

# Zhan Ruoshui at his Dake Academy on Mount Xiqiao, 1517-1521: Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Philosophy\*

GEORGE L. ISRAEL

Middle Georgia State University, USA (larry.israel@mga.edu)

*Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水 (1466–1560) is a prominent scholar-official and Confucian philosopher of Ming China. Like his contemporary Wang Yangming, he served in several official capacities during the reigns of three mid-Ming emperors, earned a reputation as an important Confucian teacher, gained a substantial following of students, and was critical to the onset of the jiangxue 講學 movement of the mid-Ming and the academy building associated with it. He also elaborated a sophisticated Confucian philosophy, leaving behind a corpus of work and a school of thought. In 1517, when he was fifty-one, Zhan Ruoshui left office and retired to Mount Xiqiao 西樵山 in Guangdong, where he constructed both a hermitage for his family and an academy for his students. He remained there for four years until he was recommended for reappointment to office in 1521. These years were critical not only for his having established his first academy and writing the regulations for operating it but also because he produced a substantial volume of philosophical writings that were foundational to his becoming recognized as a Confucian master and establishing his school of thought. This study provides an overview of the biographical and historical setting, Zhan's pedagogy (xue 學), and his philosophy at a time when this lesser-known Ming Confucian passed through a crucial stage in the development of his Way (dao 道).*

**Key words:** Confucianism; Ming Dynasty; Neo-Confucianism; Wang Yangming; Zhan Ganquan; Zhan Ruoshui

## 1 Introduction

In the tenth lunar month of the twelfth year of the reign of the Zhengde emperor (October or November 1517), Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水 (1466–1560), a prominent scholar-official of Ming China, respectfully submitted a memorial to the imperial court “to offer his heartfelt explanation regarding the matter of requesting leave to recuperate from illness” (2005a: 36/7).<sup>1</sup> Then fifty-one, Zhan recounted things about his life for the emperor, explaining that because he had lost his father at a young age, his mother was left widowed and without support. Thus, although he passed the provincial examination at twenty-six, he chose to remain at home for thirteen years to care for her. Eventually, Zhan continued, moved by her insistence that he persevere in achieving great things, he went to the capital to participate in the highest-level (metropolitan) examination, and succeeded. He

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then “shouldered the burden of the farsighted [Hongzhi] emperor and was appointed as a bachelor [in the Hanlin Academy],” where he carried out his duties energetically (2005a: 36/8). Following this, he enjoyed the beneficence of this emperor when he was promoted to the position of junior compiler at the academy, with duties primarily of a literary nature.

The events recounted above had transpired by 1507, the year Zhan Ruoshui turned forty-one. In his memorial, he further described the difficult times he had encountered in recent years. His mother’s health had deteriorated, so he brought her from Guangdong all the way to Beijing, desiring only that she be happy but leaving him with little time for anything else. But “heaven punished your servitor for his transgressions,” he wrote, “and my mother passed away at the capital” (2005a: 36/8). So devastated was he, Zhan claimed, that he would lose consciousness. He also confessed what he had done: “[I] failed to request leave early enough, to bring serenity to my mother; in fact, [I] am a criminal in the matter of performing filial responsibilities conscientiously” (2005a: 36/8). Deeply grieved, going into mourning, he returned the coffin to his home in Guangdong and interred her. Now, this year, on the thirtieth day of the fourth month (May 19, 1517), his three-year mourning rite was complete (2005a: 36/8-9).

Zhan Ruoshui concluded by admitting to the emperor that the normal pattern would be for him to return to office. That was the correct thing to do. But he also spoke of his health, and how the loss and mourning had led not only to a worsening physical condition but also to a deteriorating state of mind, something that particularly worried him: “As the depression deepened for some time, my physical capacity was weakened and my spirits were diminished. Like a damaged home or leaking boat, where wind and water easily come in, the seven emotions overwhelmed, a hundred ailments attacked—blurred vision, dizziness, coughing up phlegm, and cold sweats—so many symptoms appearing at the same time” (2005a: 36/8). Zhan expressed his belief that, if allowed to “politely divorce himself from worldly matters” for a period of time, with sufficient recuperation he would recover both physically and mentally, and would render more effective service thereafter (2005a: 36/9).

Permission was granted. Apparently, Zhan expected this, because he had already departed for Mount Xiqiao (*Xiqiao shan* 西樵山) with his family more than a month earlier, around September 10, 1517—at least that was what he stated in a letter to Yang Ji 楊驥 (d. 1520) (2005a: 8/9). At that time, Yang had been studying under the renowned Confucian philosopher and statesman Wang Yangming (1472–1529), who was stationed just north of Guangdong in southern Jiangxi to quell that region’s armed disturbances. Zhan was also one of Yang Ji’s teachers, which is why, in his letter, Zhan clarified where he stood on various philosophical matters, urging Yang “to further think it over, and then ask Yangming about it” (2005a: 8/9).

In his *Records of Ming Scholars* (*Ming ru xue an* 明儒學案), the seventeenth-century Confucian scholar and Ming loyalist Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) states that although Wang Yangming and Zhan Ruoshui each had distinct philosophical ideas and Zhan’s followers were less numerous than Wang’s, their students would journey back and forth to study under both, so that some who began their studies under Zhan would finish their studies under the guidance of Wang, and vice versa (Huang 2008: 37/835).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Wang Yangming and Zhan Ruoshui are arguably the two most influential Confucian masters of the mid-Ming Dynasty. They also shared important similarities. Born during the reign of the Chenghua emperor (Zhu Jianshen, r. 1464–1487), both obtained the highest examination degree during the reign of the Hongzhi emperor (Zhu Youtang, r. 1488–1505). They also served in several capacities during his reign and the reigns of the Zhengde emperor (Zhu Houzhao, r. 1506–1521) and the Jiajing emperor (Zhu Houcong, r. 1522–1567). They remained close friends throughout their lives and gained reputations as accomplished Confucian masters,

thereby accumulating a substantial following of students. They were also the driving force behind the onset of the *jiangxue* 講學 (literally, discussing learning) movement of the mid-Ming and the academy building associated with it (Meskill 1982).<sup>3</sup> They also both elaborated a sophisticated Confucian philosophy categorized as belonging to the learning of mind (*xinxue* 心學), leaving behind a corpus of work and a school of thought.

Yet, owing to complex historical factors, the fate of Zhan Ruoshui's school was, over time, quite different from that of Wang Yangming's.<sup>4</sup> The dominance of the Wang Yangming school in sixteenth-century Ming China is well known, as is Wang Yangming's importance to Tokugawa and Meiji Japan's intellectual history (Ogyū 2000: 83-120).<sup>5</sup> The first half of the twentieth century saw a revival of interest in him in China, and the second half a burgeoning scholarship in the west.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the secondary Japanese-, Chinese-, and English-language literature on Wang Yangming and his most prominent followers is voluminous.

The same cannot be said for Zhan Ruoshui. On the one hand, he was recognized in his time as the most prominent follower of Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (literary name Baisha 白沙, 1428–1500), attracted a following of students that numbered in the thousands over the course of his life, and was responsible for establishing at least thirty-six academies (Huang 2015: 179-81).<sup>7</sup> His biography and selections from his writings are also included in some Qing Dynasty survey compilations.<sup>8</sup> On the other, his school quickly diminished in size after his death. First-generation followers closely adhered to their master's teachings, seeing themselves as heirs to a Jiangmen school of learning initiated by Chen Xianzhang and then inherited and developed by Zhan Ruoshui. But from the second generation on to the end of the Ming Dynasty, scholars influenced by Zhan's thought were blending his philosophy with ideas belonging to other Confucian masters or schools of thought (Ji 2017: 6-7). During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), there were no prominent literati advocates or an active school of his thought. As for twentieth-century scholarship, with a few notable exceptions, the literature is largely silent until the 1980s, when Shiga Ichirō (in Japan), Annping Chin (in the United States), and several scholars in China and Taiwan produced important work.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the Chinese literature has grown substantially while the English-language literature has remained small.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, one might ask if the reason for Zhan's philosophy receiving less attention than Wang Yangming's has to do with the relative inherent value of his philosophical achievement. In fact, the Chinese-language scholarship has carried on just such a debate, albeit without clear resolution.<sup>11</sup> Some point to Wang Yangming's differing career trajectory and the politics of mid-Ming China to explain the difference; others are convinced that Wang's philosophy is more profound and compelling. For the purposes of this paper, it may suffice to highlight what two scholars have to say about the importance of Zhan. The twentieth-century Confucian philosopher Tang Junyi stated, "as for someone who lived at the same time as Yangming, who can be similarly appraised as a great Confucian, and for whom Yangming had a shared high regard—there is Zhan Ganquan" (2006: 229).<sup>12</sup> Somewhat less dramatically, Chung Tsai-chun observes that "we can look upon his scholarly research and discussion as a mirror reflecting intellectual trends in his times" (2009: 346).<sup>13</sup>

After traveling to Mount Xiqiao in 1517, Zhan Ruoshui constructed both a hermitage for his family and an academy for his students. He remained there for four years until he was recommended for reappointment to the Hanlin Academy in 1521, in the wake of the death of the Zhengde emperor. These years were critical not only for his having established his first academy and writing the regulations for operating it, but also because he produced a substantial volume of philosophical writings that were foundational to his becoming recognized as a Confucian master and establishing his school of thought.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as important as the Xiqiao years were for the development of Zhan's

Way (*dao* 道), a concise study of the biographical and historical setting, Zhan's pedagogy (*xue* 學), and facets of his philosophy during this time has yet to be written. At the very least, given the amount of attention afforded to Wang Yangming, it is a useful exercise to further our understanding of another prominent mid-Ming Confucian thinker by taking a snapshot of a critical period in his intellectual development. This article explains why Zhan Ruoshui retired to Mt. Xiqiao, outlines the content of philosophical writings composed during this time, and elucidates the Way that he developed for the edification of his students.

## 2 Historical Background to the Xiqiao Years

Zhan Ruoshui's entrance into the political world of Ming China's scholar-official elites happened slightly later than the norm, ten years before he took leave to mourn the loss of his mother and retreat to the mountains.<sup>15</sup> He was born to a well-off rural family residing far from the capital in a village belonging to Guangdong's Zengcheng County 增城縣, which is located just northeast of Guangzhou.<sup>16</sup> Owing to the turmoil his family encountered while he was young and his father's death when he was nine, Zhan's formal schooling did not begin until he was thirteen, when he attended an elementary school. At fifteen he enrolled in a county school and at twenty-one in a prefectural government school (Li 2009a: 8-10).<sup>17</sup> At twenty-six, he succeeded at the provincial level examination, becoming a *juren* 舉人 (provincial graduate), but he failed the national (metropolitan) examination given in Beijing the following year, 1493. After returning home, in early 1494 Zhan proceeded to Jiangmen 江門—a city located along the lower reaches of West River in the Pearl River Delta—to seek instruction from Chen Xianzhang. By then, Chen was one of the most prominent Confucian masters in Guangdong. Huang Zongxi would later recognize him for having changed the course of Ming philosophy: “with [Chen] Baisha, Ming learning first delved into the refined and subtle” (2008: 5/79). Chen pointedly told Zhan that in seeking his Way, “unless you put everything aside, it will be very tough ever to attain a unified state” (Chen 2006: 2/192).<sup>18</sup> So Zhan put everything aside: he burned the document verifying his eligibility to travel at government expense to Beijing for the national examinations, renounced such pursuits for a decade, and instead devoted himself to caring for his mother and attending to his intellectual growth (Li 2009a: 12).

Much of the first five years was spent under the influence of Chen's pedagogy, until Chen passed away in 1500. Zhan journeyed back and forth between his home and Jiangmen, learning of Chen's ideas regarding quiet-sitting, the natural or what is so of itself (*ziran* 自然), and self-realization (*zide* 自得). In 1497, he finally attained some insight into what his master meant when he experienced a kind of enlightenment. As he later recounted to students, “Today, the two characters *tian li* 天理 (commonly translated as ‘principle of Heaven’ but for Zhan also the fullness of being and goodness) [of which I speak] actually originally derived from what I realized on my own. They can be pondered for twenty to thirty years without reaching anything definitive. First, I was accompanying Master Baisha, [then I] returned to Ganquan for half a year. There was an experience of insight, and a letter was sent asking the master about this” (2005a: 69/21).

In his letter, Zhan recounted that when he first studied under Chen, personally receiving his venerable instruction, Zhan heard him speak of the meaning of “neither forgetting nor assisting (*wu wang wu zhu* 勿忘勿助).” Chen had explicated the Warring States Period Confucian philosopher Mengzi's (Mencius, c. 372-289 BCE) elusive phrase in terms of the essential point that nothing is present, nor is there nothing that is not present. Zhan explained that after returning home and thinking it over, even after some time, he was unable to figure out what it meant. Then, one day,

Zhan continued, “[I] suddenly seemed to experience insight.” As a result, he could now understand what the Song Dynasty Confucian philosopher Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) meant when he stated that these two characters—*tian li*—were also a matter of what he had personally witnessed for himself, and what Li Yanping 李延平 (Li Tong 李侗, 1093–1163) had in mind when stating, “sit quietly and clear the mind, personally witness *tian li*” (2005a: 8/1). Zhan explained to Chen that *tian li* was at the heart of everything the sages and worthies—from Yao and Shun to Confucius and Mencius—had taught: “If you are able personally to realize *tian li* wherever you are (*sui chu tiren tianli* 隨處體認天理), and truly see it, then, in your ordinary life—‘what is in front of [you] and attached to the yoke,’<sup>19</sup> there is nothing that is not this essential [realization]. For each, it must be cultivated so that one knows it for oneself” (2005a: 8/1).

Zhan’s master, Chen Xianzhang, was so impressed by his insight that he recognized him as his foremost student. First, in reply, he confirmed that Zhan’s letter was “very good”: “in your daily routine, wherever you are personally realize the principle of Heaven—holding this one whip, why worry that you won’t arrive at the most excellent place of the ancients?” (Chen 2006: 2/193). Then, in 1499, Chen bestowed his mantle upon Zhan by giving him the lecture hall where he taught his students—the Jiangmen Fishing Platform (Jiangmen *diaotai* 江門釣台). His blessing meant that Zhan would be responsible for transmitting Chen’s learning of the mind to another generation of students, and it also gave him the authority to shape this learning. Zhan’s concept of “personally realizing *tian li* wherever you are” thus became his principal teaching for the rest of his life.

After Chen Xianzhang was buried at the foothills of Guifeng Mountain in Jiangmen, Zhan donned the appropriate mourning dress, living nearby for three years, as if carrying out rites proper to a deceased father (Li 2009a: 19).<sup>20</sup> Then, in 1504, at his mother’s urging, he entered the National University in Nanjing to prepare for the examination he had failed in 1493. This time, in 1505, he passed the examination, and his success catapulted him into the world of the elite governing scholar-official class (Li 2009a: 21–2). His first appointment was to the Hanlin Academy, where he would remain until 1515, albeit with promotions and additional, concurrent assignments, some of which required travel. On February 23, 1512, for instance, he was dispatched to Annam to confer a title of investiture on the king. That took him away from the capital for about two years. Wishing to return home for a time, his mother accompanied him most of the way, but she also returned to Beijing with him in 1514. Shortly after Zhan resumed his duties at the academy, on February 17, 1515, she fell ill, passing away three days later. That brings us back to the course of events he recounted to the emperor. Zhan’s mother was interred at Hetang, Guangdong, where Zhan took up residence in a cottage built near the tomb, remaining there through the three-year mourning period, which concluded in May 1517.

On September 5, 1517, just before heading to Mount Xiqiao, Zhan paid a visit to Master Baisha’s tomb and composed a eulogy, stating in part, “Alas, my parents gave birth to me, my teacher brought me to maturity, and my ruler provides for me. They are the three foundations not one of which can be left out. [That is] even truer of Sir [Chen Baisha] who, thinking that people’s minds are endangered by the fragmented state of conventional learning, supported me when I was falling, and enlightened me when I was wallowing in confusion. His merit is equal to [matters of] life and death and flesh and blood: how could I just conform to conventions” (2005a: 57/5). The following day, he took his family into the mountains to the Mist and Clouds Hollow (Yanxia Dong 煙霞洞) located just below Great Exam Peak (Dake Feng 大科峰), and in the tenth lunar month, commenced construction of his hermitage and academy. Construction advanced in two stages. In 1517, the hermitage was constructed first. The principal buildings were the Perched Among the Rosy Clouds Building (Qi Xia Lou 栖霞樓), Eating [*Ling*]zhi Hall (Ru Zhi Tang 茹芝堂), Precise

Meaning Hall (Zheng Yi Tang 正誼堂), Revering the Classics Building (Chong Jing Lou 崇經樓), and Happiness Pavilion (Le Ge 樂閣). At some point during the following year, Zhan also referred to this complex as his Dake Academy, even if a separate set of buildings specifically established for that purpose was not constructed until the following year. In 1519, just outside and below the hermitage's stone gate entrance, a separate complex was added that became the academy. The principal structures were the Congealing the Way Hall (Ning Dao Tang 凝道堂), Spiritual Growth Studio (Jin Xiu Zhai 進修齋), Revering Righteousness Studio (Jing Yi Zhai 敬義齋), and Respecting Guests Hostel (Yin Bin Guan 寅賓館).<sup>21</sup>

Zhan remained at Mount Xiqiao until he received an official communication on October 5, 1521, recalling him to his former office as a compiler at the Hanlin Academy. After the Zhengde emperor had fallen ill and then passed away on April 19, 1521, Chief Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe engineered a housecleaning at court and managed to have a cousin to the deceased ruler, the future Jiajing emperor, designated as heir to the throne. During that tense transitional period, two of Zhan's colleagues—Censor Zhu Jie 朱節 (*js.* 1514) and Censor-in-Chief Wu Tingju 吳廷舉 (*js.* 1487)—submitted a memorial calling for his reappointment. Zhan's return adds weight to Ren Jianmin's theory that, aside from the more pressing issues of physical and mental health, he also sought to escape the frustrating political environment created by a derelict emperor and the unscrupulous military men and eunuchs to whom he delegated power (2012: 73). A record commemorating the history of the founding of the Academy penned by Zhan Ruoshui's colleague, the scholar-official Lu Nan 呂柟 (*js.* 1508), captures what happened:

The Dake Academy is the place where Sir Zhan Ganquan and his students discussed the *dao* 道 (Way) [...]. During [the reign of the] Zhengde [emperor], the villains in power came one after another and ran rampant, while the loyal and honest all fled to the mountain valleys and would not come out [to serve]. In 1517, [after Zhan] had served at the Hanlin Academy and taken leave on account of his mother's death, the mourning period ended. He then brought his family over three hundred *li* from Zengcheng and took refuge (*yin*) in Mount Xiqiao (Lu 2015: 522-24).<sup>22</sup>

In terms of the timeline, apparently another pressing factor was instability in Zengcheng. Zhan told one of his students that banditry had compelled him to leave home with his family. While staying in Guangzhou, he carried out divinations at Mount Xiqiao to establish the proper location for building a place to make progress in self-cultivation (Ren 2012: 73).

Having arrived in the fall of 1517, Zhan Ruoshui then spent over four years teaching the many students who came seeking his instruction, corresponding with other scholars and scholar-officials, and composing several important philosophical works. Even before leaving, he rated the significance of this time for his intellectual development highly, dispatching a letter to Zhu Jie to explain that, having spent three years studying with students and friends, "I really began to sense that this was different from what I had known in the past" (2005a: 9/1). He also informed his students that "it was only after I turned fifty *sui* that my learning gradually became more effective; that is because formerly I had never made any serious effort to extend knowledge" (2005a: 3/12).<sup>23</sup> True, over the prior two decades, Zhan had composed an admirable body of poems, letters, prefaces, eulogies and funerary epitaphs, (commemorative) records, discussions, and expositions, but taken as a whole they do not reach the level of sustained philosophical reflection or systematic commentary and pedagogy as the body of work Zhan produced while at Xiqiao. For this reason, in his study of the development of Zhan's philosophical thought, Yu Teng-ta states that this period

was “an important stage in the molding of his thought” (2012: 60). In what follows, a brief overview of the origins and content of the principal scholarship he produced will be sketched out.

### 3 Zhan Ruoshui's Scholarship at Mount Xiqiao, 1517-1521

In 1518, Zhan dispatched a letter to Chen Weijun 陳惟浚 (1494-1562) concisely stating philosophical insights that came to him in the middle of the night at Yanxia Hollow. He also noted that while living there he had compiled two books that reflected “the essence of what I poured my heart into in recent years” (2005a: 9/4). These were *Speculating on the Great Learning* (*Daxue ce* 大學測) and *Speculating on the Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong ce* 中庸測). Many years later, in 1537, Zhan explained to his students what he meant by the title: “Speculating means not daring to think one knows it all”! (2005a: 24/6).

Unfortunately, only the prefaces for these commentaries remain extant, although they do provide some insight into Zhan's purpose in writing them. The “Preface to *Speculating on the Great Learning*” states that “when Master Ganquan was reading books at Mount Xiqiao the ancient version of the *Great Learning* was extracted from the *Thirteen Classics*” (2005a: 16/18). Elsewhere, Zhan informed his students that the version of the *Great Learning* found in Dai Sheng's *Record of Rites* (*Da Dai li ji* 大戴禮記) was complete as it was (Zhan 2014: 4/138).<sup>24</sup> Like his contemporaries Wang Yangming and the scholar-official Fang Xianfu 方獻夫 (1485-1544), Zhan rejected the edited and rearranged version produced by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) during the Song Dynasty (Liu 2015: 159-81).<sup>25</sup> Of course, that was the version that Zhu Xi included in his *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books in Chapters and Verses* (*Si shu zhang ju ji zhu* 四書章句集註), together with the *Analects*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Mencius*. As is well known, during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, this compilation was authorized by the government as the basis for examination, giving it the status of political orthodoxy. By calling for a return to the original version in chapter forty-two of the *Record*, “cautiously departing from the *zhang ji* exegesis and speculating on it,” Zhan was challenging conventional educational and political norms (Zhan 2005a: 16/19).

The preface praises the *Great Learning* and then, by presenting a dialogue with an interlocutor, highlights central philosophical content. Zhan explains that because it instructs people in how to mature in virtue and, by extension, to love others, the text is crystal clear regarding the essential foundations of moral self-cultivation. Because it provides concise guidance as to how to reach and rest in the highest good, the text is complete in its simplicity. The foundation and practice are both present as two facets of a unified philosophy. The interlocutor asks, “What is the core of it?” Zhan explains that the core is the highest good, and the highest good is what is most pure, unadulterated, and enlightened in the moral principles governing matters of self, mind, family, country, and all-under-Heaven (2005a: 16/19). These principles are Heaven's (*tian li*), and *tian li* is none other than the mind's centered and morally correct original essence. Ultimately then, the *Great Learning* guides the individual towards the mind's ideal natural state. By attaining this, a person becomes able to actualize his or her virtue and love others. The interlocutor also asks, “How does one abide in [the highest good]?” Here, as explained below, Zhan brings the focus to “investigating things” (*ge wu* 格物): “investigating things is abiding in the highest good” (2005a: 16/19). He highlights a concept and practice critical to his philosophy by the Xiqiao years.

Zhan Ruoshui's “Preface to *Speculating on the Doctrine of the Mean*” also highlights key philosophical ideas. He conveys a profound concern that the essentials of what Confucius's grandson Zisi 子思 (Kong Ji 孔伋, c. 483–402 BCE) had intended to convey in this work could no

longer be understood. That was so long ago that the message was now buried, leaving the Way obscured in darkness, and Zhan was writing down his speculations in order to resurrect it. Zisi too, finding that the subtle meaning of Confucius's teachings had been lost, worried that incorrect ways of thinking would twist their righteous aim, likewise leaving the learning of the Way incomprehensible. When that happens, a divided life emerges—what people do is untethered from the source, the foundation. That foundation, Zhan explains, is human nature, which is rooted in Heaven. The *Doctrine of the Mean* explains that when the source is human nature, the Way can be completely possessed; when the source is the essence, holistic praxis follows; and when the source is the mean (or center), harmony is born from it. That is why a person of virtue must be conscientious when alone and center his life. In sum, Zhan wrote *Speculating on the Doctrine of the Mean* to bring its message of a metaphysically grounded, holistic practice into the light (Zhan 2005a: 16/19-20).

Another preface to a work dating to the Xiqiao years was “written by Ganquan Zhan Ruoshui at the Dake Academy on the fifteenth day of the third [lunar] month of spring in the *ji mao* year of the [reign] of Zhengde” (Zhan 2001: 1).<sup>26</sup> On April 13, 1519, Zhan finished compiling his *Record for Being Faithful to Dao* (*Zun Dao lu* 遵道錄, Dao referring to Cheng Hao's literary name, Mingdao). Extending over eight *juan*, the *Record* consists of numerous selections from the writings of the Song Confucian philosopher, interspersed with Zhan's brief comments (Zhan 2001: 1-58). Because he believed that the old and yet still fiercely raging debate over the relative merits of the philosophies of Lu Jiuyuan (1139-1193) and Zhu Xi could be remedied through a proper grasp of Cheng Hao's thought, this work was very important to Zhan. In fact, in his time, Confucian masters and their student followers could find themselves labeled by their position on this debate, especially their opinion of the relative merit of Lu's thought. Advocating for Lu's philosophy in any way might be perceived as denigrating Zhu Xi and therefore the prescribed curriculum for preparing for examination and entering officialdom. A pro-Lu position was nonconformist and required a defense. (Today, in general, Lu Jiuyuan is recognized for having initiated a broad Neo-Confucian school of thought known as the Learning of Mind, whereas Zhu Xi, building on the writings of Cheng Hao and his brother Cheng Yi 程頤 [1033-1107], solidified a school of thought known as the Learning of Principle. During the Ming, those who found Lu's thought attractive usually did so because they believed Zhu Xi was overly scholastic in his emphasis on learned study, dualistic in his thought, and gradual in his method of self-cultivation leading to insight.)

However, Zhan's principal concern was not to defend the unconventional literati but rather to put them on notice—regarding what clearly appeared to him as a misguided intellectual fad. He told Cui Xian 崔銑 (1478-1541) that while studying at Mount Xiqiao, he learned that many scholars considered themselves followers of Lu's school of thought. Although Zhan did not necessarily consider that a bad thing—many things Lu had stated demonstrated “penetrating insight into the essence of the Way”—nevertheless, because his thought reached so high, he could not deny that it might lead people towards Chan (Zen) Buddhism (Zhan 2005a: 10/23). And that was something Zhan opposed, for he had always maintained a clear distinction between Confucianism and Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> He similarly told Chen Weijun that he feared Lu's thought placed an excessive emphasis on the inner realms of the spiritual life (to the neglect of a person's social and political life and responsibilities). Thus, explaining that this was inferior to Cheng Hao's union of within and without (*nei wai he yi* 內外合一), Zhan stated that he “recently compiled the *Record for Being Faithful to* [Cheng Ming] *Dao* because I wanted people to seek in the Middle Way” (2005a: 9/4). And Cheng's thought directed people towards the center—that is, towards uniting the inner spiritual life with the exterior life, and the knowing subject with the object of knowledge. Hence, the preface sums up what the selections teach—how to attain and live an undivided, holistic life.<sup>28</sup>



Zhan edited and annotated three other classical texts as well as a volume of Chen Xianzhang's poetry. One of those texts was the *Lesser Learning* (*Xiao xue* 小學), the status of which Zhan explained to his students at the academy. Whereas the *Greater Learning* is designed for adults, the *Lesser Learning* provides instruction for children and youth (Zhan 2014: 4/138-39). Unfortunately, Zhan maintained, the original, complete version is no longer available but rather scattered across the *Book of Rites*. Furthermore, the version edited by Zhu Xi is insufficient because he had randomly included material from other, later works that did not belong to the original and that was more properly suited to adults. Zhan's goal then was to compile a *Lesser Learning* from the *Record of Rites* and hence to restore it as an independent text. That is why one of his regulations for the academy states, "Each student has brought relatives, lineage members, and children along with them while they pursue learning. You can have them read the *Ancient Lesser Learning*, and perform *Lesser Learning* tasks, so that they will understand the etiquette proper to sprinkling and sweeping, speaking, greeting and taking leave; norms for serving parents, respecting elders, revering teachers, and relatives and friends; as well as the six classics" (2005a: 5/6).

While at Xiqiao, Zhan Ruoshui sought to further cement his legacy as the principal interpreter and transmitter of Chen Xianzhang's Jiangmen School. In the summer of 1517, he completed his *Explanation of the Pedagogy in Master Baisha's Ancient Style Poetry* (*Baishazhi gu shi jiao jie* 白沙子古詩教解), a commentary in two *juan* on 167 of Chen's ancient style poems. In the original preface dating to that time, Zhan explains that Chen had foregone composing any books for teaching purposes. Rather, his teaching is contained in his poetry. Zhan wrote persuasively about the cosmic significance of this style of pedagogy:

What is most refined about ethics must be expressed in poetry. When presented to all under Heaven later generations can understand this and that is how it is transmitted. This is a way to educate. Hence, wind, rain, thunder, and a thunderclap are the cosmos's ultimate teaching. Poetry, books, and the six arts are the sages' ultimate teaching. When the cosmos's ultimate teaching operates the ten thousand things are born. When the sages' highest teaching is implemented the ten thousand transformations are completed (Zhan 2014a: 13).<sup>29</sup>

Thus, Zhan Ruoshui highly appraised the principal means by which his master expressed his ideas. As Li Yeming has pointed out, because Zhan supplied exegesis for each poem, this work is critical for understanding how Zhan interpreted and transmitted Chen Xianzhang's philosophy (2009b: 46). It was also just one part of his efforts to do so. Between the time that he was recalled to Beijing and departed for it, Zhan Ruoshui also helped relocate Chen's grave, providing an inscription for a memorial tablet (Zhan 2005a: 59/3). More generally, every time he established an academy, Zhan dedicated a memorial hall to Chen, placing images of Chen in them.

While living in the Yanxia Hollow, Zhan Ruoshui devoted his time to pedagogy by constructing the academy, writing books, corresponding with friends and colleagues, and engaging those who were with him in philosophical dialogue. Some of the principal sources for the study of Ming philosophy are compilations of records from such activities, usually assembled by first- or second-generation students belonging to that master's school of thought. The most venerable exemplar for this literary genre, of course, is the *Analects*, but this literary style also became characteristic of Song Dynasty *School of Principle* philosophers (Chen 2015: 129-42).<sup>30</sup> Fortunately, Zhan Ruoshui's students compiled and edited three such records: the *Qiao Talk* (*Qiao yu* 樵語), *New Discourses* (*Xin lun* 新論), and *Afterthoughts on Acquiring New Knowledge* (*Zhi xin hou yu* 知新后語).<sup>31</sup>

In 1524, one of Zhan's followers, Chen Zhu 沈珠, explained the importance of *Qiao Talk* in the preface he provided for it. He noted that his master had been placed in charge of educational matters at the National University in Nanjing (he was appointed chancellor that year) and emphasized how effective he was: "leading with virtue and restraining with ritual etiquette, in a month the principle objectives were on display, and in three his main responsibilities were fulfilled" (Zhan 2005a: 1/1). He further noted that, to teach the "scholars arriving from all directions to study [under him]," Zhan opened an academy and constructed a hostel as a place for them to stay. As time permitted, he would show them, in this order, the "Dake [Academy] Regulations," *Acquiring New Knowledge, Lucid Expositions* (*Ming lun* 明論), *Speculating on the Lessons of the Two Ritual Classics*, and *Qiao Talk*. Chen was especially clear about the significance of the last work:

When Sir [Zhan] was teaching, 'with an orderly method, [he] skillfully led'; the *Qiao Talk* was recorded by his followers when Sir [Zhan] was implementing his pedagogy at Xiqiao. His learning was inspired by Jiangmen [i.e., Chen Xianzhang], coincides with *Lian* [i.e., Zhou Lianxi] and *Luo* [i.e., Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi], and traces all the way back to the Zhu and Si Rivers [i.e., Confucius]. What is purely the center and truly right can be found complete in these works, while these compilations present it precisely and in a nutshell (Zhan 2005a: 1/1).

That is why, to disseminate what he taught, several students worked together to publish his teachings. Similar circumstances no doubt also apply to the other two compilations.

To give structure to the educational setting at the academy where these philosophical discussions took place, Zhan provided a list of sixty-seven rules, the *Regulations for the Dake Academy* (*Dake shuyuan xun gui* 大科書院訓規) (2005a: 5/5-17). Completed on June 29, 1520, a statement preceding the rules explains their provenance. Zhan writes:

Owing to illness, when I was fifty [*shu*] I retired to Xiqiao. In Xiqiao there is the Mist and Clouds Hollow, where outstanding talent from all directions gathered. Together, we gathered stones and made a platform, and using the platform we gathered lumber, constructing a home, a hall, and a guest house, as a place to hold philosophical discussions and make progress in our self-development. Since it was near to Dake Peak, [we] named it Dake Academy. All the students requested a pedagogical statement (2014: 6/187).

At first, Zhan was reluctant to speak on this matter, and his students had to wait a year before requesting this of him again. Even then, some time passed before he decided that, although he wished to remain silent, doing so was problematic. Thus, he laid out the articles item by item, beginning with, "it is all an expression of mind and nature, all returns to mind and nature." He then continued, "Because all of this does not fall outside of mind and nature, I am not just talking. Because I do not in fact merely talk, students should seek the basis for what I am stating. If you figure out what I am talking about, and hence grasp what it is that I am reluctant to speak of, that is close! That is close!" (2005a: 1/1).

One more short but important work provides a concise statement of Zhan's philosophy—the *Exposition of the Diagram of Mind and Nature* (*Xin xing tu shuo* 心性圖說). In 1552, Guo Zhaoqian 郭肇乾, a "student of his gate (*mensheng*)," wrote that he had first received the diagram from his master while residing at the Mist and Clouds Hollow in 1519, providing evidence for the time of its

composition (Zhan 2005b: 31/6).<sup>32</sup> He also explained why Zhan drew it up—he was quite concerned over the mental state of aspiring scholars. They no longer knew about this learning of the mind and human nature, and hence the Way had darkened, wrongheaded theories had appeared, and intellectual inquiry had become distorted. Few true scholars existed anymore. One problem was that some modern scholars were overly introverted, mired in mind, causing them to fail to properly understand the world outside themselves. Others, on the other hand, became so involved in matters that they left their minds undeveloped. Thus, those who combined what was without and within into one—that is, who led an undivided life, wherein the source of awareness and its objects were unified as one, and who followed the middle path of the sages in which one thread tied everything together—were indeed hard to find (2005b: 31/6). The *Exposition of the Diagram*, Guo explained, was composed to address these issues and, of course, to present the truth about the nature of reality so that scholars would know what they were looking for. “[Zhan] also wished to set people straight, setting aside misguiding florid language and just leading them back to the centered Way,” Guo continued, “but if you want to set people straight without first knowing what mind and nature are, how will you be able to return to the centered Way?” Guo maintained that “Sir [Zhan] had no choice but to write this diagram and book, to show people the essential source of mind and nature (*xin xing zhi bentu* 心性之本體). This nature is *tian li*. [If you] know that *tian li* flows expansively in every moment, without location and without shape, what Cheng Hao described as ‘the humane person forms one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things’—that is what it is” (2005b: 31/6).

A translation of the diagram and corresponding exposition was provided by Annping Chin (Woo) in her dissertation on Zhan Ruoshui (1986: 39-42); more recently, Kim Youngmin has also elucidated its philosophical import (2015: 332). Here, a brief exposition of major features will suffice for outlining some of the philosophical dimensions of Zhan’s understanding of mind. Zhan begins by restating Cheng Hao’s assertion that our nature forms one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things. Human nature is inseparably one with the entire cosmos because humans are composed of the same *qi*. Nature is also the mind’s life principle, the “principle of production,” and should be understood as being one with mind. That is, the fullness of knowing is inseparable from the fullness or dynamism of being alive. Furthermore, mind holistically apprehends the entire cosmos without leaving anything out, without division, conscious of all in oneness. That is why mind and nature are both placed in a smaller circle, while the entire cosmos, both as space and time, is indicated in a larger, encompassing circle. In fact, what is in the middle includes the rest: our minds encompass and inhere in all reality. “Mind embraces Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things from beyond, and yet penetrates Heaven, Earth, and all things from the center,” Zhan explains. Most importantly, Zhan concisely stresses that no divisions exist in mind or the cosmos; reality is without bifurcation, interiors, and exteriors. Zhan here elaborates a nondual form of philosophy, transcending a dualism of knower and known, and subject and object, albeit by using language common to *learning of the Way* philosopher (Woo 1986: 39-42).<sup>33</sup>

#### 4 Philosophy and Pedagogy during the Xiqiao Years

By combining the content of these documents with the substantial, rich correspondence Zhan Ruoshui also carried on during those four years, one can sketch out the general contours of his pedagogy. I will do so by considering, in order, what he viewed as the principal problems students and inquiring friends confronted, the goals he held out for them, and the practices he espoused for reaching those goals.

Given how lengthy Zhan's *Regulations* were, as a kind of preface to them, he also provided a concise summary of their content along with a chart listing out the main points. The first half of each defines positive and constructive conduct and attitudes that contribute to the individual maturing into a decent human being. The second half defines unproductive and negative behaviors that contribute to the individual remaining an immature person. In sum, an individual going in the wrong direction "acts out of self-interest and does not commit to the Way, is indulgent, seeks amusement in meaningless diversions, looks for the Way outside of personal relationships, prioritizes literary composition over moral development, turns into a phony by trying to impress others with words and appearance, has fits of anger, does not take serving his father and brother seriously, does not search for a teacher, does not practice what he has learned, acts defiantly, is jealous of fellow students, does not hold to commitments, acts opinionatedly towards the teacher, spends time preparing for examinations only because success secures a salary, engages in incoherent [studies], makes reading books and abiding in reverence two separate matters, when composing characters makes appearance the focus, allows reading books and viewing scenery to fetter and destroy [the good mind], ruins mental discipline by indulging in Daoism and Buddhism, is competitive about literary composition, and does not discipline family servants" (2005a: 5/2-3).

The body of the *Regulations* elaborates upon more specific issues of character, providing a list of vices for the young students as well as rules to impose discipline. Zhan was particularly concerned with self-centered behavior, vulgarity and rudeness, petty jealousies and cliquishness, failing to adhere to the rules pertaining to one's role, and living to impress others and stand out among the crowd (Zhan 2014: 6/199-200). Zhan did not wish for students to hold excessively high expectations of others and, out of arrogance and because they thought they knew it all, to insult, disrespect, and slight them (2014: 6/195). Noting that students are "quite far from sages and saints," Zhan states that as beginners they really do not know what they need to be doing: "when first making an effort one is at a loss as to where to do so" (2014: 6/194-95). Although few are those who have any real insight, like "those who sit in a room and close the door," many think they know it all (2014: 1/68-69). The remedies for all of this—in terms of developing character and adopting constructive attitudes—are also covered in the *Regulations* and will be discussed below.

Zhan was also deeply concerned with wrong ideas. That is why his list of vices reveals his fear that students are engaging in dualistic learning or interested in Daoist and Buddhist literature. A record he composed in the fall of 1521 to commemorate the renovation of the *Ru* school in Sihui County, Guangdong, captures several of the key issues. As Yu Teng-ta has pointed out, one of the central concepts that Zhan taught during the Xiqiao years was "*he yi zhi xue* 合一之學" (2012: 60-1). That can be variously translated as "a learning that combines into one," "a learning that unifies," or, somewhat more loosely, "holistic learning" and "integral learning." It seems that wherever Zhan looked, he saw misguided, fragmentary ways of thinking. He called this "*zhibi* 支離," a term often used by scholars in Zhan's time to criticize a school of thought, way of thinking, or educational practice. In those contexts, it is best translated as "deficient," "incoherent," or "disconnected." The term was often used by *learning of the mind* scholars to criticize the bookishness or scholasticism of Zhu Xi learning. Such learning, it was argued, fails to transform the learner into a moral person and therewith to a deeper awareness and understanding of that to which fundamental concepts point, such as mind, nature, and *tian li*.

For Zhan, however, *zhibi* meant first and foremost "dualistic" or "bifurcated." The *Record* makes this very clear. Zhan explains that learning and the Way require an integral approach. The ancients knew of this and implemented their pedagogy accordingly. Learning was pursued for the purpose of restoring the Way. Sages cultivated the Way to fully realize Heaven's potential, and the

virtuous pursued self-development to find their purpose in life. Modern scholars, however, start from a dualistic position. Their way of thinking and acting reflects a divided life. Because the knowledge pertaining to serving in civil and military office are compartmentalized, the world lacks well-rounded people. The same can be said of “talent and virtue,” “the essence and function (*ti/yong* 體用, usually translated as substance/function),” “knowledge and action,” “activity and tranquility (*dong jing* 動靜),” “examination practice,” and “the practice of virtue” (Zhan 2005a: 26/20-1). For Zhan, this is not how things are supposed to be, and the consequences are serious. “Ever since *zhibi* discourses arose,” Zhan writes, “Confucian learning has been ruined. With Confucian learning ruined, *tian li* has nearly been extinguished” (2005a: 26/20-1). Under such conditions, false philosophies appear. In Mengzi’s time, it was the philosophies of Yang Zhu and Master Mo; in Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi’s time, it was Buddhism and Daoism. Zhan concludes with this solution: “Examine the fundamental and reach to the contingent, and then [you will] know the theory of integrating into one and will be able to transform the examination curriculum and know the Way” (2005a: 26/21).

Further understanding the kinds of theoretical issues Zhan was targeting requires transitioning to the goals he held out for the student of the Way. Where one is going wrong is better understood in terms of what is being sought after, although Zhan’s goals might seem esoteric. For him, the *Classic of Change* describes one facet of the goal where it states, “see anew the mind of Heaven and Earth” (2005a: 8/11). Another facet is to “broaden the mind”: “when the mind is broadened, one can fully apprehend the nature of Heaven and Earth” (2014: 1/64). In the first case, Zhan speaks of mind as the source, or ontological ground; in the second, he is speaking of becoming fully aware. These are not two separate matters; what is great about the mind is just what Mengzi had claimed—fully realizing the mind leads to human nature and then to Heaven. When his student Yang Luan 楊鸞 (style name Shaomo 少默) asked him about the distinction between the original mind and the cosmos, his master told him that they are one, offering the analogy of the identity of the light generated by fire and what it lights up. Thus, Zhan states, “if one is unaware of the original mind, one will not be able to speak adequately about the principle according to which Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things are one body. [And if one] is not aware that Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things are one body, one will not be able to speak correctly about the totality of the original mind” (2014: 1/79).

Zhan also draws a fundamental distinction between divided and undivided knowing. The highest way is simply awareness or consciousness (*jue* 覺) (2014: 1/74), that is, reaching the point where one sees that “the mind inheres in all things without leaving anything out” (2014: 1/72-73). He also told Yang Luan that “what I refer to as the mind apprehends (*ti* 體) the ten thousand things without leaving anything out; therefore, it has no inside or outside” (2005a: 9/8). Here, Zhan is simply pointing to a way of knowing that is free of and untied to any object, like a mirror in which all objects appear. Addressing Wang Yangming’s suspicion that his thinking was dualistic, Zhan similarly told him that “people’s minds form one body with Heaven, Earth, and all things; the mind embodies things without leaving anything out. If you know the vastness and greatness of the mind’s essence, then nothing will fall outside it” (2005a: 8/1). He describes this mindful state as being in the middle or being centered—“what direction can you go that is not the center?” (2014: 1/72).

Zhan also identifies the moral tone of living from the center as the “right mind,” a mind where cognizance (*zhi jue* 知覺) is disciplined but also freed by cautious reflection and reverence (2014: 1/74). This is the good and just mind, the basis for achieving personhood, as well as what is requisite to penetrating the subtle, entering the spiritual, and arriving at Heaven (2014: 1/74). “The Way (*dao*) is the principle of being centered and right,” Zhan explained to the scholar Zheng Luoshu

鄭洛書 (style name Qifan 啟範, *js.* 1517). “When in dealing with relationships and our ordinary life feelings arise without failing to be centered and right,” he added, “this is the [attainment] of the Way” (2005a: 8/31). Zhan explained that the mind is like a pure void in which the living dynamism of human nature arises and responds as things are encountered in ordinary life. That dynamism manifests as feelings and emotions. If these arise from a centered and correct place, then that is the Way, genuine sentiment in accord with *tian li*. But should feeling and emotion flow astray, losing the center and rightness, then mind and nature will be lost and so will the Way. The former is necessary to bring about social order and contribute to the proper growth of others (2005a: 8/31).

Zhan also draws upon the mirror analogy. A limited mind is akin to a mirror that is almost totally concealed except for a slight fissure reflecting a part of the totality (2014: 1/64). Most people’s minds are mired in distortion and concealed by things, however. Few are those who can fully unveil the mind’s mirroring quality, its clarity, or, in other words, the essential source of mind (2014: 1/64). Zhan refers to this as great mind, different from the habitual, self-centered “me” mind. Like an impure metal, this mind must be smelted until it transforms into the mind of the Way, a mind that has found its center and rightness (2014: 6/194). Then, the totality of human nature can be witnessed, and inner and outer will be unified as one.

Lastly, while at Xiqiao, Zhan also frequently spoke of identity and one thread (Yu 2012: 64-8). A preface he wrote for Yang Luan 楊鸞 captures the main points, some of which we have covered. Having spent a year with Zhan at the Yanxia Hollow, Yang was preparing to return to his hometown of Chaozhou, so he stopped by beforehand. “Make your mind one,” Zhan urged, “don’t divide your learning!” Again, Zhan explains that *zhili* is dualism. Some lean within (oriented, as they are, to the introspective) and some lean without (oriented, as they are, to engagement with the world). However, modern scholars tend to recognize the former as *zhili* without realizing that the latter is equally distorted. “Leaning without” means forgetting the source and living in the traces. But “leaning within” leads to an aversion to things, and to nothingness. Both extremes distort the mind by bifurcating it. They must be united, made one. Putting the roots of his thought in Cheng Hao on full display, Zhan writes that in the learning of the good person, “interior and exterior [life] are integrated as one, action and tranquility are united at the spring, essence and event are united in their point of origin, things and self are united in the whole” (2005a: 16/13-4).

Zhan explains the origins of his integral approach in the life and thought of the sages of ancient times. Yao had spoken of “holding to the center” and both Shun and Yu of “refinement and singlemindedness,” and this knowledge was passed down to King Tang, from whom it was passed down to King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou. From the Duke of Zhou it was transmitted to Master Kong, who spoke of it as “one thread,” and from Master Kong to Sir Yan, who spoke of “being broadly learned and controlling oneself with etiquette.” This one thread is the unification of what is within and without, of action and tranquility as well as the oneness of self and other and the essence and function. After their time, Zhan explains, dualisms gradually arose. What was originally one was separated. During the Song Dynasty, Cheng Hao spoke of “one origin” and the “undivided,” but thereafter things were again divided. That is why interior life is now divided from exterior life, why tranquility is no longer found in activity and vice versa, why the essence and function are not identical, and why a boundary is perceived between things and self. Zhan told Yang Luan, “When Heaven gives birth to things, [it is] one source. The Way [comes from] one source. Knowing that there are not two sources, how can there be an inside and outside? Therefore, unite it and then you can enter the Way” (2005a: 16/13-4). Identity, or unitive knowing, was the one thread that Zhan saw running through all his wise predecessors’ thought, going all the way back to the sages of ancient times.

The misguided ideas students of the Way were confronting, as well as the goals that Zhan had described and set out for them, were what Zhan was addressing in the program he developed for students while at Mt. Xiqiao, as well as in his letters to colleagues. That brings us back to the first half of the preface to the *Regulations*, where Zhan provides a concise summary of the kinds of behavior and attitudes the longer lists aims to foster in order to lead students to the Way. In sum, Zhan writes that a person seeking to mature in virtue by doing what is right “aspires to the Way, personally realizes the principle of Heaven, seeks genuine happiness, searches for the Way in personal relationships, is honest, has his speech and actions emerge from the center, doesn’t blame Heaven or complain about others, doesn’t misdirect anger, sincerely tends to his father and elder brother, seeks out a teacher, practices what he has learned, politely yields to elders he encounters, always treats fellow students respectfully, keeps his word, is not opinionated, pursues virtue and examination preparation together, integrates interior and exterior [life], unifies studying and focusing the mind, composes characters in a spirit of reverence, focuses when applying himself to examination preparation, does not lose himself in enjoying nature, studies widely in the Six Classics to broaden knowledge, expresses what he has learned when composing essays, educates and controls family servants” (2014: 6/188-89).

This list captures the principal foci of the regulations, which were largely about getting students to adopt certain attitudes, cultivate certain dispositions, and approach their studies and personal development in such a way as to promote a maturation in character and, with that, an enhanced capacity to penetrate into the subtleties of the nature of mind, human nature, and *tian li* (2014: 195-96). Commitment is critical; the aspiration to reach the *dao* must be supported with a hallowed seriousness. “In learning,” Zhan stipulated, “the students must first establish the will. It is like the building of a house, of which one speaks of the foundation that makes it possible” (2014: 6/193; Meskill 1982: 107). Students are also urged to be genuinely inquisitive, to be respectful and gracious, to demonstrate humility, and to observe proper decorum.

Discipline and routine are also an important component of Zhan’s plan. His *Regulations* state that “students in advancing their virtue and studying for the examinations must devise a daily schedule” (2014: 6/194; Meskill 1982: 102). He proposes that they arise each day at cockcrow, or 3 a.m., and read books aloud until 9 a.m., followed by reading silently for four more hours until 1 p.m. Afterward, they are to write essays for two hours, until 3 p.m., and then sit silently in meditation until 7 p.m. Lastly, the evening hours are to be spent reviewing until 11 p.m. Throughout these long days, students should direct their purpose towards personal growth and advancing in self-understanding, for if they persist they will find that as the months pass by they will change and eventually become different persons (2014: 6/194). As with the prescribed behaviors, they will find that what is within and what is without will become unified, functioning holistically.

Verification of progress through sincere performance of the rules and roles pertaining to one’s social position and adhering to the norms for interpersonal relationships is also an important element of Zhan’s program. That means, of course, showing the proper deference and etiquette and providing the appropriate courtesies requisite to one’s interpersonal relationships—with, for example, parents, elders, and children, friends and fellow students, lineage members, fellow townspeople, and family servants. It goes without saying that Zhan’s standards for moral behavior were demanding. Students were to return home regularly to sincerely demonstrate their filial piety by waiting upon parents and elder brothers: “If his parents and elders brothers seem to be pleased with him, it means that he has made progress in learning” (2014: 6/196; Meskill 1982: 102-03). To redeem themselves for leaving their families behind and coming to the mountains, students must be all the more diligent (2014: 6/197; Meskill 1982: 103). They should also select a master known for

his virtue and conduct and then serve and listen to him, “thereby cultivating their attitudes of respect and humility” (2014: 6/198; Meskill 1982: 103). Regarding fellow students, Zhan writes, “Students living together as colleagues have the relationship of brothers. They should love each other like brothers. That is the Way” (2014: 6/199-200; Meskill 1982: 103). Thus, they must learn to speak sincerely with one another about things that bother them or things they have learned, about points they share in common but also differences, all in the same spirit of humility and respect. Lastly, should students bring servants to the academy, they must “see that they have adequate food, bed covering, and clothing,” and “restrain themselves as much as possible from getting angry with them” (2014: 6/196; Meskill 1982: 102).

More could be stated here, but the deeper goal is, as Zhan told Chen Haiya 陳海涯 in a letter, to lead life according to the intertwined goals of illuminating virtue and loving people as discussed in the *Great Learning*. How is virtue to grow when sitting in silence? Relationships are unavoidable (2005a: 9/5). Just open one’s eyes and there they are. Zhan also told his students that the integral approach to self-cultivation is to be found in the *Great Learning*. There is not some kind of conceptual step leading back and forth between realizing one’s virtuous nature and loving people; rather, because self and other are of the same essence, these two practices must be combined into one. If you don’t love others, part of your nature will be missing (2005a: 3/3).

That is also why Zhan consistently downplayed the importance of meditation, or quiet-sitting, even as he expected students to do it. In correspondence, he told Yu Duxue 余督學 that the ancients never spoke of quiet-sitting and that when the Song philosophers Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi did, they only saw it as a kind of supplement directed towards specific problems with learners in their time (2005a: 8/11). In fact, he told Yu, those who speak of tranquility are Chanists. Followers of Confucius, on the other hand, seek humaneness in affairs and apply effort in whatever they do. That obviously cannot happen while meditating. Rather, mindful effort must be directed towards life as the guiding practice central to all others. This effort is reverent attention (*jing* 敬). Whereas cultivating tranquility in meditation leads to a nebulous cessation, reverent attention in waking life leads down the path of Yao and Shun, towards witnessing anew the mind of Heaven and Earth and personally realizing the principle of Heaven. That is why skilled learners must unify action and tranquility in reverent knowing, for that is the path to the nondual, to uniting inner and outer. Zhan does point out, however, that “talking about this is easy, doing it difficult—it’s not something to be accomplished in one morning and evening” (2005a: 8/11).

In fact, and finally, whether in correspondence with colleagues or advising students and friends at Mt. Xiqiao, Zhan consistently advocated a singular or unified contemplative practice, a kind of mindfulness, as the most crucial practice for reaching the goal. Often, that was *jing*. When a student asked Zhan what one must do to fully realize mind, Zhan replied, “It is reverence. Total reverence is unsullied. A clean mirror has nothing covering it” (2014: 1/64). For Zhan, reverence best describes the mirror-like awareness of the mind’s source (2014: 1/63-4). In other cases, he spoke of *ge wu* 格物 and *sui chu tiren tian li* (“wherever you are personally realize *tian li*”) as the one essential practice. As Kim Youngmin explains, “the motto, *sui chu tiren tianli*, presents Zhan’s understanding of how the self is united with the world” (2015: 336). Zhan’s *Regulations* state, “Students, when applying yourself you must personally realize *tian li* wherever you are, what the *Great Learning* refers to as ‘investigating things,’ and Master Cheng [Hao] referred to as ‘arriving at the principle.’ Make [making sincere] the will, [rectifying] the mind, [developing] the self, [aligning] the household, [ordering] the state, [setting at peace] the world all one inclusive effort, without [distinction] between far and near, self and other—to the end of each day and the end of one’s life, it is only [a matter of] personally realizing *tian li*, these two characters” (2014: 6/193).



The goal to personally realize *tian li*—the principle of Heaven, Heaven’s reason, to recall some translations—had been Zhan’s consistent precept since he gained his first meaningful insight into his master Chen Xianzhang’s teaching back in 1497. Just two years before taking up residence in his hermitage, Zhan told Wang Dao (style name Chunfu) that the crux of learning was observing and beholding *tian li*, which is always present amidst the ordinary, flowing without cease. In fact, people are always employing it without even realizing what it is (2005a: 8/2). This is the knowledge that is to be cultivated, most especially by abiding in reverence, whether active or still. While at Xiqiao, Zhan stressed “wherever you are personally realize *tian li*” in discussion with students and in correspondence with colleagues. He told Yang Luan that there is nothing else to be done. Perpetually apprehending *tian li* is investigating things, the essential activity of unitive mind, the mind that apprehends all things without leaving anything out (2005a: 9/7).<sup>34</sup>

In sum, during the Xiqiao years, Zhan was not only seeking to recuperate from illness, but also withdrawing from the challenging political atmosphere caused by a derelict emperor. He took this time as an opportunity to engage in an extensive scholarship that would bring his insights to fruition and to develop a pedagogy that would realize them in practice. Zhan articulated his ideas through commentaries on the *Doctrine of the Mean* and *Great Learning* and annotated compilations of statements made by Cheng Hao and poems written by Chen Xianzhang. To train students, he established his first academy and wrote detailed *Regulations* for it, as well as permitting his students to gather and edit material from the discussions he held with them as records from dialogues. In doing so, he began to flesh out a comprehensive *Ru* philosophy and pedagogy that indeed rivalled Wang Yangming’s in its scope, and which aimed to provide guidance to students seeking to supplement their examination studies by temporarily retiring to an academy and seeking the *dao*, laying the foundation for the ensuing three decades during which he would establish many more academies and add far more scholarship to his growing corpus.

**George L. Israel** (PhD 2008, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign) is an associate professor of history at Middle Georgia State University. His research focuses primarily on Ming intellectual history. He has published *Doing Good and Ridding Evil in Ming China: The Political Career of Wang Yangming* (Leiden et al.: Brill, 2014). He has also published in the *Journal of Chinese History*, *Late Imperial China*, *Ming Studies*, *Philosophy East and West*, *Asian Philosophy*, and *Monumenta Serica*.

<sup>1</sup> Zhan Ganquan 湛甘泉, *Quan Weng da quan ji* 泉翁大全集 (Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Hanji dianzi wenxian edition, 2005a), 36/7. <http://hanji.sinica.edu.tw/>. Numbers indicate *juan*/page number.

<sup>2</sup> Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲, *Ming ru xue an* 明儒學案, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 37/835.

<sup>3</sup> For a classic study, which includes much discussion of Zhan Ruoshui and Wang Yangming, see John Thomas Meskill, *The Academies of the Ming Dynasty* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of these issues, see Wang Wenjuan 王文娟, *Zhan Ganquan zhexue sixiang yanjiu* 湛甘泉哲學思想研究 (Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 2012), 7-8; Ji Douyang 戢斗勇, *Ganquan xuepai* 甘泉學派 (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Chubanshe, 2017), 113-16; Ann-ping Chin Woo, “Chan Kan-ch’uan and the Continuing Neo-Confucian Discourse on Mind and Principle,” (PhD Diss., University of Michigan, 1986), 167-72.

<sup>5</sup> For a study, see Ogyū Shigehiro, “The Construction of ‘Modern Yōmeigaku’ in Meiji Japan and Its Impact on China,” trans. Barry Steben, *East Asian History* 20, (2000): 83-120.

- 6 For a history of the English-language scholarship, see George L. Israel, “The Transformation of the Wang Yangming Scholarship in the West, ca. 1960-1980: A Historical Essay,” *Asian Philosophy* 28, no. 2, (2018): 135-56. For a historiography of the Chinese literature, see Qian Ming 錢明, *Wang Yangming ji qi xuepai lun kao* 王陽明及其學派論考 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2009), 545-604.
- 7 Huang Mingtong 黃明同, *Lingnan xin xue: Cong Chen Xianzhang dao Zhan Ruoshui* 嶺南心學：從陳獻章到湛若水 (Shanghai: Shanghai Ci Shu Chubanshe, 2015), 179-81.
- 8 Huang Zongxi devotes six *juan* to Zhan Ruoshui and his school. See *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 2, 37/875-42/1040.
- 9 Relevant Zhan Ruoshui scholarship will be cited throughout the paper. For a survey of the Chinese-language scholarship, see Li Yeming 黎業明, “Zhan Ruoshui shengping yu xueshu sixiang yuanjiu 湛若水生平與學術思想研究” (PhD Diss., Zhongshan Daxue, 2009a), 136-46. The longest English-language study is Annping Chin Woo (1986). She focuses on intellectual influences on Zhan, his theory of mind and the principle of Heaven, and debates between him and Wang Yangming. She also provides a useful selection of translations. Shiga Ichirō 志賀一朗 published a corpus of work on Zhan, the most complete introductory book being Shiga Ichirō 志賀一朗, *Tan Kansen no gakusetsu* 湛甘泉の學說 (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 1983).
- 10 The Chinese literature is referenced throughout this article. For a recent English-language publication, see the important article by Kim Youngmin, “Moral Action in Zhan Ruoshui’s (1466-1560) Philosophical Anthropology,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 42, no. 3-4, (Sept.-Dec. 2015): 318-41.
- 11 For a summary, see Li Yeming (2009a: 148).
- 12 Tang Junyi 唐君毅, *Zhongguo zhexue yuan lun: yuan jiao pian* 中國哲學原論：原教篇 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2006), 229.
- 13 Chung Tsai-chun 鍾彩鈞, “Zhan Ganquan zhaxue sixiang yanjiu 湛甘泉哲學思想研究,” *Zhongguo Wenzhe Yanjiu Jikan* 19, (September 2009): 346.
- 14 Ren Jianmin 任建敏, *Cong “lixue ming shan” dao “wen ban qiao shan”—16 shiji Xiqiao Shan lishi bianqian yanjiu* 從“理學名山”到“文翰樵山”—16 世紀西樵山歷史變遷研究 (Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2012), 250; Yu Teng-ta 游騰達, “Zhan Ganquan zhaxue sixiang de fazhan yu wancheng 湛甘泉哲學思想的發展與完成” (PhD diss.: Guoli Taiwan Shifan Daxue, 2012), 59; Wang Wenjuan (2012: 9).
- 15 For the age of palace examination graduates in 1472 and 1529 see Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 706. In 1529, 20.7% of the *jinsbi* were 26-30 *sui*, 31.2% were 31-35 *sui*, and 20.7% were 36-40 *sui*. In 1504, Zhan would have fallen into the third category.
- 16 Ruoshui is a style name given to him later in life; he is also commonly referred to by the literary name Ganquan 甘泉, which is the name of the administrative rural township to which his village belonged. For a concise biography, see Fang Chaoying, “Chan Jo-shui,” in *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 36-41.
- 17 Li Yeming 黎業明, *Zhan Ruoshui nianpu* 湛若水年譜 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2009b), 8-10.
- 18 Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章, *Chen Xianzhang ji* 陳獻章集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), 2/192.
- 19 Zhan is abridging a part of *Analects* 15:6, which states, “If his words be not sincere and truthful, and his actions not honorable and careful, will he, with such conduct, be appreciated, even in his neighborhood? When he is standing, let him see those two things, as it were, fronting him. When he is in a carriage, let him see them attached to the yoke. Then may he subsequently carry them into practice.” Thus, “what is in front of [you] and attached to the yoke” refers to sincerity and truthfulness in speech and to honor and caution in conduct. For translation, see James Legge, *The*

- Analects of Confucius*, <https://ctext.org/analects/wei-ling-gong/zh?en=on#n1487> (accessed July 4, 2018).
- 20 Li Yeming (2009b: 19). For his burial, see Chen Xianzhang, *Chen Xianzhang ji, fulu* (appendix), 2/862.
- 21 The general timeline here is accurate, although some details vary according to the source. Ren Jianmen has thoroughly documented these events and the construction of the academy (*Cong "lixue ming shan" dao "wen han qiao shan,"* 66-80).
- 22 Lu Nan 呂柟, *Lu Nan ji: Jingye xiansheng wenji* 呂柟集: 涇野先生文集 (Xian: Xian Daxue Chubanshe, 2015), 15/522-24.
- 23 For a discussion of this evidence, see Yu Teng-ta (2012: 60).
- 24 Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水, *Zhan Ganquan xiansheng wenji* 湛甘泉先生文集 (Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2014), 4/138.
- 25 For a full study, Liu Yong 劉勇, "Wang Yangming 'Daxue guben' de dangdai jingzheng zhe: Zhan Ruoshui yu Fang Xianfu zhi li 王陽明'大學'古本'的當代競爭者: 湛若水與方獻夫為例," *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo xuebao* 60, (2015): 159-81.
- 26 Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水. *Zun Dao lu (shi juan)* 遵道錄(十卷), in *Si ku quan shu cun mu congshu bu bian*, vol. 96 (Jinan: Qi Lu Shushe, 2001): 1.
- 27 See, for example, his discussion in Zhan (2005a: 5/6).
- 28 For the influence of Cheng Hao on Zhan Ruoshui's thought, see Chung Tsai-chun (2009: 354-58).
- 29 Zhan Ruoshui 湛若水, *Baishazi gu shi jiao jie* 白沙子古詩教解 (Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2014), 13.
- 30 Chen Lisheng 陳立勝, "Lixue jia yu yulu ti 理學家與語錄體," *Shehui kexue* 1, (2015): 129-42.
- 31 These comprise, respectively, *juan* 1, 2, and 3 in the *Quan Weng da quan*, and *juan* 1, 2, and 4 in the *Zhan Ganquan xiansheng wenji*.
- 32 Zhan Ganquan 湛甘泉, *Ganquan xiansheng xubian daquan* 甘泉先生續編大全 (Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Hanji dianzi wenxian edition, 2005b), 31/6. <http://hanji.sinica.edu.tw/>.
- 33 For a Chinese version, see Wang Wenjuan (2012: 102-03).
- 34 For the philosophy of *sui chu tiren tianli* see Kim (2015: 335-37). Also, a central theme during these years is Zhan Ruoshui's debate with Wang Yangming over the meaning of *ge wu* ("investigating things") and, tied in with that, their differing understandings of the nature of mind. This debate, however, requires lengthy analysis and lies outside the scope of this paper. For an introduction, see Woo (1986: 55-79).