [Trans.: Zhu here seems to avoid answering the question.]

¹²³ He who gets it without thinking, is centered without effort, and follows easily the way of centrality is the sage.

¹²⁴ Being cautious and apprehensive is the exercise of cultivation.

¹²⁵ According with the Supreme Polarity.

¹²⁶ Being reckless and wasteful is the disposition to corruption.

¹²⁷ Going against natural principle (*tianli*).

¹²⁸ With reverent composure in a single thought, natural principle will accordingly be preserved. With

one's desires are few and principle is clear;¹²⁹ as they become fewer and fewer to the point where there are none, then one is "unoccupied when still and direct in activity,"¹³⁰ and "sagehood can be learned."¹³¹

- [3] *Master Zhu said:* In terms of events (*shi*) there is activity and there is stillness. In terms of mind's circulation and penetration, moral effort (*gongfu*) from the beginning is uninterrupted, but stillness is its basis. This is the idea of what Master Zhou called "emphasizing stillness." But speaking of stillness [by itself] is one-sided, so Master Cheng only spoke of "reverent composure."
- [4] The word "stillness" is Lianxi's phrase "emphasizing stillness" can be regarded as just "reverent composure." There he also says, "without desire [he is] therefore still." If this were taken as vacuous stillness (*xujing*), he feared people would go after Buddhism and Daoism.
- [5] *Question:* "Unoccupied when still"¹³² is when the mind is like a clear mirror or still water, without the slightest selfish desire filling it. Thus in its activity it completely follows the flow of the natural order, without the slightest selfish desire disturbing it. Being unoccupied when still is the substance; being direct in activity is the function [of this mind]. *Reply:* It is like this. "Unoccupied when still" is just what Yichuan [Cheng Yi] meant by saying, "having a master within one is unoccupied; being unoccupied then depravity cannot enter."¹³³ This is correct. ...

corruption in a single thought, natural principle will accordingly be extinguished. How can we not stand in awe!

¹²⁹ Natural principle and human desires vary inversely with one another. When human desires increase one part, one part of natural principle is lost. When human desires decrease one part, one part of natural principle becomes clear.

¹³⁰ With no attachments one is unoccupied; with no crookedness one is direct. [Trans.: *Tongshu* 20.]

¹³¹ The unwillingness of people in this world to learn sagehood is based on their inability to give up desires. That is the reason. [Trans.: *Ibid.*]

¹³² [Trans.: *Tongshu* 20.]

¹³³ [Trans: The closest match I have found to this statement is: "Having a master within one is solid (*shi*); being solid then external harm cannot enter" (*Er Cheng ji*: 8). "Solid" or "real" (*shi*) is actually the opposite of "unoccupied" (*xu*), which is more literally "empty."]

[I] Therefore [the *Yi* says], "Establishing the Way of Heaven, [the sages] speak of *yin* and *yang*; establishing the Way of Earth they speak of yielding and firm [hexagram lines]; establishing the Way of Humanity they speak of humanity and rightness."¹³⁴ It also says, "[The sage] investigates beginnings and follows them to their ends; therefore he understands death and birth."¹³⁵

Yin and *yang* are the images¹³⁶ that establish the Way of Heaven.¹³⁷ The firm and yielding are the material¹³⁸ that establish the Way of earth.¹³⁹ Humanity and rightness are the virtues¹⁴⁰ that establish the human Way.¹⁴¹ The Way is simply one, but it makes itself visible along with events. Thus there is the distinction of the three realms [Heaven, earth, humanity], and within each there is the further differentiation of substance and function. In actuality it is the one Supreme Polarity.¹⁴²

Yang, firmness, and humanity are the beginning of things,¹⁴³ *yin*, yielding, and rightness are the end of things.¹⁴⁴ If we are able to trace back to their beginning and understand how they are generated,¹⁴⁵ then we can revert [*fan*] to their end and understand how they die.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁴ [Trans.: *Yijing, Shuogua* (Remarks on Trigrams), 2 (*Zhouyi benyi*, 4:1b).]

¹³⁵ [Trans.: *Yijing, Xici*, A.4.2 (*Zhouyi benyi*, 3:4a-b).]

¹³⁶ *Yin* and *yang* refer to *qi*; thus he says they are images.

¹³⁷ In Heaven they are called *yin* and *yang*.

¹³⁸ Firm and yielding refer to form; thus he says they are material.

¹³⁹ On earth they are called firm and yielding.

¹⁴⁰ Humanity and rightness refer to principle; thus he says they are virtues.

¹⁴¹ Among humans they are called humanity and rightness. Without *yin* and *yang*, firm and yielding in heaven and earth there would be no Way of Heaven. Without humanity and rightness among humans how could they be human?

¹⁴² The unity of our Way connecting us to correctness is principle.

¹⁴³ The functioning of the Supreme Polarity is how they operate.

¹⁴⁴ The substance of the Supreme Polarity is how they are established.

¹⁴⁵ "Non-polar and yet Supreme Polarity."

¹⁴⁶ "Supreme Polarity is fundamentally non-polar."

This is the ineffable mystery of the orderly creation, flowing from past to present, throughout heaven and earth. When the Sage [Fuxi] created the *Yi*, his general idea was nothing but this, and so [Zhou Dunyi] refers to it [the *Yi*] as verification of his theory.

[1] *Master Zhu said: Yin and yang refer to qi.* The firm and yielding can be seen when there is material form. Humanity and rightness [exist] when *qi* has gathered into form and *li* is embodied in it. But it is all one. [On the level of] *yin* and *yang*, within *yang* there is *yin* and *yang*. [On the level of] firm and yielding, within *yin* there is *yin* and *yang*. [On the level of] humanity and rightness, the *yin* and *yang qi* gathers to become the firm and yielding material, and the [natural/moral] order first becomes the peak of the human Way. Humanity is *yang* and firm; rightness is *yin* and yielding. Humanity chiefly produces, and rightness chiefly gathers. Therefore they are classified accordingly [as *yang* and *yin*]. *Someone asked* about Yang Ziyun's [Yang Xiong's] statement, "The noble person is yielding in regard to humanity and firm in regard to rightness."¹⁴⁷ We can probably select from his idea what is compatible and what is useful. *Reply:* The substance of humanity is firmness and its function is yielding; the substance of rightness is yielding and its function is firmness.

[2] *Question* on "Establishing the Way of Heaven [the sages] speak of *yin* and *yang*; establishing the Way of Earth they speak of yielding and firm [hexagram lines]; establishing the Way of Humanity they speak of humanity and rightness." Is humanity properly classified as yielding and *yin*, and rightness properly classified as *yang* and firm?¹⁴⁸ *Reply:* Humanity's fixed substance itself is classified as *yang*; rightness' fixed substance itself is classified as *yin*.

...

[J] Great indeed is [the *Scripture of*] *Change*! Herein lies its perfection.

The *Yi* as a book is exceedingly great and comprehensive, so in speaking of its perfection, the Diagram exhausts it. How deep is its meaning! As we have heard from the

¹⁴⁷ [Trans.: Yang Xiong (53 BCE-18 CE), *Fayan* (Model sayings), 12:1.]

¹⁴⁸ [Trans: The questioner probably draws this inference from the order in which the terms are given in Zhou's line: *yin*, yielding, and humanity come first in each pair.]

past, both the Cheng brothers studied it under Master Zhou; Master Zhou drew this Diagram and passed it on. Many of the Chengs' statements about the nature and the Way of Heaven came from this. But when they died they had not clarified this Diagram to others, and so its meaning necessarily became obscured. Still, students cannot fail to understand it.

[1] *Master Zhu said:* The *Taijitu* simply clarifies the general outline and meaning of the *Yi*.

[2] "Great indeed is the *Yi*!" just refers to [the previous passage] from *yin* and *yang*, firm and yielding, humanity and rightness to "investigates beginnings and follows them to their ends; therefore he understands death and birth." Human life and death is just the bending and stretching, coming and going of *yin* and *yang qi*.

[3] *Question:* What did Yichuan [Cheng Yi] follow in seeing the Way? *Reply:* He was able to get it from the Six Scriptures. But also, when he was with Lianxi, he could see the order of the great Way [or the great moral order]. He divined for a place.¹⁴⁹

[4] In the *Taijitu shuo* the changes of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Phases are not uniform. The two Chengs followed this in first inferring the [idea of] physical nature (*qizhi zhi xing*).

[5] The Teacher [Zhu Xi] has said that the Masters Cheng did not hand down the *Taijitu* to their disciples, probably because they lacked the ability to receive it. But why is it that in the Confucian school it was never mentioned to [Masters] Yan and Zeng?¹⁵⁰
Reply: How do you know they did not discuss it?

[6] The *Taijitu* has never been hidden from people. But the only people who recognized *Taiji* were some enlightened spirits [??] in the Chan school, who were able to use it. They called it *Taiji*, but they did not understand *Taiji*. The natural order (*ziran zhi li*) of Heaven and earth and the myriad things, from antiquity to the present, has been mishandled but not broken. The term "*wuji*" (non-polar) is Master Zhou's penetrating insight into the substance of the Way, repeatedly producing the constant virtues. Going forward courageously, he explained it to people who did dare to speak of moral

¹⁴⁹ [Trans.: *Zhan diwei le*. Source ??]

¹⁵⁰ [Trans.: Two of Confucius' most important disciples: Yan Hui (see *Tongshu*, sections 10, 23) and Zengzi, the reputed author of the *Daxue* (Great Learning).]

principle. He caused later scholars to clearly see the mystery of *Taiji*, which is not classified as either being or non-being, and is not located anywhere. It is truly a secret not transmitted since the sages.

...