
CHAPTER 6

The Nineteenth-Century Synthesis in Confucian Learning

In the early nineteenth century, several of the new Qing dynasty academies followed the eighteenth-century emphasis on both new textual criticism, called evidential research, and ritual in their institutional precepts and in their curricula. The Retreat for the Philological Analysis of the Classics (Hangzhou, 1801) and the Sea of Learning Academy (Canton, 1826) were two; following their model a bit later, the Dragon Gate Academy (Shanghai, 1865) and Southern Quintessence Academy (Jiangyin, 1884) were exemplars of combining philological scholarship with ritual practice. Classics were taught as historical documents, which allowed recognition of possible interpolations from much later times; such passages were scrupulously corrected. The earliest etymological dictionaries and compilations on historical phonology took on a new research value for scholars seeking the precise meaning of classical-period passages. Rigorous collation techniques reconstructed lost texts, and even pre-Qin-period texts outside the Neo-Confucian canon were allowed a restricted place in the curriculum.

At all of these institutions a significant new synthesis of Confucian scholarship occurred that can be considered the final culmination of Confucian ethics as taught and practiced in imperial times. By the mid-eighteenth century the trend in Qing scholarship to rely on Han dynasty sources was led by Hui Dong (d. 1758); his Han Learning group vigorously adopted the successful philological research techniques of the evidential research movement. By the beginning of the nineteenth century Han Learning had fully incorporated the critical scholarship of the evidential research movement while retaining its priority for Han dynasty sources. The remarkable nineteenth-century synthesis that followed combined philological erudition, often summarily

termed Han Learning, with the moral cultivation of Song and Ming dynasty Neo-Confucianism usually simply termed Song Learning.

At the turn into the 1800s a host of commentaries on the *Analects* of Confucius were published that heralded the breadth of this synthesis, as illustrated by the career of Huang Shisan (1789–1862). Huang is typical of many Qing-period scholars who chose not to enter officialdom, but whose life's work set the standard for high-quality scholarship for academicians and officials alike. His personal story begins when he passed the prefectural-level Flourishing Talent civil service degree, and a few years later he was on his way to the second-level provincial examination (*xiangshi*). While he was on his way to the provincial capital where the exam was being administered, his mother succumbed to a contagious disease that had ravaged their home area, and she died. Huang was devastated and pledged filial commitment to her memory, commemorating the day of her death for the rest of his life, and he swore never to take official examinations again. He kept this commitment, dying at age seventy-four after an extremely productive scholarly life outside of officialdom.

Huang's masterwork on the *Analects* was titled *Lunyu hou'an* (The *Analects* with Comments Added); it applied rigorous philological standards to expurgate any misreadings of the passages by scholars of the Song and Ming Neo-Confucian persuasion. His methodology entailed defining each character in the sacred text; loan variants, or related terms that might be interchangeable with a character, were tested to clarify the intended meaning. Extreme care with accurate sentence divisions was essential to determine the exact meaning of passages. But Huang deeply respected the work of Zhu Xi, and his corrections were not intended as an attack of Neo-Confucianism. Indeed, in his masterwork he values Zhu's commentary equally with Zheng Xuan's commentary from the Han dynasty. Describing the mix of moral cultivation from Song learning with the philological care from Han learning that Huang demonstrated, one official who was the educational commissioner of a southern province in 1825 said, "Han Learning is like selecting rice; Song Learning is like cooking it."¹ In other words, the selection of the kind and quality of rice was the scholarly contribution provided by the philology of evidential research, or Han Learning, while the cooking of the rice's moral meaning so it could be

consumed and thus nourish (the moral growth of the individual) was provided by the Song Neo-Confucian school.

At least ten serious scholarly works on the *Analects* emerged from the generation of scholars at the turn into the nineteenth century, including the incisive work of Cui Shu (1740–1816), who identified the last five books of the twenty-book *Analects* as a later layer in its composition. The most lasting scholarly annotation and commentary on the *Analects* was written by Liu Baonan (1791–1855) and finished by his son after his death — not uncommon in Chinese classical scholarship. Liu's *Correct Meaning of the "Analects"* refers the reader to Neo-Confucian readings of selected passages, but each such insight was first purified by rigorous evidential research analysis. Liu used inter-textual comparison with passages from the other Four Books, as well as comparison with passages from the *Gong yang* commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. In many passages Liu refers to exposing their subtle meanings, which validated another new trend — that of viewing passages by disciples in the *Analects* as testimonials, much like the commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; that is, as repositories of careful meanings that Confucius himself chose not to elaborate in writing.

Improved academy education after 1800 adopted the new curricular standard of paying equal attention to moral principles and philology, then syncretically mixed the two emphases. A look at academy practices in the nineteenth century reveals how the synthesis was actually implemented in Confucian education. The intellectual orientation of the synthesis was clear at the Sea of Learning Academy in Canton, founded under the patronage of the seminal scholar-official Ruan Yuan. Chen Li (1810–1882), perhaps the most impressive scholar there, dedicated his life's work to an uncompromising commitment to philological accuracy and using factual evidence to establish the meaning of passages, yet he never challenged the moral authority of the Neo-Confucian understanding of self-cultivation, and he insisted upon a balance between moral and philological emphases throughout his career. Later in the nineteenth century the model was validated when both Dragon Gate Academy and Southern Quintessence established themselves using the curriculum and the pedagogy of the Sea of Learning Academy.

Dragon Gate, established in the mid-nineteenth century, admitted about twenty-five students in residence, with an additional twenty-five commuter students. The headmaster, who was the master teacher, lived on the academy grounds; he employed one or two assistant teachers as needed. Recruitment for the headmaster position revealed much about the educational objectives of the institution. The Academy Regulations of 1870 stipulated the following traits: "Moral character, not the [examination] degree held, must be the criterion used [to select] . . . a man of the utmost integrity, and highest personal standards. . . . The mastery of materials to be taught, and his personal character must be equally exemplary." Further, "The master teacher must live in the institution and be available for discussion day and night. . . . Daily lessons and diaries must be explained in person and with evidence. If handled from far away, there will be little emotional commitment, and commitment will decrease from the students as time goes on. This is not compatible with the objectives of an academy."²

The regulations of the academy went on to say that every student had to keep two daily diaries: a diary of academic work completed and one of reading notes taken on the classics. With few lectures and no classroom instruction, the work diary fostered self-discipline and was used by the headmaster periodically to review the academic work covered by each student. Additionally, the diary entries needed to record what academic work was covered during four daily time units: early morning, prenoon, afternoon, and after the lamps were lit.

Significantly, the diary of reading notes was "presented," along with the work diary, every five days to the Dragon Gate headmaster. This pedagogical method was a variation on the daily study timetables used since the Song and Yuan eras in Neo-Confucian education. The headmaster was formally dressed, and the "Student [had to] stand before the teacher. When asked to sit down, the student [could] receive instruction." The Chinese terms that the student used for requesting instruction from the headmaster had their locus classicus in the *Record of Rites*, one of the original works of the Five Classics. In his personal diary of reading notes the student recorded what he had "taken away" (*xin de* 心得) from the texts he had studied, as well as questions raised by the reading. Academy regulations stipulated that "what one records must not be made up, nor should the pages be filled with tedious detail." Dragon Gate's own regulations noted that the headmaster, dur-

ing these tutorials, was expected to give specific details on how the student should go about answering the questions he had written about the readings. These tutorial sessions were the heart of the pedagogy at Dragon Gate.

In addition to daily diaries, another precept of Dragon Gate Academy's curriculum reveals its explicit commitment to the mastery of Neo-Confucian texts.

Studying should be systematic. First study the *dao* in the Four Books and in each classic; then expand your knowledge by studying all the histories, the *Zizhi Tongjian* [Comprehensive mirror for aid in government], and Master Zhu's *Gangmu* [Outline]. One can use the following compilations as ladders for assistance: the *Xiaoxue* [Elementary education]; *Jinsi lu* [Reflections on things at hand]; and various collections on nature and principle. In this way one can use understanding the subtle essence of the principles of morality (*yili*) to direct one's behavior.

Selections from the hundred philosophers [and from] the classics, histories, and all related practical volumes can be studied according to the ability of the student. After that, remaining energy can be used on composition and on preparation for the civil service exams. One cannot be lazy or inconsistent; and one cannot read carelessly in a variety of books. One progresses according to one's own ability, clarifying the *ti* [substance] and attaining the *yong* [implementation]. This will lead to real benefit, and is the right way to approach study.³

Liu Xizai, Dragon Gate's headmaster from 1866 to 1880, reviewed the entries in the diaries of reading notes with great personal care, often working with one student after another until midnight. He reinforced whatever astute observations the student had made and corrected misunderstandings in his notes. In general, headmasters evaluated the second, or work, diaries submitted at the same time, being vigilant in discerning each student's diligence and depth of understanding. Liu embodied this care and vigilance—for fourteen consecutive years he personally supervised the progress of each of his students. After his death, articles and funerary inscriptions written by his former students testified to the remarkable lifelong student-teacher bonds that had been established.

At many of the good Confucian academies monthly essay examinations were combined with the daily diaries to complete the academy's pedagogy. Eight essays written on topics announced each month were collected from every student at the end of each academic year, and their grades were tallied; the quality of the essays was important in determining whether the student would be retained and his scholarly stipend, which covered room and board, renewed for another year.

At Southern Quintessence Academy, which adopted Dragon Gate's pedagogy when it opened in 1884, two essays a month instead of one became the norm. Significant monetary prizes were given for the top papers, and bottles of wine were given for second- and third-place monthly essay winners. Students naturally were attracted by these prizes, so the headmaster tried an experiment at the end of the 1890s: the number of essays was increased to one every ten days; however, he discovered that the additional preparation time necessary for three essays a month interfered with students' ability to keep up with in-depth diaries of reading notes. Consequently, in 1898 the number of essays was again reduced to two per month, and when this change was announced in a Shanghai newspaper, the notice from the academy stated that learning through the reading-notes diaries must not be compromised. The newspaper did not indicate that Song-period Neo-Confucian academies had first developed the pedagogical technique of reading notes in the eleventh century, but it made clear that reducing monthly essays provided more time for reading-notes entries, and that regardless of experiments or change, the diaries had proven their educational value so effectively that they had to accompany all work.

Southern Quintessence Academy's headmaster in 1898 was Huang Yizhou (1828–1899), one of the last giants in late-nineteenth-century scholarship. Like his father, Huang Shisan (the man discussed above who refused to ever retake the civil service examinations after his mother died), Huang Yizhou saw no conflict between the evidential research textual critics and the Cheng-Zhu School of Neo-Confucianism. Huang Yizhou had been trained in Han Learning at the Retreat for the Philological Analysis of the Classics in Hangzhou by the great classicist Yu Yue (1821–1907). When Huang was headmaster at Southern Quintessence Academy from 1885 to 1898, he explicitly rejected the factionalism that had separated the Han Learning and Song Learning

schools during the eighteenth century. By 1864, the recent fourteen-year suppression of the populist Taiping rebels had exhausted the Qing national treasury, and the dynasty had suffered military defeat more than once at the hands of different European powers. For those academies founded later in the nineteenth century—Southern Quintessence was founded in 1884—the future stability of the Qing dynasty was a concern, and academic in-fighting would have been a costly luxury.

Like Ruan Yuan at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Huang Yizhou celebrated the practical value of ritual. Huang asked all students at Southern Quintessence to post *Analects* 6.27 above their desks; it instructed readers to be broadly erudite in studying written texts, but then to understand those texts in light of proper social usage or ritual. This guideline hinted at the excesses of Cheng-Zhu metaphysics, or as Huang put it, “*Li* [ritual] must, of necessity, be in accord with past reality, whereas ‘principle’ [as emphasized by Song learning] can be just speculation.”⁴ Nineteenth-century Confucian academies largely retained Zhu Xi as a guide to self-cultivation, yet his metaphysics and even his quest for sagehood were often excluded from the original Neo-Confucian program. Considering the historical and political issues of the time, adhering to the hard evidence of socially grounded practice provided a compass for the present. Academy curricula in the latter part of the nineteenth century mandated analysis grounded in the realm of lived experience so that practical knowledge could be generated for the present.

In the China of 1895, the most sophisticated formulations of the true meaning of the classics combined the best Neo-Confucian analysis of the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties with the most searching textual critique of the Qing evidential research movement. These readings of the classics would be the last expression within the imperial state of the two-thousand-year-long evolution of the ethical tradition of self-cultivation. Qing scholarship and commentaries on the classics were still surrounded and supported by a living Confucian society in which Confucian values could be practiced, but in the national reforms between 1895 and 1911 the institutions of scholarly training, the Confucian academies, were mandated by law to convert to modern public schools. The training that had formerly focused on self-cultivation

then became the preserve of new “ethics” courses in public schools, or in very rare cases were taught in isolated institutes on the periphery of twentieth-century society.

The 1911 revolution overthrew dynastic government, and with it the Neo-Confucian possibility that political authority would derive from the moral authority of officials trained in the Confucian ethical classics. In the twentieth century republican governments, first in 1912 and again in 1949 with the People’s Republic, established public school systems with little place for the Confucian classics. But then, some two hundred years after the vital synthesis of Confucian schools that began around 1800, an academic revival of the Confucian tradition began again among scholars inside and outside the People’s Republic of China. The academic revival of Confucianism that began in the 1990s had one obstacle, however, not present as the nineteenth century opened: there was little societal context for the practical application of those ideas in the 1990s, whether in the People’s Republic of China, Singapore, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. After all, Confucius himself had said that moral and spiritual values could not be fully realized in an individual without practicing them. Around 2001 the first Neo-Confucian academy was founded precisely where the exiled Wang Yangming had experienced his deep insights at Dragon Field in China’s remote hinterland. Named the Yangming Retreat (Yangming jingshe) and financed by some wealthy businessmen, it was established almost exactly one hundred years after the last classical academies were ordered eliminated in 1901. In 2007 a prominent professor at Beijing University, Zhang Xianglong, called for “preservation zones,” modeled after the way the Amish lived in the United States, so that Confucian families and clans could practice family rituals apart from the pressures of modern life. His book, *Refuge of Thinking: Ancient Chinese Philosophy in the Age of Globalization*, used the parallel of preservation zones for endangered biological species and argued that conservation of Confucian practices in protected areas would demonstrate the relevance of Confucian social and political traditions to contemporary society. In the early twenty-first century academics revived Confucian social and political theory and were in search of a societal context in which the practice of Confucian values could be fostered.

*Interpretations of the Classics at the
End of the Nineteenth Century*

Let us look now at how Neo-Confucian self-cultivation was left for posterity at the end of the last imperial state, when the social context was more favorable to practice. Important passages from the Neo-Confucian canon are highlighted below to make clear the updated nineteenth-century synthesis of Neo-Confucian self-cultivation. The wording of each passage reflects how the orthodox Cheng-Zhu tradition would have understood that passage.

Let us first examine a passage in the *Mean* to see the difference that Han-Song syncretism made to Zhu Xi's Southern Song reading of the same passage. The beginning of chapter 13 in the *Mean*, broken into three parts, reads this way:

1. The Master said, "The Way (*Dao*) is not far from human beings. If a person in following the Way distances oneself from other people, it cannot be considered the Way."
2. The *Classic of Odes* (*Songs*) says,
Hew an axe handle, hew an axe handle;
The model is near at hand. [#158]
We take hold of one axe handle in order to hew another axe handle. Yet if we look from one to the other, the two appear far different. Therefore, the exemplary person uses the Way to govern men. When they are reformed, the exemplary person stops.
3. Being true to oneself (*zhong*) and empathetic toward others (*shu*) one keeps near to the Way. What one does not wish done to him he does not do unto others.

The final line recalls the same negative statement of the Golden Rule as it is stated in *Analects* 12.2 and 15.24. The interpretation of the passage for Song Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi, who believed that humans have an innately good nature, would be that the text says that the exemplary person (*junzi*) knows that however good an existing model of leadership is, it will not equal the perfection of the inherently good human nature all people share. The exemplary person can do his or her best to emulate that model behavior so others can witness it, and then when the community actualizes it, exemplary persons have done their jobs as good leaders.

The key revision of this way of thinking by the nineteenth-century synthesists — from Ruan Yuan at the beginning of the century to Huang Yizhou at the end — began from the position that goodness and humaneness are not innate patterns or principles in human nature waiting to be discovered or unobscured. Rather, their understanding was that humaneness develops from human nature only as one's relationships in life bring it into being. Humaneness needs to be formed, even though the capacity to develop it is available to all humans. The first line of the passage above makes this case: the *Mean* makes clear that if a person searches for the moral Way anywhere that “distances oneself from others,” or separates oneself from other persons, then it cannot be considered the Way.

But Zhu had conceived of humaneness as the substance of mind, which is present at birth and has the objective reality of metaphysical principle. He saw humaneness as the pattern or principle of the mind-and-heart. How, then, does one shape morality and develop *ren*, or humaneness, according to the nineteenth-century synthesis? The line “Hew an axe handle, hew an axe handle; / The model is near at hand” above suggests that becoming a moral exemplar is possible only with social interaction. The raw material of, say, the trunk of a hickory tree that might be shaped into an axe handle can be compared to the raw material of human nature that will need to be shaped and refined to develop its humaneness. Just as the axe blade shapes a section of the trunk, so does considerate interaction with other people build one's character.

Repeating the phrase “hew an axe handle” in the poem suggests repeated shaping of the wood by the axe head. Similarly, only through continuous interactions with others can the empathetic give-and-take of putting yourself in the place of another allow you to shape morally exemplary behavior. The repeated practice of considerate human relations actually forms one's nature into the moral character possessed by an exemplary person.

In general, everyone finds it rather easy to sense whether others are treating us in a considerate way — whether they are attempting to put themselves in our place before deciding how to act toward us. This is why relationships are indispensable as a consistent means to find out how to behave respectfully. In being considerate and in being treated with consideration, reciprocity of viewpoint is the sharp edge of the

axe with which one can hone one's moral behavior. Like the model axe handle, model behavior in each person is shaped more perfectly by each considerate act.

Zhu felt that humaneness lay in humans' original nature, which itself is pure, but only the mind of the Way (*Dao xin*) can recover knowledge of it. However, for Liu Baonan, the foremost nineteenth-century specialist on the *Analects* who incorporated the position of the nineteenth-century synthesis in his work, humaneness cannot be discovered or recovered from within one's innate nature. Instead, only by interacting with others can humaneness be enacted or carried out. The sharp edge of the axe of humaneness is reciprocity. One might add that the blade grips because humans are capable of some analytical reflection on their actions each day. Changing one's intentions the next day in an effort not to repeat the mistakes made today in human relations reshapes one's model behavior.

"The Foremost Passage in the *Analects*"

Zhu claimed that *Analects* 4.15 was the most important passage in the classic. Let us examine why.

The Master said, "Can! [name of a disciple] There is a unity which interconnects my way."

Zengzi replied, "I see."

After the Master had gone out, one of the disciples asked, "What did he say?"

Zengzi replied, "The way of the Master consists in nothing more than *zhong* and *shu*."

Zhu's explanation of this crucial passage derived from his philosophical position that there are metaphysical principles that inhere in all things. As far as human nature goes, he believed those innate principles can be revealed, and, in the tradition of Mencius, they will turn out to be good. Zhu assumed *zhong* is part of the inner mind, and it means "revealing one's mind fully" and therefore accessing the goodness that is there.

The psychology of these moral categories was subtle as Zhu explored how accessing innate goodness is tied to "inferring from one-self" to others, or *shu*. If one can be completely in touch with one's inner goodness, then *zhong*, that very state in which one is "being

true to oneself,” is achieved. Reaching that point, each person will see how extending those good feelings outward to connect to others makes reciprocity (*shu*) derivative from *zhong*. In the mind of a true sage, this interconnection will be obvious because that person will be completely in touch with his or her inner nature, or the substance, and will know just how it extends through empathy or function to other people.

But eighteenth-century evidential scholars such as Jiao Xun (1757–1809), Wang Niansun (1744–1832), and Ruan Yuan challenged Zhu’s reading of the *Analects* 4.15 passage, insisting that the dispositions of *zhong* (reconceived as “balance” by the nineteenth-century reinterpretation) and *shu* (reconceived as “doing one’s best for others”) are tied *not* to the makeup of one’s original nature, but to the way one interacts with others.

The *Mean* spoke elsewhere of “making oneself and others whole” as a definition of sincerity (*cheng*), and this was different, Liu Baonan wrote, from the Cheng-Zhu reading of sincerity as internally making oneself whole as a sage. Also, in the *Great Learning* sincere intentions (*cheng yi*) expose self-deceit and can be easily associated with the definition of sincerity in the *Mean*. Liu added that sincerity is possible only if one is balanced (*zhong*) in one’s self-cultivation. Because evidential research scholars and the synthesists who followed them rendered the meaning of sincerity as “that by which one makes others whole,” then sincerity was understood to carry humaneness into our behavior.⁵ The focus of self-cultivation consequently turned to self-restraint and realizing sincerity in one’s conduct. This redefinition of terms in *Analects* 4.15 through philology moved into the synthesist part of the nineteenth century fully in tandem with the new etymology of humaneness (*ren*) derived from Han dynasty sources as “people living together.”

The Passage to Post over One’s Desk

The morally exemplary person who learns widely in the culture and keeps to the essential through ritual will surely not transgress. (*Analects* 6.27, repeated in 12.15)

For Zhu Xi, the Way was always a discovery of the invisible principles inherent in the ideal state of both things in the world and human af-

fairs. The broad study of culture in the passage above was to apprehend those principles (*ge wu*) and extend knowledge (*zhi zhi*), as he had explained in the first two steps of the *Great Learning*. Nineteenth-century mainstream Confucian synthesizers insisted on redefining this search for moral principle in nature and human affairs. For Ling Tingkan, *ge wu* was not the recognition of principle in things, but rather the recognition of *ritual* in human affairs. Ruan Yuan followed this line of argument in noting that because humaneness has to be developed through human interaction, ritual is what actually teaches us *how to treat others* humanely.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Huang Yizhou worried that those attracted to Wang Yangming might assume that the Neo-Confucian reading of “keeping to the essential” viewed the *mind-and-heart* as the source of the essential principles explaining things, but he felt that this was speculation. The passage refers to ritual, however, which belied speculation, and that is what Huang underlined. In fact, during the thirteen years that Huang directed Southern Quintessence Academy (1885–1898), all students were asked to post the *Analects* 6.27 passage over their desks.

Huang probably would have favored Ralph Waldo Emerson’s statement that related to ritual: “Manners are the happy way of doing things; each one a stroke of genius or of love, now repeated and hardened into usage.”⁶ Applied historically, Huang wrote that at those points in the past when conflict was rife and when *zhong* (balance) and *xin* (making good on one’s word) wore thin, discussions of ritual, or proper social usage or norms, naturally emerged to facilitate human interaction. He provided examples such as the scholarly discussions that occurred at the time of the decline of the Zhou state (1045–221 BCE) and again during the debates that arose when the Jin state (265–419 CE) proved incapable of reunifying post-Han China. The decline in mutual trust so important in a stable state gave rise to debates on ritual in those periods precisely because even to initiate communication among opposing parties required more formal ceremonial or ritual language to do so.

Following his father’s masterful command of the three ritual classics — the *Decorum Ritual* (*Yili*), the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli*), and the *Record of Rites* (*Liji*) — Huang spent nineteen years writing a fifty-part analysis of the social and political conditions of the ancient period that

discussed the norms and customs of proper social usage in the earliest ritual classics. For nineteenth-century mainstream Confucians the study of past culture became a resource not for hidden philosophic principles, but for understanding humane rituals that worked, and from which one could learn to apply humane social norms to contemporary society

It should be noted, in pointing out these differences, that Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians and nineteenth-century synthetic Han-Song Confucians shared a priority on consistent daily practice. The nineteenth-century mainstream interpretation would certainly have endorsed *Analects* 15.6: “When standing, see these words in front of you — ‘do your utmost to make good on your word, be earnest and respectful in your conduct’ — and when riding in your carriage, see them propped against the stanchion. Only then will your conduct be proper.” (Today such sayings would be mounted on the dashboard of an automobile.) Zhu Xi also endorsed such daily work on self-cultivation — for example, in elucidating the revised phrase “renewing the people” in paragraph 1 of the *Great Learning*, the traditional commentary notes that Tang, the founding king of the Shang dynasty, was reputed to have had a phrase inscribed on his own bathtub to regularly remind himself to self-cultivate. It read, “If one day you truly renew yourself, day after day you should renew yourself; indeed, renew yourself every day.”⁷ Zhu celebrated this connection between regular physical cleansing and regular moral cleansing, but he then added the argument that accessing the goodness within one’s own nature is a prerequisite to moving or influencing others. Other people would be moved to renew themselves when they observe us doing such self-renewal.

An *Analects* Passage for Advanced Learners

Zigong said: Suppose there was one who widely bestowed benefits on the people and was capable of bringing relief to the multitude. What would you say? Could he be called humane?

The Master said: Why just humane? Wouldn’t he surely be a sage? Even Yao and Shun would find this difficult. Now wishing himself to be established, the humane person establishes others; and wishing himself to achieve prominence, he makes others prominent.

The ability to draw analogies from what is near at hand can be called the way to humaneness. (*Analects* 6.30)

The Neo-Confucian reading of the last lines in the above passage was discussed in chapter 2. Huang Shisan agreed with Zhu Xi that those using the “ability to draw analogies from what is near at hand” are committed to a beginning technique only, and not yet committed to humaneness itself. But from there the nineteenth-century synthesizers integrated the insights from the evidential scholars to clarify what humaneness meant and turned from analysis of the mind to the actions of the person.

Huang and his son, Huang Yizhou, insisted that humaneness is not an abstract principle in the mind, but the motivation to help others, and that it is the only way humaneness can become real. Liu Baonan applied the distinctions he had made on *Analects* 4.15 to the most intriguing part of the *Analects* 6.30 passage above. “Establishing oneself” and “achieving prominence,” he argued, concern the inner balance (*zhong*) of a sincere person. “Establishing others” and “making others prominent” is a second step that goes beyond this inner work and represents *shu*, or “doing one’s best for others.” According to John Makeham’s analysis of Liu’s thought, “It is this commitment to sincerity, first awakened in regard to oneself (*zhong, cheng ji*), that enables one to recognize that the welfare of others is equally as important as one’s own welfare and that, indeed, the continuation of one’s own welfare depends on this recognition and so acting appropriately.”⁸ Both Huang Shisan and Huang Yizhou shared this understanding.

The Practice of Personal Self-Cultivation at the End of the Nineteenth Century

By the end of the nineteenth century the primary way for mainstream Confucian practitioners to self-cultivate was to work on their many personal relationships. The secondary way, through study, expanded the scope of interpersonal relationships by turning to the fund of human experience in the classics and in the histories of the past, both of which also stress the relationships of real people. Three passages

from the *Analects* will specifically illustrate the high priority placed on social interaction; we can then turn to reading as a moral practice.

Social Interaction as a Moral Practice

The modern nineteenth-century student of self-cultivation might begin self-cultivation with Zengzi's three-point checklist for reflection on daily behavior (*Analects* 1.4).

- (1) Zixia said: "A person can be said to truly love learning who on a daily basis, is aware of what is yet to be learned, and who, from month to month, does not forget what has already been mastered."
(*Analects* 19.5)

On the campus of the nineteenth-century residential Southern Quintessence Academy, personal conduct was part of learning. Academy regulations prohibited leaving the campus without permission and forbade visiting brothels. But rather than military-like discipline, campus culture included respectful bows every morning, not only when meeting teachers for the first time, but when meeting fellow students each day. Living on the campus became an exercise in reverent respect for one another.

- (2) [A disciple] grievously said: "Other men all have brothers; I alone have none."

[Another disciple said]: . . . If the exemplary person is reverent, unfailingly courteous towards others, and observant of the rites, then all within the four seas are his brothers. Why should he be distressed at having no brothers." (*Analects* 12.5)

- (3) Zigong asked: "Is there one expression that can be acted upon until the end of one's days?"

The Master replied: "There is *shu*: do not impose on others what you yourself do not want." (*Analects* 15.24)

A morally exemplary person is one who acts according to humane conduct as completely as possible, and it would take years for most students of Confucian practice to reach the exemplary stage of humaneness. Mainstream nineteenth-century Confucians stressed that relationships are the beginning and end of humane practice. It was not difficult to cite *Analects* passages like (2) and (3) above to support this position. In fact, even when Confucius described an exemplary

person, the very interpersonal “making good on one’s word (*xin* 信)” was the concluding step in his definition: “The Master said, ‘Having a sense of appropriate conduct as one’s basic disposition, developing it in observing ritual propriety, expressing it with modesty, and consummating it in making good on one’s word; this then is an exemplary person’” (*Analects* 15.18).

In addition to trustworthy character, the nineteenth-century student of self-cultivation did not hesitate to use reciprocity as a lifelong method in determining what appropriate moral action toward others should be in any situation. Because the reciprocity implicit in the Golden Rule refers back to one’s own interests, the Chinese Golden Rule can be easily used as a method of self-cultivation. The increasingly humane person in nineteenth-century practice fostered other interpersonal virtues that naturally elicited a similar emotion in others, such as polite and courteous behavior, consistent reverence, trustworthiness in word and deed, and interpersonal fidelity.

It is a spiritual exercise to put oneself in the place of the other person before acting; reaching out with one’s heart builds one’s capacity to be humane. In fact, just as physical exercise strengthens one’s muscles, this spiritual exercise strengthens the heart and its capacity for compassion. After a few years of empathetic training, putting oneself in another’s place becomes habitual. The mind remains the master of actions, and the objective is to make this concern for others second nature.

The social norms that communities in ancient China accepted were enshrined in their rites or ceremonies, and the ritual propriety with which they were performed was understood by Confucians to be reverent. Coming-of-age rituals and family funeral services were rites of passage that reflected these patterns of deference, and they then became conventions of civil interaction.

Quiet-Sitting. Some earlier Neo-Confucian teachers, as well as nineteenth-century synthesists, advocated quiet-sitting as one aid to self-cultivation. In 1078 CE, when Cheng Hao was appointed magistrate of a distant county, he was disappointed that the followers who accompanied him to this new post did not seem to go beyond “talking the talk” of Confucian self-cultivation: “You people accompany me here and only learn the way to talk. Therefore, in your learning, your

minds and words do not correspond. Why not practice?" When the students asked what they should practice away from home, he responded, "When there is nothing to put into practice, suppose you practice quiet-sitting" (*Reflections* IV.63). In other words, Cheng's main point was to "walk the walk." Being away from relatives and their accustomed social roles, those relationships could not be maintained in practice, so the teacher suggested quiet-sitting, which is the contemplation that reduces the appeal of material gain as well as the hustle that accompanies gain, and calms the spirit to center the person for humane thinking.

It was essentially after Confucianism had responded to the popularity of Buddhism and Daoism that later Confucians added quiet-sitting as one aid in self-cultivation, but unlike Chan meditation, it was never aimed at clearing the mind of conceptual thinking. What had to accompany quiet-sitting in Confucian practice was reverence (*jing*); this idea served to humanize both public and private relationships with a sense of care and deep respect. Applied to the individual, quiet-sitting can look like meditation, and, like meditation, often even begins with the eyes closed. Obliterating the self or melding the self with greater realities, however, was never the goal. The Confucian practitioner should never lose conscious direction of the inner practice, or the goal of practicing propriety afterward. The highlighted function of reverence in Neo-Confucianism is more like concentrated awareness so that the practitioner remains always consciously respectful of others. In the eighteenth century Zhang Boxing, the editor of Zhu Xi's *Further Reflections*, was an advocate of controlled quiet-sitting. By the nineteenth century Ling Tingkan would attack Wang Yangming's definition of the phrase "even when alone, be watchful over yourself (*shen du*)," which Wang had understood as a way to experience the essence of mind. Ling argued that instead of experiencing mind, this form of reverent concern checks or monitors one's behavior to see that one's thinking is properly cultivated according to ritual.

Reading as a Moral Practice

There has probably been no other tradition so clearly committed to scholarship as the Confucian, and in the absence of sacerdotal, pastoral, or monastic activities, it was book learning and literary activity which became for the Confucian even more central tasks than for the Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist.⁹

Confucius said he was convinced that in any town of over ten households there would be people who were more accomplished than he in doing one's utmost on behalf of others, and better than he at making good on their word (*xin*), but he was willing to claim that he could be singled out as excelling on one trait: his love of learning (*Analects* 5.28). The nineteenth-century synthesis drew two conclusions. First, it is crucial that each person take full responsibility for his or her own moral learning. Such a commitment to full responsibility meant the values adopted for oneself were formed independently of imposed norms, expectations, or external pressures. Confucius felt the standards of his own day had declined so far that students of morality were studying texts just to impress others, instead of for their own benefit. Zhu Xi and many other Neo-Confucians of exceptional personal fortitude taught the same point.

Second, self-cultivation necessitated becoming a self-learner for life. Apart from doing one's utmost in existing relationships, reading was the major way to maintain a program of self-cultivation. Like the cutting and grinding of a gem in the rough, studying the Confucian classics expanded one's constricted sphere of personal experience to include the human experience of the morally exemplary and even sage-like figures who wrote the ethical classics and histories.

The Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian sequence for study of the Four Books remained as follows in the nineteenth century: first the *Great Learning*, second the *Analects*, third the *Mencius*, and fourth the *Mean*. And as we have seen, Zhu Xi's *Reflections on Things at Hand*, the anthology of scholarly writings with perceptive comments on passages from all four classics, provided a useful "ladder" for the committed student/practitioner. When one finished the Four Books the serious student then turned to the histories to read the traces of dynastic preservation and ruin, order and disorder. Once the historical record provided the expansion of personal experience to include what had happened in the past, one returned to a critical reading of other philosophic thinkers of the One Hundred Schools of Thought. These steps took a student from understanding the self, to broad learning, and then back again to the principles of morality.

Nineteenth-century thinkers added that the main canon of texts had to be read only in critical editions that eliminated interpretations that might have introduced the bias of non-Confucian schools of thought, and also eliminated the metaphysical reading of passages

first imposed by Song Neo-Confucian thinkers. Nineteenth-century thinkers then gave special attention to the study of past rituals and the classics that revealed rituals. Also noteworthy is that the careful empiricism of evidential research scholars often led them to a research technique called notation books (*zhaji cezi*), which were the meticulous records of facts culled from textual criticism employing collation, etymological research, and historical phonology. One great academy headmaster, Qian Daxin (1728–1804), titled his notation books *The Record of Self-Renewal from the Ten Yokes Study*. Nineteenth-century academies taught this methodology of building knowledge, rather than trying to recover it from innate sources.

Journals. As we have seen in chapter 2, children memorized all of the Four Books and even longer classics. Selected sayings in the *Analects*, in particular, were expected to become meaningful one at a time as the life experiences of the reflective student increased. Serious student learners in the best Confucian academies would open up the full meaning of passages from the classics by submitting their diaries of reading notes to the headmaster. Many centuries after 1000 CE Confucian academy students were still composing their own diaries of reading notes; passages relevant to a student's life got priority. The practice of writing down what they took away from the passages, which crystallized their understanding in their own words, was quite similar to the scholarly skill of glossing the passages of a classic (*xungu*), the heart of ancient commentarial reasoning.

By the time such a student became a scholar-official, it was not uncommon for him to keep a daily personal diary of self-criticism as a way to comment on his personal relationships. When moral temptations or lusts crossed the minds of high officials, they would copy guiding maxims in their self-cultivation diaries—often quotations from the classics—to address such weaknesses in themselves. By the time of the Qing dynasty, as Hellmut Wilhelm has determined, “It became the custom to show these self-revealing diaries around among friends and have them add their own criticism to one's own.” Within a coterie of three to five intimate friends, one would invite marginal comments on one's acknowledged weaknesses. Even the highest officials often used this regular method of self-cultivation. Reading the marginal comments of someone one trusts who is also trying to be a

good person can rectify one's behavior in a reciprocal manner. The daily diaries of several powerful officials are still preserved in the Chinese record today.

One such journal belonged to Zeng Guofan (1811–1872), the governor-general who oversaw three major provinces after he led the repression of the Taiping Rebellion in 1864. Zeng argued, like Ling Tingkan, that rituals should accompany all steps in the Eight-Step program of the *Great Learning*. He recorded what his teacher, Tang Jian (1789–1872), had told him of the diary of a fellow student, Woren (1804–1871), who by then had become a grand secretary in the capital: “My teacher said, ‘In recent years, Woren has been the most dedicated one. Every day he records each word he said, each move he made, and even each meal he ate. He also records his bad behavior, and the lusts he fails to overcome.’”¹⁰

Zeng's teacher also extracted some useful points from his own diary of introspection and self-criticism and included them in a handbook of sayings on personal cultivation. Such a book could then be studied by Tang Jian's students even after his death, and in turn by their students. Excerpts included the following.

- (1) In matters of merit and reputation you may give in to people; in matters of morals you may not. In matters of gain and loss you may obey orders; in matters of right and wrong you may not.
- (2) If you know yourself and know people, humaneness and indulgence will come naturally. If you do away with your ego and do away with things, “voidness” and justice will come naturally.¹¹

Similarly, as discussed in chapter 3, Liu Xizai, the headmaster of Dragon Gate Academy from 1866 to 1880, titled his booklet of sayings for future students *Lessons on Maintaining Resolve*.

The Confucian synthesis of the second half of the nineteenth century concluded the self-cultivation tradition of dynastic China that had evolved since the inception of Neo-Confucianism in the eleventh century. The last great classical academy to be founded in the nineteenth century, Southern Quintessence in Jiangsu Province, took its name from Zhu Xi's Song-era visit near the location of the academy, during which he commemorated a shrine to Yan Ziyou, the only immediate disciple of Confucius who had been born south of the Yangzi River, and used the term “Southern Quintessence” in his commemo-

rative tablet. The new academy's curriculum mandated all entering students to write a copy of the academy precepts to guide their three years of study, including the following: "It is held that the essay and other minor Confucian genres do not reveal the Way. When Zhongni [Confucius] passed away, the subtle and profound language [of the Way] was interrupted. The masters of the Northern Song were again able to transmit it. The most accomplished single person to do this was Xin'an [Zhu Xi]."¹² At the end of the nineteenth century it is clear that Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism was synthesized with later trends of textual criticism, but remained very much the heart of a modernized Confucian self-cultivation practice.