

## **Xin Jing (The Heart Scripture)**

collected and edited by Zhen Dexiu  
translated by Ryan Chiang McCarthy

### **Introduction**

This is a translation of the *Xinjing* or *Heart Scripture* compiled by the Southern Song Dynasty politician and scholar Zhen Dexiu (1178-1235, art name Xishan). The *Xinjing* is an anthology of selected texts, from ancient classics such as the *Yijing*, the *Liji*, and the *Mengzi*, accompanied by comments by the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, and other eminent scholars, mostly of the Song period. Its theme, as the title suggests, is the matter of cultivating the heart, or mind.

This cultivation of the heart was a vital concern for Confucians, or Ruists, in general and particularly to the school to which Zhen Dexiu belonged. This school, called variously *lixue* (study of pattern/principle), *daoxue* (study of the way), or the Cheng-Zhu school (after its leading figures), produced wide-ranging and voluminous writings, tackling many subjects including metaphysics, natural philosophy, statecraft, and aesthetics. Self-cultivation and introspection were foundational, though, for social harmony and the stability of the empire. In compiling this book, Zhen Dexiu sought to provide a brief primer- for himself as well as for students- of this foundational subject of self-cultivation.

As Zhen Dexiu was instrumental in cementing the dominance of the Cheng-Zhu school, so his *Xinjing* became an influential text, not only in China, but later in Korea and Japan. To distinguish it from the Buddhist *Heart Sutra*, also called *Xinjing*, it has also been known as the *Xishan Xinjing*.

### **Note on the Translation**

I am not a trained scholar and this translation is a labor of love by an amateur. I have relied heavily on the work of proper scholars and translators, not to mention dictionaries, in parsing frequently difficult texts. I owe special thanks to Drs. Joseph Adler and Stephen Angle for taking time to elucidate some particularly difficult texts for me. All errors that remain are my own.

The *Xinjing* text has no chapter breaks. It does follow a pattern of quotes from original texts followed by chunks of commentary. For ease of reading, I have offset these sections and named them based on the overriding theme.

I have omitted a tiny handful of etymological notes in the original text that are only useful to readers in Chinese.

I will take a moment to explain a few translation choices I made of key terms:

Xin (心)= Heart. This refers both to the physical organ and to the mind, so many translators have rendered this as “mind” or “heart-mind” in philosophical texts. I have chosen to simply render it “heart” because “heart” in English likewise has multiple

connotations depending on context, and the notion of the heart as the seat of consciousness is not foreign to Western thinking, such as in Aristotle.

Cheng (誠)= Authenticity. This is most commonly rendered as “sincerity.” I opted for “authenticity” as a stronger term, because cheng involves a deep coherence of the person, inward and outward, aligning with Heaven and reaching cosmic dimensions.

Ren (仁) = Humaneness. This is sometimes rendered “kindness”, “benevolence,” or “humanity.” It is pronounced the same as the word for “human” or “person” and there is a clear etymological link between them. I used “humaneness” instead of “humanity” to avoid confusion with humanity as a species.

Li (理)= Pattern. This is often translated as “principle” or “pattern-principle.” The word originally referred to the pattern found in jade. Following Bryan van den Norden’s choice in his translation of the *Mengzi*, I opted for simply “pattern” as it has a more dynamic connotation than “principle.” Though it only appears a few times in the *Xinjing* it is a central concept for the School of Pattern (*li*) as the Cheng-Zhu school was known. It refers to the order or reason that governs both the cosmos as a whole and inheres entirely in every person and thing. The pattern is sought both through introspection and the assiduous investigation of phenomena. Attaining humaneness (*ren*) and authenticity (*cheng*), and aligning oneself with the pattern of heaven (*tianli*), are thoroughly interconnected.

Qi (氣) is left untranslated, as it has begun to enter common English as such. It has sometimes been rendered as “material force”, “life force,” “material energy,” etc. Originally denoting vapor, air, or breath, it became a key cosmological principle in Chinese philosophy, with several overlapping meanings, including the basic stuff out of which all things were made. In the Cheng-Zhu conception, pattern (*li*) must be expressed in qi, but because qi can be more or less turbid, the expression of pattern can be frustrated, especially coming into contact with human desires and emotions.

## The Heart Scripture

### 1. The Human Heart and the Heart of the Way

The Emperor says: The human heart is restless, the heart of the way subtle; be discerning, be one, faithfully holding the center.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> from the *Book of Documents*, “Counsels of Yu the Great”; this is spoken by Shun to his successor Yu

Zhuzi<sup>1</sup> says: The heart's spacious, spiritual consciousness is simply one. But we make a distinction between the human heart and the heart of the way: the one is born of the selfishness of formed qi, the other originates from the rightness of (human) nature's mandate, and therefore, with regards to consciousness, they are not the same. Because, whether restless and disquieted, or subtle and obscure, there is no person lacking form, so even the supremely wise cannot lack a human heart; nor can anyone lack nature, hence even the profoundly stupid cannot be without the heart of the way. Both are intermingled in the square inch (of the heart), and if one knows not which one rules it, then what is restless grows more restless, what is subtle grows subtler, and the impartiality of Heaven's pattern will have no means of victory over the selfishness of human desires. "Be discerning" then means to perceive these two without confusing them; "be one" means to guard the rightness of the original heart, and not depart from it. Undertaking this without any interruption, one will surely make the heart of the way the constant master of the entire self, and the human heart ever obedient. Then what is restless will be pacified, what is subtle will be manifest, and moving or still, saying or doing, one will not err by overstepping or falling short.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Undivided Heart

The *Odes* say: The Lord on High<sup>3</sup> is watching you, be not divided in your heart.<sup>4</sup>

They also say: Be not divided nor troubled, the Lord on High is watching you.<sup>5</sup>

The *Mao Commentary* says: Speak without daring to harbor two hearts.

Zhuzi says: Know the necessity of heaven's mandate, and firmly uphold it.

Zhen Xishan<sup>6</sup> says in his Reading Notes: With this matter of King Wu overthrowing Tyrant Zhou, while the poem's topic is Wu overthrowing Zhou, yet right-thinking scholars recite it in peacetime, trembling thus as if the Lord on High really watches them, and so, with this aid for guarding from evil and keeping sincerity, need not mind themselves often! Also, when you know what is virtuous yet lack the needed courage, or allow benefit and harm, or gain and loss, to divide your heart- such is also a moment to reflect on these words and direct yourself.

## 3. Remaining Unashamed in Secret

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Xi (1130-1200), leading figure of the *lixue* or Cheng-Zhu school, who synthesized the ideas of the Cheng brothers, Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and others into a complete philosophical system

<sup>2</sup> from Zhu Xi's commentary on the *Zhongyong*

<sup>3</sup> *Shangdi*, the Shang dynasty's supreme god, later conflated with *Tian* (Heaven)

<sup>4</sup> from the *Book of Odes*, 236, Da Ming

<sup>5</sup> from the *Book of Odes*, 300, Bi Gong

<sup>6</sup> Art name of Zhen Dexiu. "Xishan" means "western mountain"

The *Odes* say:  
Seen in fellowship with the noble  
you keep your countenance so mild,  
careful not to transgress.  
Looking within your chamber,  
have nothing shameful in the inmost corner,  
without saying, This is private  
and none can see me here.  
The inquest of the spirits  
cannot be predicted;  
even less should they be slighted!<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Zheng<sup>2</sup> says: The spirits see a person's deeds. In vain you hide them away in darkness- though I do not see, the spirits see you.

Zhuzi says: When it speaks of being seen in fellowship with the noble, with a mild countenance, this is a warning to appear constantly self-aware in one's speech- how then can one transgress? To restrain common human feelings- such is seen among the manifestly cultivated, without fail; yet when you are seen dwelling alone in your chamber, have likewise nothing shameful in the inmost corner, where there is none to speak of, reveal or witness what you do. Also be aware of the mystery of spirits, formless and bodiless, who thus come as undetected observers. If you are still loath to err when no one is watching, how then can you slight or despise the spirits? This speaks not only of outer cultivation but also exhorts cautious fear where one is unseen and unknown.

#### **4. Guarding from Evil and Keeping Authenticity**

In the *Changes, Qian*, Nine in the Second Place, the Master says: (The virtuous person is) trustworthy in ordinary speech and careful in ordinary conduct, guarding from evil and keeping authenticity.

Chengzi<sup>3</sup> says: One who is trustworthy and cautious ordinarily, will perform also be so in haste.

He also says: (The task of) guarding from evil and following authenticity is self-maintained; it is not an authenticity that comes from outside oneself.

He also says: What is guarding from evil? When there is something against ritual yet one does not regard, hear, speak, or partake of it.

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<sup>1</sup> from the *Book of Odes*, 256, Yi

<sup>2</sup> Zheng Xuan (127-200 CE), Han dynasty commentator

<sup>3</sup> Chengzi (Master Cheng) could refer to either of the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi); most or all of the Chengzi quotes in the *Xinjing* are likely from Cheng Yi

## 5. Reverence and Righteousness

The *Changes*, in *Kun*<sup>1</sup>, Six in the Second place, says: The noble straightens the inside with reverence, and squares the outside with righteousness. With reverence and righteousness established, virtue is not isolated. "Straight, square, and great, without effort and without inhibition"- thus one has no doubts as to what must be done.

Yichuan<sup>2</sup> says: In establishing reverence and straightening the inside, forming righteousness and squaring the outside, the outer form of righteousness is not left out.

He also says: Unity of mind is called reverence; a straightened inside is precisely the righteousness of a united mind. As for not daring to deceive, not daring to be idle, and remaining unashamed in the inner courtyard- these are all matters of reverence. But preserving this self-discipline for a long time, one will naturally understand Heaven's pattern.

He also says: If the heart is reverent then the inner self is straight.

Yang Guishan<sup>3</sup> says: When one's heart is authentic to the furthest extent, and therefore without hypocrisy- this is what is called straight. As circumstances arise, to be certain and unwavering, through thick and thin, prosperity or disgrace- this is due to being square. Ruled by reverence and righteousness, one hence goes forth with discernment impervious to outer forces.

## 6. Decreasing Anger and Desire

The image for *Sun* (decrease) says: At the foot of the mountain is a pool: decrease. The noble therefore restrains anger and blocks desire.

Yichuan says: In the way of self-cultivation, what must be decreased is but anger and desire. Therefore they chastise their anger and inhibit their desires.

Yang Guishan says: When angry thinking cuts off the nine thoughts<sup>4</sup>, then it is hard to gain righteous thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> the second hexagram of the *Yijing*

<sup>2</sup> "Yichuan" is Cheng Yi's art name

<sup>3</sup> Yang Shi (1052-1135) a disciple of Cheng Yi

<sup>4</sup> Referring to the nine thoughts ascribed by Confucius to the noble in *Analects* 16:10: "There are nine patterns which are awarenesses of the noble man. In seeing, he is aware of clarity; in listening, he is aware of acuity; in faces, is aware of warmth; in the attitude he projects, he is aware of courtesy; in speech, sincerity; in service, reverence. In doubt, he is inclined to question; when angry, he is aware of the difficulties that may ensue. When he sees an opportunity for gain, he thinks of what would be Just." (A. Charles Muller's translation)

## 7. Following Virtue and Correcting Error

The image for *Yi* (Increase)<sup>1</sup> says: Wind and thunder: increase. The noble, seeing virtue, follows it; having errors, corrects them.

Mr. Wang's annotations say: Following virtue and correcting errors is the supreme increase.

Chengzi says: If one sees virtue and is able to follow it, then one may reach the height of virtue under heaven; if one sees errors and can correct them, then one is inerrant. Therefore the person of increase is supreme.

## 8. Straying and Returning

*Fu* (Return), nine in the first place: Returning from not far. No cause for regret. Greatly auspicious.<sup>2</sup>

The Master said: The son of the Yan clan is almost perfect. If he has a fault he doesn't fail to know it; knowing it, he does not return to it.<sup>3</sup>

Yichuan says: One may stray and then return, but what need is there to return if one does not stray? Nonetheless straying not far and then returning, having not come to regret, is greatly virtuous and auspicious.

He also says: Not going far and returning, the noble thus cultivate their moral conduct. They may have learned nothing else, but they know faults are quickly corrected through virtue alone.

Heng Qu<sup>4</sup> says: To know faults and not return to them, is to not repeat mistakes.

## 9. Conquering the Self, Returning to Ritual

The Master avoided four things: Ideas, certainties, hardness, and "I".<sup>5</sup>

Chengzi says: "Ideas," that is, selfish bias. "Certainties," that is, shortsighted certainties. "Hardness," that is, stubborn clinging. "I," that is selfishness.

Yan Yuan asked about humaneness. The Master said: To conquer oneself and return to ritual is to be humane. If one can conquer oneself and return to ritual for one day, the

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<sup>1</sup> Yijing, hexagram 42

<sup>2</sup> Yijing, hexagram 24

<sup>3</sup> From the Great Commentary, second part, of the Yijing. "The son of the Yan clan" is Yan Hui, Confucius' beloved disciple

<sup>4</sup> Art name for Zhang Zai (1020-1077), philosopher and uncle of the Cheng brothers

<sup>5</sup> Analects, 9:4

world will return to humaneness. Does humaneness come from oneself or others? Yan Yuan said: May I ask what the process is for this? The Master said: Not looking at what is against ritual, not hearing what is against ritual, not speaking what is against ritual, not doing what is against ritual. Yan Yuan said: Although I'm not quick-witted, I request to implement this teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Master Yang says: To defeat one's selfishness is called "to conquer."

Yichuan says: What is against ritual consists precisely in selfish bias. This being the case with selfish bias, how does one acquire humaneness? All people must utterly conquer selfishness, in all cases inclining to ritual- only then can they be humane.

Mister Xie says<sup>2</sup>: Self-conquest must come from oneself; if one has places that are stubbornly hard to discipline, they must be conquered.

## 10. Reverence and Mercy

Zhong Gong asked about humaneness. The Master said: Go out as if you were seeing a great guest; treat people as if offering a great sacrifice. What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. Be blameless in the state and blameless in the family. Zhong Gong said: Though I am not quick-witted, I request to implement this teaching.<sup>3</sup>

Yichuan says: "As if seeing a great guest, as if offering a great sacrifice"- this is reverence. Reverence accords with unselfishness. One irreverent act, in pursuit of selfish desires, harms the myriad sprouts of humaneness.

Zhuzi says: Be reverent by means of ruling yourself; be merciful by means of engaging with things- then selfish bias has no place to take hold, and the virtue of the heart is complete.

## 11. Never Parting from the Way

*The Constant Center*<sup>4</sup> says: What Heaven decrees is called nature; what follows nature is called the Way; what cultivates the Way is called teaching. What is the Way cannot be parted from for an instant; what can be parted from is not the Way. So the noble are cautious where unseen, and wary where unheard. There is nothing more seen than the hidden, nothing more obvious than the obscure, so the noble are cautious in their solitude. When joy, anger, sorrow, and delight are not yet arisen, this is called the Center; when they arise and act in due measure, this is called Harmony. The Center is the great root of all under heaven; Harmony is the pervasive Way for all under heaven. Realize the

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<sup>1</sup> Analects, 12:1

<sup>2</sup> Xie Liangzuo, disciple of Cheng Yi

<sup>3</sup> Analects, 12:2

<sup>4</sup> *Zhongyong*, also translated as "The Doctrine of the Mean". Attributed to Confucius' disciple Zisi.

Center and Harmony, and heaven and earth shall be in their places, and the myriad things flourish.<sup>1</sup>

Zhuzi says: Zisi clarifies that the root of the Way originates from Heaven and is unchanging in its substance. It begins in oneself and does not depart; then he speaks of the need to nurture and examine it; lastly he speaks of the miraculous powers of sages and gods at the fullness of its transformations. One learns to restrain passions by returning to this and examining it fully within oneself, and so naturally repel selfish outer temptations, and thus fulfill the virtue of one's root nature.

He also says: The noble's heart always keeps a reverent awe, not daring to be careless even though unnoticed. Therefore the root nature of Heaven's pattern is kept, and not parted from for even a fraction of an instant.

He also says: "Hidden," as in secret places. "Obscure," as in trifling matters. "Solitude", as in places other people do not know and known only to oneself. This says that even in the midst of darkness, and in petty matters, although the traces are yet unapparent and slight, it is already in motion; although other people do not know it and oneself alone knows it, yet there is nothing under heaven more obvious than this thing. Thus the noble is ever wary, and in this is especially careful, therefore nipping human desires in the bud, and not allowing them to grow amid hiddenness and obscurity; so the noble is far from departing from the Way.

## 12. Caution in Solitude

The Odes say, "Though they dive to the bottom and hide, they are quite apparent." Thus the noble searches within, that no guilt is found there and no mark of vileness. The noble is unmatched just there where other people cannot see.

The Odes say, "Looking within your chamber, have nothing shameful in the inmost corner."

Thus the noble is revered without acting, believed without speaking.<sup>2</sup>

Chengzi says: Learning begins with no deceit in dark chambers.

He also says: To have nothing shameful in the inmost corner, and be cautious in solitude, is to preserve and nurture character.

Zhuzi says: The places other people do not see- these are the matters of which the noble is cautious in solitude. Continuing from the previous text, it says the nobles are unrelenting in their guarded caution and dread; they have no need to act or speak and then be revered and believed, but they keep their own merits and accomplishments concealed.

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<sup>1</sup> The opening of the *Zhongyong*

<sup>2</sup> *Zhongyong* 33

### **13. Making Thoughts Authentic**

The Great Learning says: The meaning of "making thoughts authentic" is not deceiving oneself, as when one abhors a stench or enjoys a lovely sight. This describes self-contentment. So the noble are cautious in their solitude. Lesser people at leisure are unvirtuous without inhibition; seeing the noble, they then cover up, hiding their wickedness and donning their virtue. When people observe you, it is as if they see right to your lungs and liver, so what use is this? Thus we say that inward sincerity shows on the outside. So the noble are careful in their solitude. Zengzi said, "Ten eyes stare and ten hands point- how severe!" Abundance adorns a house, virtue adorns a person, the mind's breadth fills the body. Therefore the noble must make their thoughts authentic.

Zhuzi says: Solitude is the place other people don't know, which oneself alone knows. This speaks of those who desire self-cultivation, who know to become virtuous by removing their wickedness, and therefore earnestly apply their strength and refuse to deceive themselves. This enables them to abhor wickedness just as one abhors a foul stench, and enjoy virtue just as one enjoys a lovely sight. Both involve discerning what is to be removed and what must be sought. In this way one is pleased and satisfied within oneself, and cannot become so careless as to pursue externals and the whims of others. So whether one is true or false, this is concealed, so others cannot investigate it and only you alone can know it. So one must be cautious in this by examining one's particulars.

Zhuzi says: "Covering up," this is the appearance of erasing, blocking, or concealing. This speaks of how lesser people, who are unvirtuous in the dark, seek to hide it in the light. So they are not ignorant of the practice of virtue and the rejection of wickedness, but they simply cannot apply their strength to this end. Hence they seek to mask their wickedness but in the end cannot mask it, seek to fake virtue but in the end cannot fake it, so what good is this? This therefore is what the noble gravely guard against and must be cautious of in their solitude.

He also says: The heart being unashamed is thus vast, broad, and peaceful, and the body is ever at ease and secure.

### **14. Correcting the Mind**

[The Great Learning continues:] What is called self-cultivation lies in correcting the mind. If the self is angry, one cannot correct it; if it is afraid, one cannot correct it; if it is joyful, one cannot correct it; if it is grieved, one cannot correct it. When the heart is away, you look but don't see, listen but don't hear, eat but don't taste. This is what is meant by "self-cultivation lies in correcting your mind."

Zhuzi says: These four things are all workings of the heart, and human beings cannot lack them. So if one of these goes unexamined, then passion is aroused and triumphant, and if it takes its course, then one may be unable to correct it.

He also says: If the heart is unguarded, then one has no means to check oneself, so the noble must examine this and with reverence straighten it.

## 15. Ordering the Heart

The *Music* records: A noble says, Rites and music must not for a moment be neglected by anyone. Mastering music and thereby ordering the heart, a heart that is gentle, straight, loving, and honest is spontaneously born. With the gentle, straight, loving, and honest heart born, then comes joy; from joy comes peace; this peace becomes enduring; enduring, it becomes heavenly; heavenly, it becomes divine. One who is heavenly is believed without speaking; one who is divine is formidable without violence- such is the one who masters music and thereby orders the heart. Mastering the rites and thereby ordering oneself, one is thus grave and reverent. Grave and reverent, one is thus awesome. If in one's heart there is a moment's lack of harmony and joy, then a mean and fraudulent heart enters. If one's demeanor for a moment lacks gravity and reverence, then a careless, slothful heart enters. So music works upon one's inside, and ritual works upon one's outside. The fulfillment of music is harmony; the fulfillment of ritual is order. With one's inside harmonious and one's outside orderly, then the people gaze upon one's countenance and do not quarrel, they gaze upon one's demeanor and do not give rise to carelessness and sloth. Thus when virtue brightens one's inside, then there is none among the people who do not listen; when pattern pervades one's outside, then there is none among the people who do not obey. So it is said, Mastering the way of rites and music, and upholding and applying it, there shall be no difficulties under heaven. <sup>1</sup>

Mr. Zheng says: “Mastering,” as in deeply examining. “Spontaneously”, like a newborn’s good appearance. If the virtuous heart is born then there is scant avarice and one is joyful.

He also says: Music flows from the inside out, so it orders the mind. Ritual works from the outside, so it orders the body.

He also says: Meanness and fraud entering means that avarice is born.

[The *Music* says]: Nobles return to feelings to harmonize their will, and compare the kinds to perfect their conduct. Devious sounds and disordered sights do not detain their eyes and ears. Lewd music and depraved rites do not invade the powers of their heart. The qi of careless sloth and vicious contention has no place on their person. This makes their eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, the insight of their heart and the hundred body parts, all follow what is right in accord with their righteousness. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Record of Music*, 45. The *Record of Music* is the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Record of Rites*.

<sup>2</sup> *Yueji* 30

Tang Kong's<sup>1</sup> notes say: To "return to feelings" is to expel lusts. To "compare the kinds" is to analyze the kinds of virtue.

[The Music says:] The noble gladly attain their Way, lesser people gladly attain their desire. If the Way orders desire, one is joyous and not disordered. If desire obscures the Way, one is confused and unhappy.<sup>2</sup>

Zheng's annotations say: "The Way" refers to humaneness and righteousness; "desire" refers to excess and depravity.

Chengzi says: Although people cannot be without desire, they should act upon it with order. If one lacks order and merely obeys desire, then one abandons the human way and joins the beasts.

## 16. The Heart that Pities Others

Mengzi says: All humans have a heart that pities others. Former kings had a heart that pitied others, and therefore had a government that pitied others. If with this heart that pities others you run a government that pities others, then you could rule the world as if turning it in your palm.

Here is why I say all humans have a heart that pities others: Even now if someone saw a child about to fall into a well, anyone would be alarmed and have a compassionate heart, not from a desire to befriend the child's parents, nor from wanting praise by neighbors and friends, nor fear of infamy or anything like that. We can see from this that to lack a compassionate heart is inhuman, to lack an ashamed heart is inhuman, to lack a yielding heart is inhuman, to lack a heart discerning right and wrong is inhuman.

A compassionate heart is the sprout of humaneness; an ashamed heart is the sprout of righteousness; a yielding heart is the sprout of ritual; a heart discerning right and wrong is the sprout of wisdom. Humans have these four sprouts like they have their four limbs. Those who have these four sprouts, and say they are incapable, rob themselves; those who say their lord is incapable, rob their lord. We all have these sprouts within us, and if we all know how to grow and fulfill them, it would be like a fire catching or a spring welling up. If one could fulfill them it would be sufficient to rule the four seas; if one does not fulfill them, one would be unable to serve one's parents.<sup>3</sup>

Zhuzi says: A person's reasons for having this heart are nothing apart from these four, so one should consider compassion and examine it in detail. That is to say, anyone lacking this cannot be called human and so clarifying this is necessary.

He also says: "Grow" means to expand. "Fulfill" means to fill completely. "The four sprouts are within me"- they can be discovered anywhere. "All know," that is, this

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<sup>1</sup> Kong Yingda (574-648), illustrious descendent of Confucius, whose commentaries on Confucian classics became standard during the Tang dynasty

<sup>2</sup> *Yueji*, 32

<sup>3</sup> *Mengzi*, 2A:6

expansion; if it is fulfilled to its proper measure, and renewed daily, then desire cannot arise. If one is able to do this and at last fulfill it, one may even rule the four seas.

He also says: This passage discusses human nature and the workings and aspects of the heart in the most meticulous detail. The reader should deeply savor it.

Chengzi says: All humans have this heart. Only the noble can expand and fulfill it. Those who cannot, abandon themselves. So whether I fulfill it or not lies with me and no one else.

## **17. Humaneness, the Primal Virtue**

Mengzi says: How could the fletcher be less humane than the armor maker? The fletcher is afraid lest anyone not be injured; the armor maker is afraid lest anyone be injured. So too with the healer and the undertaker. So one must not be careless about one's trade. Confucius said, 'A humane village is beautiful- if you choose to not dwell in humaneness, how can you achieve wisdom?' Humaneness is the glory bestowed by heaven and a person's peaceful dwelling. No one can forbid humaneness, only lack of wisdom hinders it. Who is inhumane is unwise, who lacks ritual lacks righteousness, and is a servant of others. To be others' servant and be ashamed of it, is akin to a bowyer ashamed of making bows, or a fletcher ashamed of making arrows. If this is shameful, it is better to be humane. The humane are like archers- archers first correct themselves, then shoot. Shooting and missing the mark, they blame not those who surpass them but turn and search within themselves and nowhere else.

Zhuzi says: Humaneness, righteousness, ritual, and wisdom are all treasures bestowed by heaven. And one who is humane is the heart of heaven and earth and all that lives- who attains humaneness first at the same time gathers all four, and this is called the extension of the primal virtue. Hence it is called "glory." When it is in a person then it is like the entirety of the root-heart's virtue, having the natural peace of heaven's pattern, without peril of sinking and drowning in human passions. Someone who ever acts within it, and does not part from it for a moment, may thus be said to dwell in peace.

He also says: This is also because of a person's ashamed heart and the aspiration to extend to humaneness. He does not mention the heart of wisdom, ritual, and righteousness- humaneness contains all of the above. If one can be humane then the other three are in one's midst.

## **18. Grasping the Good Heart**

Mengzi says: A great person is one who does not lose the newborn heart. <sup>1</sup>

Zhuzi says: Insofar as a great person's wisdom encompasses the myriad things and a newborn is yet unaware, their hearts seem very different. Insofar as they are not tempted

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<sup>1</sup> *Mengzi*, 4B:12

by things and they are genuine and simple, without falsehood, they are not different at all. So he says therefore that to be a great person rests especially in this.

Mengzi says: The forests of Ox Mountain were once lovely, but because it neighbored a great city, lumberjacks cut them down- could it be lovely then? Yet being allowed to rest day and night, moistened by the rain and dew, there was no lack of sprouts and shoots to grow. Then cows and sheep grazed there, and so it seemed barren. People, seeing this barren mountain, thought it never had trees- but how could this be the mountain's nature?

As for people, how could they lack the heart of humaneness and righteousness? They may lose this good heart, like lumberjacks chopping down a forest- cut down dawn after dawn, how can it be lovely? Allowed to rest day and night and breathe the morning qi, one has likes and dislikes a little similar to those of other people, but one is constricted by one's daily actions. Constricted repeatedly, one's nighttime qi is insufficient. With an insufficient store of nighttime qi for survival, one cannot survive and is not far apart from beasts.

When people see one thus bestial, they wonder how this one could ever have talent. How could this be a person's nature? So if carefully nurtured, there is nothing that does not grow; not nurtured, there is nothing that does not wither. Confucius says: "Grasp it and you keep it; let it go and it withers. It comes and goes at no certain time, and no one knows its place." He speaks only of the heart. <sup>1</sup>

Zhuzi says: The "good heart" is the virtuous heart of the root-nature, that is to say, the heart of humaneness and righteousness. "Morning qi" refers to the qi of pure brightness, which has not yet mingled with things. "Likes and dislikes similar to those of other people" speaks of acquiring the commonality of the human heart. "Little"- not much. "Constricted," as by shackles. "Repeatedly," that is, continually. He is saying that although a person's good heart has been lost, yet it must also regenerate a little between day and night. So before the coming of dawn, when one's qi is pure and bright, the good heart can still certainly appear. But it appears until it is obscured and one's unvirtuous daytime actions come again and constrict it, like a mountain forest that has been hacked down, like sprouts shooting up and then grazed by cows and sheep. So if one's daytime actions are intense, they surely have the means to harm what one breathes at night; if what one breathes at night is weak, then all the less can it prevail over one's daytime actions, so they continually harm each other. As for morning qi, it cannot be pure, and is insufficient to preserve one's good heart of humaneness and righteousness.

He also says: Confucius says of the heart, grasp it and it is here; let it go and you lose it. Mengzi expands on this, clarifying that the heart's divine brightness cannot be fathomed, and the changes of gain and loss, and the difficulties of guarding it, cannot instantly efface what one has nurtured.

Chengzi says: How does the heart come and go? By being grasped and let go, and nothing else. The way of grasping is nothing more than reverence by means of

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<sup>1</sup> *Mengzi*, 6A:8

straightening the inside. My famous teacher says, "This passage points to something crucial- scholars should carefully enjoy it and deeply examine it."

## **19. Seeking the Lost Heart**

Mengzi says: Humaneness is the heart of the people, and righteousness the road of the people. What a pity it is to abandon this path and not follow it, to lose this heart and not know to seek it! When people's chickens or dogs are lost, they know to seek them, yet when they lose their heart they don't know to seek it. The way of learning is nothing other than seeking one's lost heart. <sup>1</sup>

Chengzi says: The heart's root is virtue, and to slide into wickedness is what is called losing it.

Zhuzi says: Humaneness is the heart's virtue. Chengzi compares the heart to a grain seed: what makes it grow is humaneness- that is his meaning. Yet the heart spoken of is not known by prying into oneself, so instead it is named "the heart of the people," and thus can be seen by the harmony of oneself with the Lord of myriad changes and cannot be lost in an instant. The proper conduct of the righteous is called "the road of the people" and can be seen by how their comings and goings necessarily follow the Way, and cannot abandon it for an instant.

He also says: If what is most precious is in my midst, and I lose it, this is pitiable.

He also says: Matters of learning certainly have more than one source, so in all such pursuits do not lose the correctness of the root-heart and avoid other ways.

Chengzi says: The thousand words and myriad sayings of the sages merely teach people to desire their lost hearts, inviting them to repeatedly enter into themselves, naturally enabling them to ascend in their search from lower studies to the heights. In this passage Mengzi instructs scholars in the method of self-exertion with the deepest penetration; scholars should bear it in mind and not overlook it.

## **20. Standing in the Great Self**

Mengzi says: If you have a third finger that's bent and can't be straightened, and it neither hurt nor hindered you, still the distance between Qin and Chu would not be too far to go if there's someone who can straighten it, because your finger is inferior to those of other people. You know to be ashamed if this finger is inferior to others' fingers, but if you don't know to be ashamed when your heart is inferior to other people's hearts, this is called not knowing categories. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Mengzi*, 6A:11

<sup>2</sup> *Mengzi*, 6A:12

Chengzi says: By “not knowing categories” he means one does not know how to prioritize and so is neglectful.

Mengzi says: Humans love all parts of themselves together. Loving all parts together, they nurture all parts together. As there is not an inch of flesh they do not love, there is not an inch of flesh they do not nurture. Therefore, how does one test if someone is virtuous or not? By what they choose and nothing more. The body has lofty and lowly, small and great parts; one does not harm the lofty parts by means of the lowly, or harm the great parts by means of the small. Who nurtures the small parts becomes a small human; who nurtures the great parts becomes a great human. Supposing a gardener abandons parasol and catalpa trees, and plants jujube and thorns- that would be a worthless gardener. Someone who nurtures one finger while neglecting the shoulders and back and forgetting them is rabid. Gluttons and drunkards are despised by other people, because they nurture the small and neglect the great. If gluttons and drunkards were not losing something great, then how could the mouth and stomach be deemed mere bits of flesh? <sup>1</sup>

Zhuzi says: The lowly and small are the mouth and stomach; the lofty and great are the heart and the will.

[From the Mengzi]: Gongduzi asked, "All are equally human, so how is it that some become great humans and some become small humans?" Mengzi replied, "Those who follow their great self become great, and those who follow their small self become small." Gongduzi asked, "All are equally human, so how is it that some follow their great self and some follow their small self?" Mengzi replied, "It is not the office of eyes and ears to think, and they get misled by things; things mix with things and just draw them in. The office of the heart is to think. Thinking, we get it; not thinking, we don't get it- Heaven has placed this in us. If we principally stand in what is great in us, our smallness is unable to rob it. This is how we become great humans." <sup>2</sup>

Zhuzi says: By "office" he means responsibility; ears are responsible for hearing, eyes are responsible for looking, and cannot think, so they get lost in outer things. As the heart is responsible for thinking, so outer things cannot mislead it; the ears and eyes therefore pertain to the small self and the heart therefore pertains to the great self. Since ears and eyes pertain to the small body and get misled by things, they too are a thing. As outer things mix in this thing, so they necessarily draw it in and away. Although the heart is the great body and cannot get lost in things, if it does not think and so does not grasp the pattern, then ears and eyes take charge of matters, and at last the heart too cannot escape being drawn into things and away. Although these two (small and great selves) are both bestowed by Heaven, one must principally stand in what is great.

Mengzi says: The starving find any food delicious, the thirsty find any drink delicious, having no standard for food and drink, for hunger and thirst have harmed it. Do hunger

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<sup>1</sup> *Mengzi*, 6A:14

<sup>2</sup> *Mengzi*, 6A:15

and thirst harm only the mouth and belly? The human heart is also harmed. If a person can prevent the harm of hunger and thirst from also harming the heart, then there is no worry about falling short of other people. <sup>1</sup>

Zhuzi says: The mouth and belly are harmed by hunger and thirst because they have no chance to choose among foods and drinks, and so lose their standards of taste; the human heart is harmed by poverty and disgrace because it has no chance to choose among riches and honors, and so loses its standards.

He also says: Humans can keep their hearts unaffected by poverty and disgrace, thus surpassing others by far. This passage says that humans should not harm the great by means of the small, nor harm the root by means of the tip.

## 21. Preserving the Heart of Shame

Mengzi says: I desire fish, and I also desire bear paw, but if I cannot get them both together, then I would forgo fish and choose bear paw. Likewise I desire life, and I also desire righteousness, but if I cannot get them both together, then I would forgo life and choose what is righteous. I desire life, but there is something I desire more than life, so I won't do just anything to get life; likewise I fear death, but there is something I fear more than death, so there are dangers I do not avoid.

If you teach people to desire nothing more than life, then they could do anything to get life, and what wouldn't they do? If you teach people to fear nothing more than death, then they'd do anything to avoid danger, and why not? So there are ways of staying alive that are not used, and ways of avoiding danger that are not done. So there is something desired more than life, and something feared more than death.

Not only the worthy and talented have this heart, all people have it- it's just that the worthy are capable of not losing it. If getting a basket of food and a bowl of soup is a matter of life or death, but they are given with insults, even a roadside tramp will not take them; if they're stomped on, even a beggar will disdain them. But a ten thousand bushel salary is accepted without any quibbles of ritual and righteousness. What will ten thousand bushels add to me? The beauty of a mansion, the esteem of wives and concubines, needy acquaintances in my debt? Before I did not accept to save my life, but now I accept for the sake of a beautiful mansion. Before I did not accept to save my life, but now I accept for the sake of wives' and concubines' esteem. Before I did not accept to save by life, but now I accept for the sake of having needy acquaintances in my debt- what wouldn't I do? This is called losing one's root heart. <sup>2</sup>

Zhuzi says: The "root heart" refers to the heart of shame. The three things mentioned are external to oneself, and their loss or gain is a very light matter compared to life and death. If before one would refuse trampled food offered with insults, even if it meant dying, yet now, for these three things one accepts this unrighteous, improper ten-thousand bushel salary, what wouldn't one do? The heart of shame is intrinsic to

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<sup>1</sup> *Mengzi*, 7A:27

<sup>2</sup> *Mengzi*, 6A:10

humanity, so what can determine life or death in a time of danger, cannot be laid aside in favor of wealth and status in a time of peace; therefore the noble must not be hasty and undiscerning in this.

## **22. Virtue or Profit**

Mengzi says: Who rises at cock-crow and multiplies virtue is a disciple of Shun; who rises at cock-crow and multiplies profit is a disciple of Zhi. If you want to know what separates Shun and Zhi, it's the space between virtue and profit.<sup>1</sup>

Chengzi says: He says "space" to mean they are not distant from each other- the breadth of a hair's tip and no more; the relation between virtue and profit is that between the impartial and the selfish, and that is all. Talent stems from virtue, opportunity from profitable talk.

Mr. Yang says: Shun and Zhi are far apart, and the difference lies in the space between profit and virtue and nothing more, so how can one not be cautious? So if the explanation is yet unfamiliar, and the picture unclear, that one does not become righteous by means of profit, again the scholar should deeply examine this. One might ask, 'Rising at cock-crow' seems to not connect with anything- what does it have to do with virtue? Chengzi says, "Merely abiding in reverence is precisely to be virtuous."

## **23. Decreasing Desires**

Mengzi says: In nurturing the heart, there is nothing better than decreasing desires. If someone has few desires, even if things are not kept, they are few; if someone has many desires, even if things are kept, they are few.<sup>2</sup>

Zhuzi says: He designates things pertaining to the mouth, nose, ears, eyes, and four limbs as desires. Although a human cannot be without them, if they are many and uncontrolled, one never fails to lose the root heart. Scholars should be deeply guarded against this.

Chengzi says: One need not wallow in desires to then be desirous- if one slightly inclines toward it, one is desirous.

Nan Xuan<sup>3</sup> says: If a slight inclination makes you desirous, then many desires lead to a hundred anxieties and confusions- you race out of your mind, and what do you keep?

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<sup>1</sup> *Mengzi*, 7A:25

<sup>2</sup> *Mengzi*, 7B:35

<sup>3</sup> Art name for Zhang Shi (1133-1181), scholar, commentator, and friend of Zhu Xi

Zhouzi's<sup>1</sup> Discourse on Nurturing the Heart says: Mengzi says, "In nurturing the heart, there is nothing better than reducing desires. If someone has few desires, even if things are not kept, they are few; if someone has many desires, even if things are kept, they are few." I say that nurturing the heart does not stop at reducing desires, with some remaining, but reduces them to none. Reducing them to none, sincerity is established and brightness penetrates. Whose sincerity is established is a worthy; whose brightness penetrates is a sage. This worthy sagehood is not inborn but must be attained by nurturing the heart. Nurturing the heart to such greatness is to simply gain one's humanity.

Zhouzi's Penetrating Book says: "Can sagehood be learned?" Reply: It can. "Does it have requirements?" Reply: It does. "I ask to hear them." Reply: It requires oneness. Oneness is to have no desires; having no desires, one is then empty in stillness and straight in action. Empty in stillness, one is then bright; bright, one is then penetrating. Straight in action, one is then impartial; impartial, one is then pervasive. Bright, penetrating, impartial, pervasive- it is almost finished!

Chengzi says: When Yan Yuan asked about the process of conquering oneself and returning to ritual, the Master replied, "Not looking at what is against ritual, not hearing what is against ritual, not speaking what is against ritual, not doing what is against ritual"- these four are one's methods. If one follows them within and accords with them without, one is ordered on the outside and therefore nurtured within. Yan Yuan is therefore speaking about the entrance to sagehood. Those who study sagehood should hold this close and not neglect it, so I caution myself with these admonitions.

### **Conclusion: Admonition Poems**

[Chengzi's] Admonition on Looking says:

The heart, its root in emptiness,  
responds to things without a trace.  
What you must have to hold it well  
can be shown in the case of looking.  
Clouded by outward contact,  
one is thereby changed within.  
Ordered on the outside,  
one thus has inner peace.  
Conquer yourself and return to ritual,  
then in time you shall be authentic.

His Admonition on Hearing says:

Humans have a standard

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<sup>1</sup> Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073), philosopher who briefly taught the Cheng brothers- his exposition of *Taiji* cosmology and his ascetic principles were enormously influential for later Song Confucians

rooted in their heavenly nature.  
Knowledge is tempted by the changes of things,  
finally losing its rightness.  
Brilliant is the one with foresight,  
whose knowledge is not trapped.  
Guard from evil, keep sincere,  
hearing nothing against the rites.

His Admonition on Speaking says:

The movements of the human heart  
are declared by means of speech.  
Refusing to send forth peevish rashness,  
one's inside is thus still and focused.  
Moreover speech is the pivot  
by which war springs or peace goes forth;  
fortune or misfortunate, honor or disgrace  
only there do they convene.  
Speaking too easily leads to boasting,  
speaking too freely leads to triteness.  
If one is unruly, others are disordered,  
send out contention and quarreling comes.  
Speak no lawlessness!-  
Respect this instruction.

His Admonition on Movement says:

The wise know the source,  
and are sincere to it in thought;  
the resolute are firm in action,  
and guarded in their doings.  
Following the pattern, one is enriched,  
but obeying desires, one is imperiled.  
When hurried, be able to reflect;  
in turmoil, maintain yourself.  
Whether by study or by nature formed,  
the sages arrive at the same place.

Mr. Fan's<sup>1</sup> Admonition of the Heart says:

Vast, vast are heaven and earth-  
searched up and down they are boundless.  
Humans in their midst-  
so tiny is their body!

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Jun, 1102-1150, scholar and teacher of Zhu Xi

A small fraction of this body,  
like a grain in a great storehouse,  
is placed among the Three Powers<sup>1</sup>-  
I speak of nothing other than the heart.  
From ancient times to now,  
who has lacked this heart?  
The heart in servitude to forms  
is then like beasts and birds-  
all because the mouth, ears and eyes,  
hands and feet, motion and stillness,  
invade its calm and press through the cracks  
to make the heart unsettled.  
A single heart's smallness,  
assailed by numerous desires-  
how much can it hold to?  
Alas! Precious little.  
The nobles keep authentic,  
remaining attentive and reverent.  
Heavenly lords are tranquil,  
and the hundred organs obey them.

Zhuzi's "Admonition from the Studio of Reverence":

Adjust your clothes and cap  
and dignify your gaze;  
collect your heart with steadfastness;  
toward the awesome Lord on High,  
one's gait must be firm,  
and gestures be respectful.  
Discern the ground you tread on,  
veering round the ant hills.  
Go out as if to meet a guest;  
handle matters like a sacrifice.  
With fear and trembling,  
do not dare to be at ease.  
Guard your mouth like a stoppered bottle,  
defend your thoughts like a walled city.  
Penetrating and collected,  
do not dare to be careless.  
Go not east by means of west,  
go not south by means of north.  
Attend to a thing and keep to it,  
not straying after others.

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<sup>1</sup> The Three Powers (*san cai*) are heaven, earth, and humanity.

Be not doubled by two,  
nor be tripled by three.  
Only essence, only oneness,  
can direct the myriad changes.  
Undertake matters thus-  
this is called grasping reverence.  
In movement and stillness be blameless,  
inside and outside mutually straightened.  
In the space of an instant,  
myriad selfish desires sprout up-  
burning though there is no fire,  
shivering though there is no ice.  
By the difference of a hair's breadth,  
heaven and earth change places,  
the three bonds are dissolved,  
and the nine laws lapse as well.  
Alas, my child!  
Be studious and reverent!  
Literati, take up these warnings,  
daring to announce them at the numinous terrace<sup>1</sup>.

The inscription of the Seeking the Strayed Heart Studio says:

The transformations of heaven and earth-  
their awareness is humaneness.  
It is completed in me,  
and so rules my self.  
What is this ruler?  
The ineffable spiritual clarity.  
Manifesting myriad changes,  
it establishes the peak of humanity.  
Let go for a moment,  
it rushes a thousand miles.  
Without authenticity, how can you have it?  
Without reverence, how can you keep it?  
Who loses it, who keeps it?  
Who lacks it, who has it?  
Flexing and stretching arms,  
turning hands up and down,  
being careful of the slightest and cautious in solitude,  
this is constant vigilance.  
Sharply inquire, reflect on things at hand,

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<sup>1</sup> In Daoist physiology, the numinous terrace (*lingtai*) can refer to several points in the body but most likely refers to the heart region here

Speak only with discernment.

The inscription at Honoring Virtuous Nature Studio says:

Steadfast August Lord on High,  
descend unto these lowly people,  
that you may by means of me  
speak of righteousness and humaneness.  
To preserve righteousness and humaneness  
is to preserve the norm of God.  
Respect and carry this  
as if fearing not to win.  
What a benighted and mad,  
careless, cheap, slovenly,  
lewd-eyed, lavish-eared,  
lazy-limbed  
light-of-heaven-mocking,  
humanity-insulting era!  
To relish these vulgarities,  
accumulating swarms of evils-  
this is for me to decide.  
Who honor the kernel of their heart  
have serenity in their home,  
and radiance on their faces,  
holding precious offerings in abundance.  
In a flash there is hardship,  
heavy loads on distant paths,  
for those who dare to be careless.

Xishan's Praise of the Heart Scripture:

The gift and acceptance of Shun and Yu:  
from these sixteen words<sup>1</sup>  
through all ages, the learning of the heart  
takes its origin.  
What is the human heart?  
Born in the form of qi,  
fed for myriad hours-  
its loss and gain must be discerned.  
Conquering, ruling, keeping, nurturing

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<sup>1</sup> The exhortation quoted at the beginning of the *Xin Jing*, from the “Counsels of Yu the Great”: “The human heart is restless, the heart of the way subtle; be discerning, be one, faithfully holding the center.”

and handing over his achievement-  
Shun! what person  
in this era is like him?  
If I preserve this heart of the Way,  
master of myriad virtues,  
what Heaven has endowed in me-  
this is its greatness.  
The square inch collected,  
the Supreme Pivot resides in oneself.  
Dispersed among the myriad things,  
its power is not exhausted.  
If there is a jeweled spirit turtle,  
if there is a jade disc offering,  
bear this constantly in mind,  
and they can have no influence.  
Examine the ancient forebears,  
throughout history and tradition-  
grasping the essentials, applying broadly,  
which of these came first?  
When I became a prefect,  
obstructing weeds were fearsome,  
so I gathered up these maxims  
so as to cleanse my innards.  
A bright window and a yew desk,  
clear daylight and the stove's warmth,  
an open book and solemnity-  
with these things I am a heavenly lord.

### **Postscript of the Scripture of the Heart:**

Mister Xishan collected these maxims of the sages for his own assistance. His study of the heart led him to Kaoting and up the Lian, Luo, Zhu, and Si rivers<sup>1</sup>, to their source, arriving at the mastery of preserving and nurturing. Thus he conducted himself, that if "the Lord on High is watching you," he could face it to the utmost and without shame.

He watched over people and protected them like they were a newborn child crying, "My body is wracked with itching and painful sickness!" He carried himself at court with worry for the country, as of hunger and thirst; his words were always sincere and with a sorrowful expression, and straightforward without ostentation. When he desired to offer counsel, it was as if he fasted for an audience with the gods and hoped they would notice him.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaoting, in Fujian province, was Zhu Xi's final residence and the site of his academy. The Lian and Luo rivers are associated with Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers, respectively; Confucius was buried between the Zhu and Si rivers.

In time he withdrew and built a cabin at the foot of Mount Yue. Although it was a quiet place, he always faced forward like an emperor. The books he wrote were always rooted in the *Constant Center* and the *Great Learning*. Although he played with pen and ink<sup>1</sup>, it sprang solely from uprightness.

So just as Evening Qi Studio and Wu Studio have their admonitions, Reverence and Righteousness Studio had its inscription: "In the evening guard again the spring, returning to finish compiling this book; rising at daybreak, incense must be burned while sitting upright, having recited ten or more times, 'Not a day without study, not a thing unlearned'." His inside and outside mutually nourished each other in this way.

If I, in my old age, am unable to advance in study, I still may be ambitious this way: to hand copy this scripture, reciting it in the daytime and pondering it by night, and maybe, if I can, carving it on boards at the county school, to exhort my comrades. During the Duanping era<sup>2</sup>, 15th day of the 10th month, I, junior pupil Yan, reverently record this.

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<sup>1</sup> *Youxi hanmo*, playing with pen and ink, refers to the enjoyment of painting and calligraphy

<sup>2</sup> The third era of Emperor Lizong's rule, from 1234 to 1236

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