

***Reconstructing the Confucian Dao: Zhu Xi's Appropriation of Zhou Dunyi.***

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This book provides us with an innovative explanation of the question why Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) placed Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) at the head of the lineage of the founding fathers of Northern Song Confucianism. This question has intrigued scholars, particularly Western sinologists, because Zhou Dunyi did not enjoy a great reputation during his lifetime, was believed to have had strong Daoist inclinations, and had taught the Cheng 程 brothers (who were the first “Neo-Confucians” to manifest the idea of a vocation to resuscitate the heritage of Mencius after a rupture of 1,300 years) for less than two years while they were still teenagers. Moreover, no tangible trace of Zhou’s teaching is visible in their writings.

To give us evidence for his argument, the author proceeds in four steps: in the first chapter, he outlines some of the competing visions of *dao* as a concept during the Song. This chapter is rather selective, because it emphasizes, besides several Buddhist and Daoist notions of the period, the Cheng brothers and Zhou Dunyi. The selectivity (one could have thought of many other contemporaneous *ru* 儒 attempts to define this notion, think alone of Su Shi 蘇軾, Sima Guang 司馬光, or Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修) is due to the fact that the author wants to prove that the intellectual aims of the early development of Song “Neo-Confucianism” consisted in gaining superiority with regard to notions of *dao* prevalent in other religious-intellectual communities (hence the term *daoxue* 道學, “Learning of the Way”). One of the few hypotheses for Zhu Xi’s choice of Zhou Dunyi sees Zhu attracted by Zhou’s notion of the *taiji* 太極 (“Supreme Polarity,” see below), that is, Zhou’s cosmology as filling a lacuna in Neo-Confucian world-view. In other words, the *taiji* diagram provided “an ontological and cosmological foundation” for the “moralist teachings” (p. 112, n. 3, quoting Tillman and Soffel).

The second chapter is devoted to Zhou Dunyi’s role in the *daotong* 道統 as conceived by Zhu Xi, a term which the author convincingly renders as “succession of the Way” (in contrast to the more common “transmission” or “genealogy”). Between 1169 and 1196 Zhu Xi devoted no less than 22 independent texts to Zhou Dunyi, and we are provided with the most important passages relevant for Zhu Xi’s understanding (and construction) of the beginning of his school’s tradition, Zhou Dunyi as its ancestor, and its subsequent development. This revival after “100 generations” could not be explained by the mere evolution of scholarship. The use of the concept of “revelation” is meant to clarify that we are facing a religious movement, not a purely philosophical school. The numerous passages from Zhu Xi and his followers that attest that Zhou must have received the *Taijitu* 太極圖 “from Heaven” (p. 42) or by a particular condensation of cosmic *qi* 氣 (p. 43) give sufficient evidence for this assumption. The reviewer, who has since long opted for both the use of “revelation” and the idea that the Neo-Confucian project is closer to Western theology than to philosophy cannot but fully agree with this courageous position. However, in some of his arguments, the author draws perhaps too strict a line between the “religious” and the “philosophical” (or secular) interpretations of Neo-Confucianism: if one accepts the notion of “theology” (as a family resemblance of Neo-Confucianism in terms of form and scholarly practices, without the idea of a personal creator), philosophy would of course not be excluded, particularly if we draw the parallel between the obsession with defining notions in European scholasticism (and the eminent position of Aristotle therein) and the equally meticulous treatment of notions in Neo-Confucianism that reminds one of the shifting around of terms like counting tokens on an abacus.

In contrast to previous contentions, Zhu Xi asserted that it was the Cheng brothers who followed Zhou Dunyi. In addition, the author quotes passages from scholars of Zhu Xi's lineage who reiterated this canonization of Zhou Dunyi. As early as 1159, Hu Anguo 胡安國 (1074–1138) had written a commemoration for Zhou's shrine; later examples are Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180), Li Xinchuan 李心傳 (1166–1243), Huang Gan 黃幹 (1152–1221), Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159–1223), and Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178–1235). The earliest scholar to claim explicitly that Zhou Dunyi had continued Mencius's untransmitted learning was probably Hu Hong 胡宏 (1105–1161) whose preface to Zhou's *Tongshu* 通書 is translated on pp. 33ff. All of them share the view that the Cheng brothers had received their teaching from Zhou Dunyi, who was depicted as the one who had first recovered the Way. The omission of Zhou Dunyi in Zhu Xi's writings about the *Daxue* 大學 and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 might seem perplexing at first glance, but according to the author, in these texts, Zhu Xi is not concerned with problems of the *daotong*, which, in turn, is inextricably linked to the notion of *taiji*.

Zhu Xi was aware of the narrative of transmission of both the "Former Heaven" (*xiantian* 先天) and the *taiji* diagram provided by Zhu Zhen 朱震 (1072–1138). Zhu (and Hu Hong) had made strenuous efforts to deny the apparently Daoist background of this transmission that started, according to Zhu Zhen, with the Daoist hermit Chen Tuan 陳搏 (d. 989) and continued with a line connecting Chong Fang 种放 (959–1015) and Mu Xiu 穆修 (979–1032).

Notwithstanding this genealogy, the reviewer has to add that a careful reading of Zhu Zhen's text (the "Memorial Presenting the *Zhouyi*" 進周易表) reveals that, in his account, there are three different "items" and, accordingly, three different lines of transmission. The first one deals with the *xiantian* diagram, the second one with *hetu* 河圖 and *luoshu* 洛書, and only the third (and shortest one) with the *taiji* diagram. It simply states that Zhou Dunyi received the *taiji* diagram from Mu Xiu, and that Zhou transmitted it to the Cheng brothers. As a result of all these transmission processes and the teaching of Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1078) delivered to the Cheng brothers and Shao Yong 邵雍 (1012–1077), the latter composed his *Huangji jingshi shu* 皇極經世書, while Zhou Dunyi wrote his *Tongshu*. Although one may acknowledge that no "heaven" or particular "qi condensation" is involved in this account (and this might explain Zhu Xi's reluctance to accept it), we still have to realize the eminent position Zhou occupies in this early narrative.

Chapter 3 discloses the explanation for Zhu Xi's selection of Zhou Dunyi as the first Confucian Sage of the Song (p. 138). During the 1160s, Zhu Xi experienced a spiritual crisis that was closely linked to his religious practice of meditation, i.e. his method for self-cultivation: "quiet-sitting" (*jingzuo* 靜坐). "Zhu was seeking not only a theoretical way of bridging the still and active places of mind but also a

practical means” (p. 85). One of the core passages in the Scriptures with regard to this practice was the second half of the first chapter of the *Zhongyong*, where the feelings (better perhaps: “affections,” M.L.) of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are divided into the two phases of being not yet expressed, *weifa* 未發 (better perhaps: “aroused,” M.L.) and of being expressed, *yifa* 已發. The first one is called *zhong* 中, “centrality” or “equilibrium”; the second one *he* 和, “harmony.” This passage is brought into a connection of resonance with the *Xici* 繫辭 appendix of the *Changes*, which mentions that the mind (*xin* 心) is “still and inactive; when stimulated it then penetrates” (*jiran bu dong, gan er sui tong* 寂然不動，感而遂通, p. 86). It was in the concept of *taiji* with its foremost emphasis on “stillness” and “activity” that Zhu found a reconciliatory explanation for the apparent contradiction between “stillness” (as advocated by Buddhist meditation) and “activity”: just like *wuji* 無極 (“non-polar,” see below) and *taiji* do not represent a dualism, but rather interpenetrate each other, “stillness” and “activity” are interwoven and “emphasizing stillness” is meant to “nourish activity”; thus, a “Confucian brand of quietism that fundamentally entails activity” has been established (p. 109), and the mind (*xin*) is no longer opposed to either “nature” (*xing* 性) or “feelings” (*qing* 情), because it has become an overarching concept for both. Placing the tokens of the terminological and conceptual repertoire of Chinese canonical texts in a new relationship of resonance by adding the hitherto indispensable jettons of Zhou Dunyi’s thought on “stillness,” “activity,” *wuji*, and *taiji*, Zhu Xi arrived at a satisfactory solution for his spiritual problems. Just as in Western scholasticism, the religious concern is inseparable from philosophical thinking.

The fourth chapter elucidates the author’s choice for translating *taiji* as “Supreme Polarity” (in contrast to previous renderings, which he lists on pp. 119–21). Elsewhere, the reviewer has tried to point out that the famous controversy between Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 on the intriguing opening sentences of Zhou Dunyi’s *Taijitu shuo* 太極圖說, “*wuji er taiji* 無極而太極,” could have been more easily resolved if the two scholars had already possessed an explicit grammar, which would have allowed them to distinguish between a temporal use (*er* translated by “and then”) and a coordinating conjunction (*er* translated by “and yet”). The first interpretation comes close to a Daoist-inspired idea of a gestation of the world, originating in Nothingness, an idea that had to be refuted by Zhu Xi and his school. Therefore, as we have seen in the previous chapter, for Zhu Xi *taiji* is the principle of activity and stillness. According to one of his *Collected Sayings* 語類, Zhou Dunyi “feared that people would say that *taiji* had form, so he said ‘*wuji er taiji*’” (p. 131). “Supreme Polarity” (instead of, for instance, “Supreme Ultimate”) expresses the interpenetrating modes of yin and yang, of activity and stillness; since it is “without form, and has no relation to space” (Zhu Xi, p. 135), it can be equated to “principle” (*li* 理). Thus,

*taiji* should not be understood as a cause that underlies a creation of the universe, but rather as a principle of the interaction between yin and yang—the Change(s), in brief.

The author has presented us with ground-breaking and novel insights into the motifs that were decisive for declaring Zhou Dunyi as the first of the Song Confucian sages. It was out of a spiritual need that the master narrative of Neo-Confucianism was created—for scholars who have since long been convinced that the characterization of Zhu Xi as a pure “philosopher” has been shaped by Western notions, this book adds a new and valuable piece in the jigsaw, and for them, the author’s digressions on the concepts of “religion” (pp. 138–41) might seem like preaching to the converted. For the sake of making an argument, it is perhaps not entirely sufficient to make a distinction between “religion” and “philosophy” without giving an exclusive definition of philosophy. However, given the fact that still a large part of the scholarly community are still scrupulously avoiding any proximity to “religion” with regard to Zhu Xi’s thought, these digressions will be most helpful for further debates on the subject. It will also be the challenge for future scholarship to decide whether the author bets too much on Zhu Xi’s individual creativity.

This review would be incomplete without mentioning the fact that Part II (pp. 147–309) contains translations of Zhou Dunyi’s major works and Zhu Xi’s commentaries, with further discussions by Zhu Xi and his students. The introduction to the paragraph on “Supreme Polarity” even presents the manifold graphic representations of the *taiji*, including the Buddhist image of the “storehouse consciousness,” which has been (mistakenly, as the author asserts) ascribed to Zongmi 宗密 (781–841). The quality of the translations is magnificent, and the only objection that could perhaps be raised is the rendering of the term *hun* 混 as “undifferentiated.” How on earth can a Western reader understand the following passage: “The Five Phases are *yin* and *yang*; [*yin* and *yang* are] the Supreme Polarity. The Four Seasons revolve; the myriad things end and begin [again]. How undifferentiated! How extensive! And how endless!” (pp. 57 and 261). If one accepts the definition of “undifferentiated” as not having any distinguishing features, it will be difficult for a Western reader to understand that this is meant, along with “extensive” and “endless/inexhaustible,” in a eulogistic sense.

To sum it up, students of Song thought will greatly benefit from a volume that excels in both thorough analysis and careful translation and, in presenting key works of Zhou Dunyi, sheds a new light on Zhu Xi’s “reconstructing the Confucian *dao*.”

MICHAEL LACKNER  
University of Erlangen-Nuremberg

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