



# Way of Kun: the metaphysical foundation of Zhuxi's female ethics

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**Abstract** Confucianism has a system of Ethical argumentation that is based on Three Cardinal Principles and Five Constant Virtues, directed towards the cultivation of virtue. Neo-Confucianism, especially Lixue 理学 that is initiated by Chengyi 程颐 and developed by Zhuxi 朱熹, puts great emphasis on the theory of cultivation that usually converges instead of being emanative, tinged with the characteristic of the Way of Kun 坤道 that is directed towards the Virtue of Kun 坤德. This cultivation of the mutual dependence of knowing and doing leads to the subordination of the Way of Qian 乾道 and a corresponding change in the relation between the Virtue of Kun and the Virtue of Qian in a range of language levels, as the metaphysical foundation of Zhuxi's female ethics.

**Keywords** Zhuxi · Way of Kun · Virtue of Kun · Language levels

When Zhu Xi developed his system of *Lixue* 理學, he enlarged Chengyi's notion of “one principle shared by the many” into “ten thousand rivers reflecting the moon,” and constructed a system of self-cultivation which incorporated transcendent morality and immanent ethics. This system suggests that each being, relying on his or her understanding and actions, can connect to the Heavenly Principle's virtue illumined within the heart and mind.

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Significantly, in this theory of cultivation the cardinal virtues of wisdom and righteousness are classified as *Yin* 陰, thus articulating women's affinity with these virtues. In this light, women are given equal status with men in both the corresponding metaphysical area and ethical practice. However, classifying the virtue of women, as well the people in the lower half of the social hierarchy, under the category of *Yin* may incur criticism for being an oppressive or slavish morality, since the category of *Yin* is supposed to confine their obligations to menial work from which they acquire their virtue that is inclined to *Kun*. This question can be considered in Zhu Xi's discussion about "expediency" *quan* 權, in that cultivation rests on the converging point of "righteousness" *yi* 義 and "benevolent compassion" *ren* 仁, which is the point where *Yin* and *Yang* 陽 meet. Only in this mode of *Yin* interacting with *Yang* can cultivation become effective. There is no one who falls absolutely in the single category of either *Yin* or *Yang*: the two function equally in the reality of human life. Nevertheless, in women's cultivation the "way of *Kun*" 坤道 is more emphasized, while in men's cultivation the emphasis is on the "way of *Qian*" 乾道.

### Principles are realized through knowledge and action

To know the principles that underlie the myriad things, one only needs to investigate things themselves. According to Zhu Xi, "Investigating things *gewu* 格物 and acquiring knowledge *zhizhi* 致知 are equivalent. One does not investigate things today and acquire knowledge tomorrow...Acquiring knowledge relates to myself, while investigating things relates to the things."<sup>1</sup> Investigation of things and knowing one's own heart are really the same process. When spoken of separately, the difference between the two only lies where we put the emphasis: when speaking about investigating things, our respect is directed towards the things; when speaking about knowing, our respect is directed toward the capability of one's own heart and mind which can reach the greatest understanding of the Principle. In this light, "investigating things" is very similar to "respecting things" *jingwu* 敬物, or the Principle in the things, and only with respect to the Principle in things, can one ultimately achieve the fullest understanding of oneself.

### Achieve knowledge in yourself; realize the principle in things

To investigate things is to welcome them with an open mind. As Zhu Xi says, "Open the door of your heart, and sit upright to observe things as they arrive; investigate them thus."<sup>2</sup> The subject exists before things arrive. The subject is not an isolated creature waiting in the darkness of a view from nowhere; it exists between the passive and the active. Transcendent, it is suspended between high and low, inner and outer; immanent, it holds the midpoint between ritualized behavior and spontaneous

<sup>1</sup> *Zhuzi yulei*, Li Jingde ed., Vol. 15 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup> *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi' (1)*, Li Jingde ed., Vol. 15 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 286.

righteousness. Throughout the whole process of the encounter, the investigation of things, the subject, starting from the quiet dynamic state of heart-mind, continually activates the mind. Investigating things is a process that moves between the stillness and activity of one's heart-mind as it seeks to obtain the ultimate principle in things, thus enlarging knowledge of the Heavenly Principle in the subject's heart.

Zhu Xi also temporally differentiates investigating things and acquiring knowledge: the former indicates the period of investigation, while the latter refers to its end result. When all the facets of the ultimate principle of things have been acquired by the heart, the principle is not only reflected in knowledge of their appearance, but also in the subject's most intimate and secret feelings. This is "obtaining the ultimate in one's heart." Progressing from studying knowledge of the principle to loving it and then to finally take delight in knowing it, the secret feelings in one's heart become stronger and induce the subject to extend the process of investigation.

Feeling is also identified as "benevolent compassion" *ren* 仁, which people develop in their hearts. This is established through investigating things and acquiring knowledge as an act of benevolent compassion, and exists in the process of moving from simply knowing benevolent compassion to the mind being purified by illumination *ming* 明 and true sincerity *cheng* 誠. As Zhu Xi remarks, in Vol. 77 of his *Collected Writings*:

When selfish desire is extinguished and the ultimate knowledge is reflected brightly and purely in one's heart, it is the heart of Heaven and Earth, which birthed myriad things warmly like the spring-sun, that is preserved in one's heart. Apprehending knowledge in silence, there is no single thing that is not covered by it, and there is no other single principle that is not integrated with it; feeling it and pushing it ahead, there would be no matter that does not possess it as its own principle, and there would be nothing that is not flooded by the compassion of love.

The reflection of ultimate knowledge in people's hearts is the apprehension of the structure of principles with benevolent compassion, and every apprehension of the ultimate knowledge is regarded as an experience of acquiring the Heavenly Principle.

### **Broadening culture and following ritual propriety are compulsions**

The ultimate knowledge acquired in each investigating process could never be viewed as adequate or complete as the wholeness of knowledge, but every acquirement of ultimate knowledge would be a perfect attainment of the Heavenly Principle in that one has obtained satisfactory feelings of benevolent compassion and has seen the coherent scheme of principles brightly, and so the contradiction between one supreme Heavenly Principle and many ultimate principles may be neutralized.

The acquisition of the Heavenly Principle results from investigating one thing after another. Before one has fully developed one's capability for cultivation through realizing the ultimate principle of a single thing, Zhu Xi does not advise one to

hastily move on to investigate something new.<sup>3</sup> Investigating a thing is a sort of rough capability of learning from the mundane, through which one may abstract the ultimate principle of the thing into a new coherent scheme of knowledge. The Heavenly Principle is reflected in every apprehension of the ultimate principle as a new accommodated scheme of knowledge obtained in any single investigation. Along with the accumulation of knowledge acquired in the process of investigation, the subject will find it increasingly simple to understand the coherent scheme and to realize satisfactory feelings of benevolent compassion. In the continuing process one cannot help but drive onward, nearer and nearer to the supreme Heavenly Principle through investigating each ever-clearer reflection of it. The capability of learning from mundane investigation is just like polishing a mirror to make its reflection of the supreme look even clearer.

The continual processes of investigation and knowing are actually discontinuous moments of apprehension of the ultimate principle separated into a series of time–space events. If the realization of knowledge is the moment when the myriad principles are revealed to the subjective mind, then the next step is for the subject to use that mind which possesses the myriad principles to respond to the myriad affairs operating in the temporal world. This means that one relies on ritual propriety to manage affairs, to renew the people, realize goodness, and prepare for the next step of investigating things. This stage of implementation belongs to the “way of *Qian*” which Zhu Xi associates with “controlling oneself and returning to ritual propriety” 克己復禮, and is contrasted with the period of obtaining knowledge called the “way of *Kun*”. Together these two “ways” are identified as “broadening knowledge and following ritual propriety” 博文約禮.<sup>4</sup>

The key point of transformation from broadening knowledge to following ritual propriety is the moment of apprehension of the ultimate principle, at which time the scheme of ritual propriety is activated in moral human relations by practicing controlling oneself and observing ritual norms. Broadening knowledge to following ritual propriety connotes the consistency of knowing and doing in that the latter extends the capability of investigation to enlarging one’s knowledge in the area of action. Following ritual propriety endows the space between expanding knowledge and following ritual propriety humbly with an atmosphere of carefree contentment. The Heavenly Principle can only be viewed clearly after a long period of cultivation, during which practice and investigation mutually influence each other.

Broadening knowledge and following ritual propriety, or knowing and doing, can also be compared to walking forward step by step through the alternation of one’s feet. This process is sustained by an “internal compulsion” *yuba buneng* 欲罷不能.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*’ (2), Li Jingde ed., Vol. 18 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), pp. 403–422.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu Xi: “Teacher Confucius coaxed his students into expanding knowledge and following ritual proprieties. The most important education of the sage lies in investigating and knowing, as well as controlling oneself and observing the ritual proprieties.” *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*’(3), Vol. 36 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 966.

<sup>5</sup> Zhu Xi: “‘self-compulsion’ not only resides alongside following the ritual proprieties, but is also in the area of expanding knowledge. One cannot help going ahead in the cycle of expanding knowledge and

The “compulsion” here is very like that in another statement by Confucius: “I feel the compulsion of benevolent compassion, and then it comes,” which is also always quoted by Zhu Xi. In both contexts, the focus remains on the exterior of things, while working on what exists within them. The Chinese term “compulsion” 欲罷不能 also has another meaning of exhausting one’s capacities.<sup>6</sup> “Capacities” are the abilities determined by the facility of one’s emotions.<sup>7</sup> The tendency of the emotions is definitive in that emotions are delimited by *qi* 气; thus the capacities are determined as such to define the limit to the development of the emotions.

For instance, when benevolent compassion, as part of human nature, functions as the emotion of love, it can spread to everything under heaven, metaphysically speaking; however, speaking in terms of one’s capacities, one’s love can only ever connect to a few people and things. Self-compulsion pushes one to exhaust one’s capacities, continuing to broaden knowledge and follow the ritual proprieties unceasingly. Because of this compulsion, one cannot help but spread love to more people until one’s capacities are exhausted. The investigating process starts from nearby, and gradually spreads outward without urgency till the limits of one’s capacities bring it to an end.<sup>8</sup>

During this process, the phases of broadening knowledge and following ritual propriety mutually promote each other. More precisely, the more one follows the ritual proprieties to control oneself, the more perfectly one broadens one’s knowledge, and vice versa. As one does one’s best to expand knowledge and follow the ritual proprieties within the limit of one’s capacities, it is the utmost excellence to stop at that limit. Zhu Xi’s conservative theory of cultivation canonizes harnessing one’s capability of cultivation to things in a limited range and in an orderly manner, thus laying the foundation for constructing a small community with the family as its center.

## Restraint and knowledge

### Sincerity and respect as the foundations of knowledge

The investigating of things to enlarge one’s knowledge is a sequential process pervaded by sincere respect for the ultimate principle. Cheng Yi asserts that “Self-restraint requires respect, and education rests on knowledge.” Zhu Xi develops this into “Knowledge requires self-restraint, and self-restraint relies on

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Footnote 5 (continued)

following ritual proprieties moving forward one after the other, and that is the meaning of ‘self-compulsion.’” *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*, Vol. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Zhu Xi: “‘Self-compulsion’ is the compulsion that cannot stop. Only in this can one exhaust one’s talents.” *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*, Vol. 36.

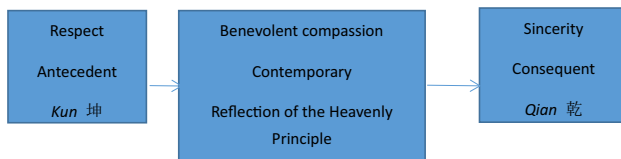
<sup>7</sup> *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi* (1), Li Jingde ed., Vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi* (2), Li Jingde ed., Vol. 18 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 394.

knowledge.” Before things come into view, sincere respect is held to maintain the neutral emptiness and illumination of one’s heart-mind; when a thing comes, certain hidden experiential elements should be brought into focus with the help of respect, therefore forming the accommodated scheme of knowledge under the newly acquired ultimate principle. In this way, respect is necessary throughout the whole process of self-restraint preceding the arrival of things and following the subsequent acquisition of knowledge. As Zhu Xi says in Vol. 18 of *Classified Conversations*: “Right and wrong are only in regard to respect; respect is the power that permeates the transcendent and immanent realms.” Before the arrival of things, the subject only restrains itself with respect, leisurely residing in metaphysical speculation; at the point of the arrival of things, the subject and object both come into being in the physical world, thus the process of investigating and knowing is promoted by respect.

Together with respect, sincerity also undergirds investigating and knowing. Sincerity means maintaining the previously obtained knowledge, while respect is what one holds for the unknown. In the light of the consistency between the known and the unknown as both belonging to the Heavenly Principle, the mutual inclusion of sincerity and respect are ensured. Respect for the unknown also rests on aligning with the known, because the Heavenly Principle contains the condition of creativity entirely within itself.

The condition is determined by the ultimate principle that unites disjunctive individuals brought into focus as one complex unity in the synthetic activity of creativity, as embodied by the synthesis of sincerity and respect (or secretly satisfactory feelings) as the function of benevolent compassion. Having mixed the feelings of sincerity and respect, the subject’s heart is full of loving compassion, free of any vestige of selfish desire, thus organizing the previous knowledge with the new-found knowledge in an inclusive scheme that also remains coherent with the yet-to-be-known of the future. The coherent scheme of knowledge achieved by the harmonizing of sincerity and respect as benevolent compassion in that respect represents the past, the synthesis of the two is embodied in the present, and love, feeling sincerely as its function, following benevolent compassion, spreads towards the future.



As shown in the charts above, the tripartite structure of antecedent, contemporary and consequent that constitutes the temporal process represents the self-organizing perspective modeled on the synthetic feelings of sincerity and respect; the subject moves from the physical sphere of the way of *Kun* to the metaphysical sphere of the way of *Qian* through this syncretic activity of creativity which occurs throughout each moment of apprehension of the ultimate principle.

Each apprehension of the ultimate principle opens a new tripartite structure of the physical world, waiting for the subject to humbly investigate through further study. Therefore, the continuous way of *Kun* is interrupted now and then by discontinuous moments of self-construction. This is most obviously reflected by the fact that respect does not work well together with sincerity in the primary period of investigation; however, after several instances of apprehension of the ultimate knowledge, the experience of benevolent compassion has filled most of the heart, so the synthesis of sincerity and respect becomes easier and easier to achieve. But this does not deny the point that the tripartite structure is discontinuous. Continuous learning from the mundane is only the restraint of oneself through strengthening the capability of cultivation and recognition of the metaphysical realm. In this cyclic process, the subject shuttles through metaphysical speculation and concrete investigation of the physical world, gaining a more mature capability of cultivation and a more enlightened grasp of the structure of nature.

Zhu Xi identifies *Kun* as “calm and serious as in, ‘Be respectful through inner uprightness and righteous through external appropriateness.’”<sup>9</sup> The way of *Kun* as “being respectful through inner uprightness” indicates self-restraint, while nurturing and “being righteous through external appropriateness” signifies knowing. Having obtained these two, one then progresses to sincerity, initiating the way of *Qian*. However, *Qian* in turn activates *Kun* during the next period of investigation, which leads to another coherent scheme that becomes the new starting point of *Qian*. In this light, the process of moving between investigating and knowing can be described as the alternation between the ways of *Qian* and *Kun*. *Qian* and *Kun*, represented by sincerity and respect, set the continuous foundation for knowing discontinuous nature and principle. As Zhu Xi says, “Maintain respect to establish the foundation, and advance knowledge through investigating the ultimate principle; knowledge becomes clearer with the support of the foundation, and the foundation becomes firmer through the refinement of knowledge.”<sup>10</sup> Based on the foundation of restraint, the mutual inclusion of restraint and knowing forms the embodiment of the Heavenly Principle that prevails throughout the world.

### **Establishing the heart in sincerity and respect, and reining in nature and emotions by the heart: objectification of the Heavenly Principle as Bright Virtue**

The Heavenly Principle is revealed by the ways of *Qian* and *Kun* as embodied in sincerity and respect. This is because the mutual inclusion and promotion of the two provides recognition of the structured manifestation of each apprehension of the ultimate principle during the tripartite temporal process. Knowledge means that one has enabled one's heart-mind to recognize and accommodate the scheme

<sup>9</sup> *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi* (3), Li Jingde ed., Vol. 42 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 1077.

<sup>10</sup> Zhu Xi, “Postscript to Writings Left by the Cheng Family”, *Collected Works of Zhu Wengong*, Vol. 75.

of the Heavenly Principle through the synthesis of sincerity and respect in regard to a coherent unity; the apprehension of the ultimate principle means broadening the “categorical scheme” of the Heavenly Principle with *Qian* and *Kun* as the basic categories. In this way, the Heavenly Principle is objectified in the subject’s heart-mind through nurturing the emotions and nature, and knowing the scheme of nature. In other words, the Heavenly Principle is objectified as “the heart-mind controlling nature and emotions” *xin tong xingqing* 心统性情 through restraining and knowing. The objectified Heavenly Principle is also called the “Illumined Virtue” *mingde* 明德, and the process of investigating and knowing it is referred to as “illuminating Illumined Virtue” *ming mingde* 明明德.<sup>11</sup>

Illuminated Virtue includes the virtuous natures all obtained from Heaven: benevolent compassion, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom. While these natures are considered the Four Shouts, shame, courtesy, and conscience also belong to Illumined Virtue.<sup>12</sup> The scheme of nature can be regarded as the metaphysical generalization of the tripartite structure of the ultimate principle, while the Four Sprouts are its extension into the temporal-physical world; thus Illumined Virtue comprises both nature and the Four Sprouts. However, Illumined Virtue cannot manifest on its own. It requires a person to illuminate it through studying the mundane via the alternation of investigating things and achieving knowledge. This capability is like polishing a mirror to regain the illumined heart-mind; thus it is called the capability of illuminating Illumined Virtue.

Illumined Virtue is “illuminated completely” from nature to the original emotions in one’s heart-mind. The illumination may be generalized as “the heart-mind controlling nature and the emotions”.<sup>13</sup> It is the illumination of the Five Natures, Four Sprouts, with investigating things and achieving knowledge functioning to prevent the loss of the Four Sprouts. Although investigating things and achieving knowledge are the way to illuminate Illumined Virtue, they are also included within Illumined Virtue as the function or realization of itself.

At every moment of apprehension of the ultimate principle, Illumined Virtue is the objectification of heart-mind before the subject as nature and emotions is under the control of heart-mind. There are two meanings of “heart-mind controlling nature and the emotions.” First, this indicates that the heart-mind has reined in nature and the emotions in the immediate experience of benevolent compassion; second, this

<sup>11</sup> Zhu Xi: “Brightening is to brighten Bright Virtue which is acquired from Heaven and is always bright. People hold Bright Virtue to possess ten thousand principles and cope with all affairs. Bright Virtue is restricted by *Qi* and becomes muddled sometimes, but its brightness in its metaphysical meaning is never obscured, thus we should brighten it following its function.” *Collected Annotations on the Four Books* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi’ (1)*, Li Jingde ed., Vol. 14 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 206.

<sup>13</sup> Zhu Xi: “The whole heart is clearly bright and empty, possessing ten thousand principles without the slightest amount of selfish desire; it prevails in every way running through quietness and exercising, and functions everywhere. It is nature speaking in terms of the unity before its functioning, while it is also the emotions speaking from the wonderful prevalence after functioning. ‘The heart reining in nature and emotions’ indicates both the unity before and prevalence after functioning in the heart as a whole.” *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi’*, Vol. 5.



also means the whole process of self-restraint that the heart-mind goes through to control both nature and the emotions.<sup>14</sup>

Nature is the manifestation of the Heavenly Principle and is what people should ideally adhere to. It is also the extended scheme in which benevolent compassion and ritual propriety fall into the category of *Yang* 陽 or *Qian* 乾, while righteousness and wisdom belong to *Yin* 陰 or *Kun* 坤. With the satisfactory feelings of benevolent compassion, the scheme of nature is accommodated and refined by the structure of the Heavenly Principle one has apprehended. That is how the heart-mind recognizes Illumined Virtue as the master of nature and emotion. Nevertheless, it is through the function of illuminating Illumined Virtue that the heart-mind ultimately acquires recognition of it. Only through the whole process of investigating things, achieving knowledge, striving to be intently sincere, and conditioning heart-mind in the right way to the limits of one's capacity can one's Illumined Virtue remain illuminated.

The former two relate to the "way of *Kun*" and respect, while the latter two correlate with the "way of *Qian*" and sincerity. Between the ways of *Kun* and *Qian* is the apprehension of the scheme of the ultimate principle by the compassionate heart-mind. The heart-mind that recognizes Illumined Virtue in accordance with respect and sincerity is then established. It is through sincerity about the apprehended knowledge and respect for the unapprehended knowledge of the Heavenly Principle that the heart-mind strives to keep nature and emotion in control till the coherence of *Qian* and *Kun* is achieved and Illumined Virtue is objectified clearly in the heart-mind. In other words, the heart-mind is established through the mutual influence of sincerity and respect until the balance of the two is achieved.<sup>15</sup>

Respect is introverted and sincerity is extroverted. The former tries to keep one's heart alert holding onto Illumined Virtue, while the latter persists in excluding the obscuring selfish desire from the heart-mind. It is through respect for Illumined Virtue as the founding character of the heart that one can follow the scheme of the Heavenly Principle and exclude the obscuring of sincerity. Therefore, embracing respect as the way of *Kun* acts as the ground for sincerity as the way of *Qian*. It is

<sup>14</sup> Zhu Xi: "Nature is in tranquility, and emotions are in movement, while both tranquility and movement are included in the heart. Before movement there is only nature in the heart, while it would be taken up by emotions once it is in activity. That is what is called the 'heart reigning in nature and the emotions'."

What is meant by heart is domination. The heart is always ruler whether it is in tranquility or activity. It is not that the heart holds the emotions in control only when it is activated, or that the heart does nothing in tranquility. As far as domination is concerned, the whole scheme of unity is in it.

The heart holds nature and operates the emotions. So it is called medium before the movement of emotions, and harmony after its dynamic action in appropriate rhythm. Through the whole process of tranquility and movement, it is heart that is performing the labor of reigning in." *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi* (1), Li Jingde ed., Vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994a), pp. 93–94.

<sup>15</sup> Zhu Xi: "The three sections of knowing, respect and controlling oneself can be analogized to a family. Respect is the gatekeeper, controlling oneself is repelling robbers, and knowing is to examine and observe actual entities or things of both inside and outside. As Yichuan said: 'Cultivation should go with respect, and learning should be done by knowing.' He did not mention controlling oneself in that respect excels hundreds of iniquitous desires and no more control is needed... But if cultivation is concerned in contrast to controlling oneself, the two might be viewed separately as well, just like recuperating and taking medicine. If one can recuperate, no more medicine is needed." *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi* (1), Li Jingde ed. Vol. 9 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), p. 151.

with the quality of respect that one progresses in investigating things and achieving knowledge, as one fights intensely against the obstruction of the heart-mind. Once the Heavenly Principle is objectified as Illumined Virtue and the heart-mind restrains nature and the emotions, then respect appears to periodically engage with Illumined Virtue just like maintaining the furniture in the home of one's heart-mind.

In this light, to sincerely practice accordance with the Illumined Virtue in one's heart is to control oneself with the ritual propriety that is constructed during another period of investigating things; thus one awakens respect to enable the investigating of things and achieving knowledge until Illumined Virtue is regained and the scheme of knowledge is achieved once more. In this ever-lasting process, one establishes the heart-mind repeatedly through the alternation of respect and sincerity, as its illumination gradually grows.

### **Ten thousand rivers reflecting the moon: knowing the Heavenly Principle through proper human relations**

According to Zhu Xi, self-restraint and achieving knowledge are mutually reinforcing, as restraint promotes the achievement of knowledge and the achievement of knowledge activates self-restraint. Furthermore, self-restraint is the foundation of knowledge, since the realized knowledge of the Heavenly Principle is only achieved through the tripartite structure embodied by sincerity and respect as the way of *Qian* and *Kun*. Restraint is therefore the prevailing embodiment of the Heavenly Principle. Through exercising one's capability of cultivation, one can reflect the Heavenly Principle in one's own heart as personalized Illumined Virtue; this is just like the same water looking different in bowls of different colors. (*Classified Conversations of Zhuzi*, Vol. 4).

Speaking metaphysically, the Heavenly Principle is fully independent of the different *qi* onto which it is reflected, while it remains unchangeable in terms of the tripartite structure of knowledge acquisition; however, concerning physical actuality, each reflection is colored by the specific quality of *qi* in which the object and subject reside. In terms of the content, each subject's myriad apprehensions of the Heavenly Principle involve a refined scheme of knowledge rooted in the inheritance of one's own tradition with new elements added; this is not to mention the multiplicity that manifests when the Heavenly Principle reflects itself in myriad things. Zhu Xi describes this multiplicity with the notion of "ten thousand rivers reflecting the moon." If it is more or less safe to assume a metaphysical foundation for Zhuxi's ethical thoughts, there is equally no harm in assuming that this foundation manifests as a system of language levels, in which the scheme of the way of *Kun* and the way of *Qian* constitutes a meta-language that interprets the object-language of the relation between the concrete significance of the virtues of *Qian* and *Kun* and their correspondence in actual human relations. The former is the principle, and the latter is the quality of *Qi* that is given and interpreted by the former. On this metaphysical foundation, although feminist ethical practice differs from that of the male with a virtue that seems to be subordinated, the female and the male reflections of the Heavenly Principle in the scheme on the meta-language level remain the same;

further, it is in this that the way of *Kun* is prior to the way of *Qian* in this scheme, the feminist ethical practice playing an even more influential role in reality.

The Heavenly Principle is objectified as Illumined Virtue through the cultivation of both actions and knowledge. In this way, one could exhaust one's capacity in the inquiry into nature and the Heavenly Principle through ethical practice in daily life that starts with filial piety and brotherly caring.<sup>16</sup> Cultivation starts from practicing the ritual proprieties sincerely, therefore awakening the process of investigating and knowing with respect in order to reflect the Heavenly Principle in one's heart. Practicing filial piety and brotherly sacrifice starts the way of *Qian* that is to extend loving compassion to following the ritual proprieties to control oneself, while the way of *Kun* begins at its heels until Bright Virtue is achieved. Knowing benevolent compassion is to brighten Bright Virtue through the way of *Kun*, while practicing benevolent compassion is to control oneself in following benevolent compassion through the way of *Qian*, and both manifest in practicing filial piety and brotherly giving-in. Actually in one's lifetime, practicing is prior to knowing; while concerning the immediate situation of a person who is learning, knowing and doing are in mutual subsumption; as the capability of cultivation becomes fully realized, doing and knowing integrate as a whole and the distinction is no longer needed, although it is still safe to assume that the former is interpreted by the latter in terms of language levels.

According to the order of cultivation, there are three states of practicing filial piety and brotherly giving-in. The first is the practice of ordinary people in imitating the style given by the sages. They have the sincerity to follow, but are deficient in cultivation, thus practicing their nature as usual without recognizing it. The second is the state of a person who is learning. In this state, cultivating and knowing promote each other in mutual subsumption till the third stage is achieved and no difficulty is found in the mutual promotion of cultivating and knowing. In order to reach the last state, one should keep brightening Bright Virtue in the heart, just like reflecting the moon in every river.

To illustrate that "the Heavenly Principle is one while its reflections are many", Zhu Xi uses the metaphor of "ten thousand rivers reflecting the moon in themselves". Myriad things obtain their nature by reflecting the Heavenly Principle, thus achieving *Taiji* in themselves.<sup>17</sup> Not only myriad things reflect the Heavenly Principle in this way, but specific virtue and general virtue also follows this way. Specific

<sup>16</sup> Zhu Xi: "In exercising filial piety and brotherly giving-in that one inquires into nature and the scheme of the Heavenly Principle 天命. Asserting that filial piety and brotherly giving-in is the root of benevolent compassion is not to say that filial piety and brotherly giving-in is benevolent compassion, but that inquiring into and practicing benevolent compassion starts from filial piety and brotherly giving-in." Zhu Xi, Lu Zuqian, *Collected annotations of reflecting with self-applying records (Vol. 2)* (Changsha: Yuelu Bookstore, 2010), pp. 570–571.

<sup>17</sup> Zhu Xi: "With regard to the whole of Heaven, Earth and myriad things, there is *Taiji* in them; with regard to myriad things, there is *Taiji* in each one of them. One and many get their nature and the scheme of the Heavenly Principle separately." *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*, Vol. 94.

virtue is contained in general virtue, that is, the former reflects the latter in itself. It is exemplified in “benevolent compassion contains four virtues”.<sup>18</sup>

Each of optimal appropriateness, ritual proprieties and wisdom have their own reflection of benevolent compassion, as each river has its own reflection of the moon. This reflection of general virtue comes through self-manifestation of every specific virtue. As benevolent compassion embodies itself as the origin of loving compassion, the feeling of shame rises up, and the subject seeks temperate rites for treating the object, thus calling for a judgment on what is justly appropriate that relies on consciousness of right and wrong. In this way, each ritual propriety, optimal appropriateness and wisdom has its own manifestation one after the other, and each manifestation is a specific reflection of benevolent compassion. Feelings of love and shame are emanative and ardent, while civility and conscience are converged and intrepid; as benevolent compassion and ritual proprieties are known as *Yang*, while optimal appropriateness and wisdom as *Yin*. On the meta-language level, the four virtues constitute the ways of *Qian* and *Kun* that are in mutual subsumption, therefore each of them subsumes all the others and represents benevolent compassion as a whole; while on the object-language level, they manifest in one’s actual feelings, which thus function and enrich the significance of themselves.

Although cultivation is to hold oneself in riddance of selfish desire by following ritual propriety, this is not to say that everyone should be similarly cultivated. Different manifestations tinted with specific *Qi* appear as various enrichments of the same Bright Virtue, and the style of cultivation may also vary with different endowments of *Qi*. For instance, the endowment of a female person is prone to loving compassion, therefore more weight is put on cultivation of optimal appropriateness and wisdom that are the converged way of *Kun*. It is worth noting that this style of exercise leads to acquiring the pivot between wisdom and benevolent compassion as also the tripartite structure of the scheme of the Heavenly Principle. From the emphasis Zhu Xi put on the way of *Kun*, it also becomes quite apparent why female virtue and the rites of the patrilineal family are valued so much by Zhu Xi.

<sup>18</sup> Zhu Xi: “It is in rituals, optimal appropriateness and wisdom that benevolent compassion can be reflected and seen. Benevolent compassion is nature of itself[?]; ritual proprieties are its temperate manifestation; optimal appropriateness is regulating judgment of it; wisdom is distinction of it[?]. The four virtues are like the four seasons in a year. Although the four seasons are different from each other, they all originated from the spring... Benevolent compassion is the head of the other origins, and wisdom can carry it through to the end; similarly, Yuan 元 is prior to other virtues; however, Yuan does not grow from itself but from Zhen 贞. It can be speculated that generating and transforming of Heaven and Earth is from converged to emanative[?]. The temporal structure between benevolent compassion and wisdom is the pivot of reflecting the relation of the one and the many, or the specific and the general. The pivot circulates unceasingly as the Heavenly Principle prevails in myriad things without interruption.” *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*, Vol. 6.

## Conclusion: expanding knowledge and following ritual proprieties with a humble stance

It is in respect and sincerity that benevolent compassion has all the manifestations originating in an orderly way. Following the way of *Qian* sincerely, civility is emanative at the originating point, but becomes converged through the way of *Kun* in which respect is paid to investigating and knowing.<sup>19</sup> As sincerely as the ritual proprieties are followed originally, it is in respect that feelings of civility become converged into a relatively humble stance and embodied by certain rites for treating objects. Influenced by respect, benevolent compassion manifests in ritual proprieties like this, as also the process of “expanding knowledge and following ritual proprieties with a humble stance”.

In cultivation of respect and sincerity, one establishes one's Bright Virtue or personality. Following ritual proprieties with a humble stance is to protect the four origins carefully with cultivation of respect and sincerity. This is also controlling oneself and following ritual proprieties while getting rid of selfish desire to ensure the four origins function in order. However, the origins of benevolent compassion and optimal appropriateness are soft, so cultivation with respect should let the soft origins set on hard ritual proprieties and wisdom. Then comes the collision between the hard and the soft, as also the conflict between attuning ethical rites and harming the appropriateness of emotions. A case in point is the explanation of the commentary on the meaning of Family People 家人.<sup>20</sup> Originating from loving compassion to the appropriate distinction between husband and wife, the transforming emotions fall in the appropriateness of emotions; on the other hand, the demand for attuning ethical rites always violates the natural development of the emotions, just as soft water meets hard stones. In Zhu Xi's view, it is precisely the nature of water to splash as it meets stones; similarly, it is precisely in attuning the ethical rites that the emotions become appropriate. Confronted with sturdy rites, the emotions can only appropriate themselves respectfully; to say “following ritual proprieties with a humble stance” is also to indicate the decline of the emotions before the established ritual proprieties. In this light, expanding knowledge is no more than delicately cultivating the emotions to make them submit to the rituals, as also submission to the Heavenly Principle and nature. Although the process originating in benevolent compassion and ending in ritual proprieties is the way of *Yang*, it is in being acquired and maintained by the way of *Kun* that cultivation of respect lies through investigating and knowing till optimal appropriateness is achieved.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Zhu Xi illustrates “expanding knowledge and following ritual proprieties with a humble stance” in Annotations of Book of Change like this: “The more delicate is the capability for cultivation, the more infinite is the ultimate principle. That is ‘expanding knowledge and following ritual proprieties with a humble stance’, or ‘lofty as virtue is, actual achievements should be extensive.’” *Classified Conversations of Zhu-zi*, Vol. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Someone asks: “If I intend to attune the rites in life, then the appropriateness of feelings would hurt; if I want to nourish emotions, then a departure from ethical rites happens. What should I do?” Zhu Xi answers: “It is in attuning ethical rites that appropriateness of emotions will be acquired, while rites are also conserved in nourishing emotions.” Zhu Xi Lu Zuqian, *Collected annotations on reflecting with self-applied records (Vol. 2)* (Changsha: Yuelu Bookstore, 2010), p. 566.

Actually, “following ritual proprieties with a humble stance” is the humble virtue of *Kun*. Zhu Xi says: “‘following ritual proprieties with a humble stance’ means weakness and humbleness. If it is humble like earth, it becomes extensive, while loftiness makes it narrow.” The capability of humbleness is the virtue of earth and *Kun* that is obedient to the lofty, while it is in its humbleness that it may expand unlimited knowledge to establish a Bright Virtue of its own. The virtue of *Kun* is also that of the female, thus Zhu Xi’s cultivation may be regarded as a system of ethics discourse for the female.

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