

ELEVEN

DEATH AS THE ULTIMATE CONCERN IN THE NEO-CONFUCIAN TRADITION

Wang Yangming's Followers as an Example

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INTRODUCTION

A prevalent view of Confucianism is that Confucian scholars have paid great attention to the value and significance of life while overlooking the question of death, which has been treated as a very important issue in Buddhism, Daoism, and the Western philosophical tradition. Confucian scholars are widely seen as responding to death by ritualizing living people's sorrow toward the dead and by encouraging the establishment of virtues, deeds, and words to realize the immortality of spiritual life.¹ The lines "Not yet understanding life, how could you understand death? (未知生, 焉知死?),"² said by Kongzi 孔子, have often been quoted to underpin this attitude toward death. As far as the Confucian tradition before the mid-Ming dynasty is concerned, this observation is roughly correct. The question of death was indeed relatively marginalized in Confucian texts before the mid-Ming; as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) said, "The records of the sages and the worthies in the six classics are rich, but discussions about death almost cannot be found. The reason for this is that most Confucian scholars treat death as nothing but an ordinary event in daily life." (六經記載聖賢之行事備矣, 而於死生之際無述焉, 蓋以生為常事也。)³ Although death in the Chinese tradition

in general and the Confucian tradition in particular has received quite deep and detailed attention, the previous studies on this topic are basically limited to the Classical period, at least as far as the Confucian tradition is concerned.⁴ Can we, however, consequently assert there has been no deep reflection upon and insight into death at all in the larger Confucian tradition? In fact, among Neo-Confucian scholars in the middle and late Ming dynasty, especially among the students and followers of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1528), death as an ultimate concern received considerable attention. When this important period is taken into consideration, the prevailing observation on death in the Confucian tradition mentioned above will need to be largely revised.

In this article, I shall take Confucians in the middle and late Ming dynasty, mostly the followers of Wang Yangming, as an example to probe death as an ultimate concern in the Neo-Confucian tradition. My account includes three interrelated aspects. First, relying upon original evidence, I will point out that the taboo regarding talking about death changed dramatically and that concern with death became a central focus and explicit problem for a large number of Confucian scholars in general and among the followers of Wang in particular. Second, I will show that these Confucians' concern about death arose not only from the influence of Buddhism but also from the political environment in which they lived. Finally, I will compare the striking views advocated by Wang's followers about the way to liberate oneself from death with those of Buddhism. I will argue that the origin of the fundamental difference in their responses to death lies in the very different ontological bases of Confucianism and Buddhism. Spiritually, a Confucian may accept *wu 無*, in the sense of "detachment," as a kind of living wisdom. Ontologically, however, a Confucian cannot give up *you 有*, "existence," or morality as an ultimate commitment. We can therefore see that the Confucian tradition contributes—as other religious-ethical traditions in the world have done—a rich resource to our understanding of death as an ultimate concern of human beings.

DEATH: A FOCUS OF AWARENESS AMONG WANG YANGMING'S FOLLOWERS

Until the Song dynasty, Confucian scholars, following Kongzi's attitude, had basically regarded death as an unavoidable and natural phenomenon and had always faced it peacefully and without great discussion. "In life I follow and serve. In death I will be at peace (存, 吾順事; 沒, 吾寧也。)," stated Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077) in his famous *Ximing* 西銘 (Western Inscription). So, in order to make a convincing case for the claim that death constituted a central focus of awareness among mid-to-late Ming dynasty Confucian scholars, especially Wang's followers, the first step is to show

that these scholars had come to understand the exploration of death as an intrinsic dimension of the Confucian tradition rather than as something that belonged only to the Buddhist and Daoist traditions. Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583), one of the most brilliant students of Wang Yangming and the most important figure within the late-Ming Wang Yangming School, suggested that the question of how to resolve the problem of death should be an integral part of a Confucian sage's learning: "If one cannot explore and come to understand the fundamental causes of life and death, then even brilliant work, outstanding talent, and the most successful career will in an instant turn into empty trappings when death comes upon one. In the end, all those things eventually have nothing to do with the life, of what benefit will they be? (若非究明生死來去根因, 縱使文章蓋世, 才望超群, 勳業格天, 緣數到來, 轉眼便成空華, 身心性命了無干涉, 亦何益也?)"⁵ Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 (1547–1629), a student of Wang Ji's, further believed that death should be consciously and explicitly pondered by everybody as one of the fundamental questions of human experience. Zhou said: "It is impossible to transcend secular affairs in daily life without understanding the way of life and death; it is impossible to forget about interest, gain, and loss in daily life without understanding the way of life and death. So, those who avoid talking about theories of life and death are simply unthinking. (生死不明, 而謂能通眼前耳目見聞之事者, 無有是理; 生死不了, 而謂能忘眼前利害得失之動者, 亦無有是理。故於死生之說而諱言之者, 其亦不思而已矣。)"⁶ In the same spirit as these remarks, Guan Zhidao 管志道 (1536–1608), a contemporary of Zhou's, criticized Confucian scholars of the Song dynasty for missing an inner dimension of Confucianism even while acknowledging their great contributions to the reconstruction of the Confucian way: "Those great Confucians in the Song dynasty made significant contributions to the support of Confucian ethics and to reverence of the Confucian way, but, unfortunately, they never made any profound exploration of Kongzi's teachings about the mysteries of life and death and the transformations of the spirit, and so they lost sight of these. (有宋大儒, 扶綱常而尊聖道, 厥功不細, 而未嘗深究吾夫子幽明死生遊魂為變之說, 是以失之。)"⁷ Although there were many differences, both obvious and subtle, among mid-to-late Ming Confucians, there was almost no disagreement among them when it came to treating death as a crucial element both of the Confucian tradition and of personal ultimate concern.

Everybody has to face the possibility of death coming at any moment as soon as one comes into this world. Life and death are inseparable; they are two sides of living. It is impossible for those who have a real embodied understanding of the meaning and significance of living to think of death as something far away from us that can be disregarded. Indeed, it is precisely for such reasons that many Western philosophers have taken death so seriously. For example, as Bert Hucker has said, learning how to face death was an

integral part of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy in general and the Hellenistic tradition in particular: it constituted a spiritual exercise.⁹ Herbert Fingarette has also made several illuminating insights about death and cited many discussions of death by ancient Western philosophers.¹⁰ In the traditional Chinese context, it is exactly because a concern with death is not a problem with which only Buddhism and Daoism had been wrestling that so many Confucian scholars, especially those who lived and wrote in the late Ming dynasty, also expressed their strong concern about death as a fundamental anxiety. This is seen very clearly in a number of their poems. As a matter of fact, expressing an explicit or implicit concern about death in poetry was very popular throughout the history of Chinese literature. So, the relative silence of pre-Qin Confucian scholars about death does not mean that this problem was overlooked or ignored. On the contrary, the ostensible silence on this topic may indicate a high level of active and deep deliberation.

Most Neo-Confucians in the Northern Song dynasty criticized the Buddhist and Daoist concern with death as nothing but thinly veiled selfish desires for life and fear of death. As Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) said:

Buddhism simply seeks to scare people with talk about life and death. It may seem strange that nobody has realized this for the last two thousand years, but this just shows that they have succeeded in scaring most people. The sage and the worthy take life and death as ordinary aspects of people's lives and there is no need to fear, so, they don't talk about life and death. It is only because Buddhists fear life and death that they can't stop talking about them. (佛學只是以生死恐動人，可怪二千年來，無一人覺此，是被他恐動也。聖賢以生死為本分事，無可懼，故不論生死。佛之學為怕生死，故只管說不休。)¹¹

This dominant opinion in the Song dynasty among Confucian intellectuals, however, changed strikingly by the mid-to-late Ming. Wang Yang-ming already acknowledged that "thoughts about life and death are rooted in and arise along with life and so it is very difficult to get rid of them (人於生死念頭，本從生身命根上帶來，故不易去。)"¹² Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596) further confirmed that "the desire for life and the fear of death are simply human nature and there is no difference in this regard between the worthy and ordinary people. How can one say there is no attachment to this common feeling? (蓋好生惡死，賢愚同情，即彼不著，焉得不著耶？)"¹³ Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540–1620), a student of Geng's and one of the leading Confucian intellectuals in the late Ming, not only followed Geng's idea but explicitly elaborated the rightness of the desire for life and the fear of death. Jiao said in a reply to a friend:

There is an old saying that Daoists bemoan people's attachment [to life] and so deliberately attract people by teaching about longevity at the very beginning and then lead them to the Dao. I would like to say that Buddhist teachings about liberation from the cycle of life and death are just like this. People practice Daoism because they long for longevity. When they master Daoist teachings, they realize that the authentic self is always activated; people practice Buddhism because of their fear of death. When they finally attain the wisdom of Buddhism, they understand that the authentic self is ultimately beyond death. This reflects living people's fundamental inclinations and the shortest way to the Dao. Some Confucians may say that this desire to escape the cycle of life and death is just an attempt to benefit the self, but does this mean those Confucians have no fear of death? Or do they just hide that fear in their hearts and deceive one another? If they really don't have any delight in life and fear of death at all, then those books of Buddhism can be thrown away. But they, I am afraid, will finally be moved by the fear of death simply because they are not ultimately enlightened. Even though they say they are not moved by the fear of death, isn't this just forced speech rather than real feeling? (古云：黃者悲世人貪著，以長生之說，漸次引之入道。按：此語本自張伯端《悟真篇後序》。余謂佛言出離生死，亦猶此也。蓋世人因貪生乃修玄，玄修既微，即知我自長生。因怖死乃學佛，佛慧既成，即知我本無死。此生人之極情，入道之徑路也。儒者或謂出離生死為利心，豈其絕無生死之念耶？抑未隱諸心而漫言此以相欺耶？使果毫無悅生惡死之念，則釋氏之書政可束之高閣。第恐未悟生死，終不能不為生死所動。雖曰不動，直強言耳，豈其情乎？)¹⁴

For Jiao Hong, the desire for life and the fear of death are normal human feelings. Only after gaining a thorough understanding of life and death can people really be unmoved by both. If people cannot face the desire for life and the fear of death as psychological realities and simply try to dismiss them as selfish concerns, it is nothing but hypocrisy. In this regard, another Confucian scholar of the late Ming, Yang Qiyuan 楊起元 (1547–1599), not only has the same opinion as Jiao but also further pointed out the positive significance of a fear of death for pursuing the way of the sage. In Yang's view, the fear of death is such a common feature of the human psyche that even a sage cannot get rid of it. The attitude toward death of Song Confucian intellectuals such as Cheng Hao, as mentioned previously, not only conflicts with genuine human nature but also makes people walk away from the way of sage. In his *Da youren bu pa si shuo*: 答友人不怕死說 (Reply to a friend about no fear of death), he said:

According to the Great Appendix to the *Book of Changes*, the way is not distant from people. Those who try to attain the way but are distant from people actually cannot attain the way. Death is something everybody fears. Since the sage is also a human being, is it reasonable to say that the sage does not fear death? . . . Every opportunity the sage has for saving the world arises by taking into account people's fear of death. This is called attaining the way by not being distant from people. Those who transcend life and death by hearing the way, and especially those who are committed to leading the world to peace and safety, only succeed after experiencing an extreme fear of death. Those Confucian scholars in the Song dynasty avoided talking about the fear of death. The result is nothing but initially concealing the real feeling under the guise of having no fear of death and finally coming to really have no fear of death and to really be far from the way. Oh! They simply did not think! (《傳》曰：道不遠人。人之為道而遠人，不可以為道。死者，人人所共怕也。聖人亦人耳，謂其不怕死，可乎？ . . . 凡聖人所以濟世之具，皆起於怕死而為之圖，此之謂不遠人以為道也。而聞道以離生死，尤其濟世之大而舟楫之堅者。惟怕死之極，然後有之。後世儒者諱言怕死二字，故其始也，姑以不怕死為名，而昧其中情。其既也，遂以不怕死為實，而去道實遠。嗚呼！其亦不思而已矣！)¹⁵

For both Jiao and Yang, the fear of death is not only human nature but also constitutes a motivation for the pursuit of the way for common people. The greater the fear of death people have, the stronger their motivation for pursuing the way. Obviously, in acknowledging that the fear of death constitutes an integral part of the ultimate concern of the Confucian tradition, quite a few Confucian intellectuals in the mid-to-late Ming dynasty no longer generally denied that mentality. Rather, they started to appreciate the fear of death and positively regarded it as an important inner experience that can be transformed into a motivation for pursuing the Confucian way. This recognition seems to contradict the view advocated by Song dynasty Confucian scholars such as Zhang Zai and Cheng Hao. As a matter of fact, however, it should be understood as a further development of these earlier ideas. Cheng Hao's attitude toward death "as the ordinary result of people's life and there is no need to fear" is actually not abandoned by the Ming Confucian intellectuals previously introduced. For those mid-to-late Ming Confucians, the attitude described by Cheng Hao is the final stop along the way and the highest spiritual achievement as well; it is the common pursuit of all Confucians. The key, however, is that only by starting from the premise that the "desire for life and fear of death" is part of human nature can people ultimately realize the high spiritual achievement that "regards

death as an ordinary, not fearful, result of human life." Those familiar with the story of Wang Yangming's enlightenment at Longchang 龍場, Guizhou 貴州, in 1508, will immediately realize that the crucial moment of the event was his transcendence of nothing other than the fear of death as a subtle consciousness rooted in his life.

Since deliberation on death was regarded as an intrinsic dimension of the ultimate Confucian concern, the desire for life and fear of death could also be a trigger for the pursuit of the way of the sage; whether or not a person could peacefully face the threat of death became a criterion for reaching the level of sage. As Wang Ji said in a letter to one of his students, "As long as one can maintain a sense of peace and serenity in the course of daily life, one naturally will not be unsettled and frantic when death is near. If one often cannot maintain a sense of peace and serenity in the course of daily life, how can one be peaceful and serene when death is near? (平時澄靜，臨行自然無散亂。平時散亂，臨行安得有澄靜?)"¹⁶ Zha Duo 查鐸 (1516–1589), another student of Wang Ji's, also said in a letter, "People in ancient times often said life and death are great affairs. If one can handle the coming of death peacefully one will have nothing to fear. But this achievement cannot be reached without lifelong cultivation. (古人每謂生死為大事，此處了得，則諸念了矣，然非臨時所可襲取。)"¹⁷ In fact, Zha Duo indeed paid a great deal of attention to the death of his teacher. Because of the spread of some critical gossip about Wang Ji, Zha made a point of visiting Wang's house to enquire how his master was doing. As far as Zha could tell, the gossip was nothing but empty rumor and his master, while dying, was as poised as ever. Coming to this conclusion, Zha finally felt at ease and wrote a detailed record of Wang Ji's death to make it clear to the public just how his master faced his own death.¹⁸ Similarly, in a sacrificial article to Zha, Xiao Yan 肖彥, his disciple, deliberately recorded Zha's serene death. According to Xiao's account, not only did Zha peacefully face his death, he even predicted its date.

Actually, there were many similar records of Wang Yangming's followers in the late Ming. For the sake of brevity, let me cite only two further examples here. One is Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1540); the other is Luo Rufeng 羅汝芳 (1515–1588). The death of Wang Gen, another leading Confucian as notable as Wang Ji but almost wholly lacking in education, was depicted in the following manner in his chronological biography:

A few days before the master [Wang Gen] died, there was always an area of light in his bedroom at night. Everyone thought this was an auspicious sign, but the master said, "That actually means I am going to pass away." As the master was about to die, all his sons wept and asked if he had any final words. He turned to his second son, Wang Bi 王卬 (1511–1587), and said, "You understand my

learning, what more is there for me to worry about?" . . . Throughout the entire process of dying, the master was quiet and peaceful, both spiritually and physically. Even when he was encoffined, the look of the master remained as serene as ever. (先是臥室內竟夜有光燭地，眾以為祥。先生(王良)曰：“吾將逝乎。”至病革，諸子泣，請後事。顧仲子爨曰：“汝知學，吾復何憂？”……神氣凝定，暈暝目。是為八日子時也。及殮，容色瑩然不改。) ¹⁹

If Wang Ji was noted for his lucid and eloquent writing, Luo Rufang, younger than Wang, was equally well known as a persuasive speaker who could pull at people's heartstrings. It was said that this Confucian figure of the late Ming even could determine the date of his own death. His dying was portrayed in the following way:

On the first day of the ninth month, the master [Luo Rufang] came out of the hall; sitting upright he bade his grandsons approach him with wine and to drink a little bit themselves one by one. After that, he bowed and took leave of all those around him, saying, "I am ready to go." When they all beseeched him to stay one more day, the master agreed. At noon on the following day, the master put his clothes and hat in order, sat upright, and departed from this world. (九月朔，盤礴出堂，端坐，命諸孫次第進酒，各各微飲，隨拱手別諸生曰：“我行矣。”諸生懇留盤桓一日，許之。初二日午刻，整衣冠，端坐而逝。) ²⁰

According to biographical records, Confucian intellectuals such as Wang Gen and Luo Rufang here not only could face the coming of death with spiritual and physical peace but also could sometimes control or at least predict the date of their own deaths. Some Western scholars have questioned the reliability of this kind of biography, doubting that these are actual accounts of real life recorded without exaggeration. ²¹ This skepticism, of course, can help us to realize the possible discrepancies between biography and real life. No matter how reliable these records might be, however, these narratives strongly suggest that the attitude toward death—that is to say, whether or not one could face death with spiritual and physical serenity—was an important index for measuring whether one had attained the highest stages of the Confucian way. For instance, Gao Panlong 高攀龍 (1562–1621) once evaluated the relative spiritual accomplishments of Zeng Zi 曾子 and Wang Yangming by exploring how well they dealt with the coming of death. In his view, the achievements of these two Confucian masters were precisely defined by their attitudes toward death. Gao wrote

Zengzi insisted on changing the mat he was sitting on so that he would not violate proper ritual even at the moment of his

death: this reveals the true nature of Zeng Zi. Wang Yangming died after reaching Nan'an: this reveals the true nature of Wang Yangming. Zengzi said, "I am correct and so can pass away; there is nothing more." This is what made Zengzi the person he was. Wang Yangming's last words were, "This heart-mind is luminous and bright. What more is there to say?" This is what made Wang Yangming the person he was. (曾子易箦而卒，便顯出個曾子，陽明至南安而卒，便顯出個陽明。曾子曰：“吾得正而斃焉，斯已矣。”此曾子所以為曾子矣。陽明曰：“此心光明，更復何言？”此陽明所以為陽明也。) ²²

Gao's strategy was to quote Zeng's and Wang's last words in order to reveal and attest to their tranquil acceptance of death.

The significant change regarding death in the Confucian tradition that occurred in the mid-to-late Ming dynasty consisted of three related aspects. First, the taboo against explicitly talking about death was exploded and a concern with death became an important, publicly discussed topic, which, as a focus of awareness among leading Confucians of the day, was no longer concealed behind a veil of ignorance. Second, the desire for life and the fear of death were positively appreciated not only as expressions of a common human nature but also, if transformed properly, as strong motivations for pursuing the Confucian way. Third, whether one could face death without any spiritual and physical unease became an important criterion for evaluating one's spiritual advancement along the Confucian way.

WHY PAY ATTENTION TO DEATH, AND HOW TO LIBERATE ONESELF FROM DEATH? THE RESPONSE OF WANG YANGMING'S FOLLOWERS

Attention to life and death has been a sharp and long-standing focus of the Buddhist and Daoist traditions; Buddhism especially has contributed rich resources to the analysis of death. For Confucian scholars, particularly the followers of Wang Yangming, their perennial interplay with and amalgamation of Buddhist thought and practice was one very important reason that a strong and explicit concern about death became a central interest among them. Simply put, that death became an ultimate concern of Confucian scholars in the mid-to-late Ming was a natural outcome of the long-standing mutual influence between Confucianism and Buddhism. As a matter of fact, the three interrelated concerns with death that characterized Wang Yangming's followers, which were discussed previously, are closely associated with the Buddhist tradition. As Hkushan Deqing 慈山德清 (1545–1623), one of the four famous Buddhist masters of the late Ming, said: "Since ancient times, the reason people left their families to become Buddhists was because of the great affairs of life and death. The reason that Buddha came into this world was for no other reason

than to reveal this point. There is no Buddhist teaching apart from life and death. Also, there is no life and death apart from Buddhist teaching. (世上古人出家本為生死大事，即佛祖出世，亦特為開示此事而已，非於生死外別有佛法，非於佛法外別有生死。)²³ Taking the desire for life and the fear of death seriously as expressions of a fundamental anxiety and transforming these emotional responses into an inner dynamic for pursuing the way has been a common experience of Buddhists throughout history. Furthermore, taking the acceptance of death with tranquility as a criterion for achievement and enlightenment also has a Buddhist origin. In the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Great Buddhist Masters*) by Hui Jiao 慧皎 (497–554), a Buddhist of the Liang 梁 dynasty, we can find numerous records of many Buddhist masters who were tranquil, serene and poised when they were dying and who could even determine the dates of their deaths. It is quite possible that the previously mentioned dying portraits of Confucians in the late Ming were inspired by Buddhist works such as Hui Jiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*.

Apart from Buddhist influence, there is another important element that contributed to a concern with death becoming a striking feature of mid-to-late Ming Confucians in general; that is, the cruel and sometimes even bloody political life those Confucian scholars often experienced. The tyranny of the political system of the Ming dynasty, which was quite different from both the Northern and Southern Song dynasties, often pushed Confucian scholars to confront death. In addition to Wang Yangming's well-known story of attaining enlightenment at Longchang after his own serious deliberations about death,²⁴ there are accounts that show many of Wang Yangming's followers were witnesses to the political cruelty that characterized the Ming. Four examples of their vivid depictions of political violence will be presented here. The first is that of Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1496–1554), who, being among the first generation of Wang Yangming's students, may have been the closest to Wang and the most loyal. Qian once was put into jail because of a political conflict. In one of his letters to Wang Ji, written while in prison, Qian said:

When I personally experienced the true path of life and death, I came to regard both self and world as mutually empty. All that remained was the single thought of my luminous soul. Unable to sleep, in the middle of the night, I had a sudden insight and knew that it was Heaven that is the source of this phenomenon; this showed me that my original and true nature was wholly free of even the slightest attachment. (親蹈生死真境，身世虛空，獨留一念瑩魂。耿耿中夜，豁然若省，乃知上天為我設此法象，示我以本來真性，不容絲毫掛帶。親蹈生死真境，身世虛空，獨留一念瑩魂。耿耿中夜，豁然若省，乃知上天為我設此法象，示我以本來真性，不容絲毫掛帶。)

The second case involves Wei Liangbi 魏良弼 (1492–1575), who also studied directly with Wang Yangming. Wei “was caned so badly at court that he barely managed to make it back from the brink of death (受杖於殿廷，死而復蘇)” in two years, and then he “got thrown into prison and tortured again (又下獄拷訊).” As a result of “repeatedly being caned at court, his skin was rubbed off and some bones were so badly broken that they could not be put back together. (累遭廷杖，膚盡而骨不續).”²⁶

The third case is that of Liu Kui 劉魁 (1488–1552), who began his studies with Wang Yangming but completed them with Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562), another noted and esteemed disciple of Wang Yangming's. Liu was put into jail for four years. After being released, he was unexpectedly “arrested and put into jail again before even reaching the gate of his house (未抵家而復逮).”²⁷

The last example is Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563). Strictly speaking, he was not Wang Yangming's disciple as he never got a chance to meet Wang face-to-face, though the two exchanged letters. Nie Bao, however, identified himself as Wang's disciple and was accepted as a disciple by Wang Ji and Qian Dehong after Wang Yangming's death.²⁸ Nie once experienced a vision of his authentic mind-heart while he was in jail. As he described it, “[i]n the midst of the long seclusion and extreme stillness of prison, I suddenly realized the true nature of the mind-heart; it was illuminating and limpid, and all the ten thousand things were present within it. (獄中閑久靜極，忽見此心真體，光明瑩澈，萬物皆備。獄中閑久靜極，忽見此心真體，光明瑩澈，萬物皆備。)”²⁹

There are many similar examples that I do not have space to discuss here. In short, standing at the edge of death because of frequent political turmoil forced Confucian intellectuals of the time to ponder deeply the problem of death and to make dying with tranquility a criterion for embodying the Confucian way. It is exactly this point that wholly differentiated Confucian scholars of the Ming dynasty from those of the Song.

Although Buddhism was one of the reasons that death developed into a crucial concern for Confucians in the mid-to-late Ming dynasty, Confucian accounts of the way to gain liberation from death were strikingly different from those of Buddhism.

The following is a record of a dialogue between Wang Yangming and Xiao Hui about the way of life and death:

Xiao Hui asked about the way of life and death. The master [Wang Yangming] said, “If you know day and night, you then know life and death.” Xiao Hui, therefore, asked about the way of day and night. The master said, “When you know the day, then you know the night.” Xiao Hui asked again, “Is there really anything I do not know about the day?” The master said, “You really think you

know the day? You wake up in a fog, eat dully, don't scrutinize your conduct or explore your practice. Since you remain muddle-headed throughout the day, what you know about the day is nothing more than a daydream. Only by cultivating and preserving in every moment of your daily life, always ensuring that your inner mind-heart is on alert and bright and that you are never separated from heavenly principle can you really understand the day. This is the virtue of heaven, the way of penetrating the day and the night. There is no life and death beyond this. (蕭惠問死生之道。先生曰：“知晝夜即知死生。”問晝夜之道。曰：“知晝則知夜。”曰：“晝亦有所不知乎？”先生曰：“汝能知晝？憊憊而興，蟲蟲而食。行不著，習不察。終日昏昏，只是夢晝。惟息有養，瞬有存，此心惺惺明明，天理無一息間斷，才是能知晝。這便是天德，便是通乎晝夜之道，而知更有甚麼死生？）³⁰

It is clear from this dialogue that Wang Yangming had a deep, personal, and embodied knowledge of life and death, but it seems he deliberately did not provide a full elaboration here. Rather, he seemingly just followed the classical strategy that Kongzi inaugurated, with his teaching “not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?”

Wang Ji later made a more explicit articulation of the origin of life and death and also the way of liberation from life and death. At a meeting held in 1575 at the Dou Shan Academy of Xin An (新安門山書院), Wang Ji said:

The reason people undergo life and death and rebirth (*samsara*) lies in thoughts and consciousness. Thoughts are products of a dualistic mind;³¹ some are good while others are bad: there is no constancy. That is the seed of rebirth. Consciousness distinguishes and discriminates; it is the spirit of wisdom: it arises suddenly and suddenly disappears; there is no stop. That is the root and cause of life and death. This is a general truth that has held in both the past and present and also an actual event taking place at this very moment. It's really bewildering that some Confucian scholars take it as a heresy and abstain from talking about it because they regard it as a delusion. Thoughts are rooted in the mind; the ultimately accomplished person has no mind and so thoughts cease and naturally there is no rebirth. Consciousness changes into knowledge; the ultimately accomplished person is without knowledge, his consciousness is empty, and naturally there is no more life and death. For ordinary people, we may say there is life and death; for the ultimately accomplished person, we may say there is no life and death. Both saying there is life and death and saying there is no

life and death are reasonable. These two seemingly contradictory sides mutually generate each other, responding without end. Those who do not understand the way are not prepared to hear what I have said here. (人之有生死輪回，念與識為之崇也。念有往來，念者二心之用，或之善，或之惡，往來不常，便是輪回種子。識有分別，識者發智之神，倏而起，倏而滅，起滅不停，便是生死根因。此是古今通理，亦便是見在之實事。儒者以為異端之學，諱而不言，亦見其惑也矣。夫念根於心，至人無心，則念息，自無輪回。識變為知，至人無知，則識空，自無生死。為凡夫言，謂之有可也。為至人言，謂之無可也。道有便有，道無便無，有無相生，以應於無窮。非知道者，何足以語此？)³²

For Wang Ji, “the root and cause of life and death” is generated from the differentiation of subject and object. If we can “transform thoughts and return to the original mind-heart (*hua nian huan xin* 化念還心)” and “transform consciousness into wisdom (*zhuan shi cheng zhi* 轉識成智),” then we can transcend life and death. This point of view, which holds that the way of gaining liberation from life and death depends upon the consciousness of the subject, prevailed among Confucian scholars of the mid-to-late Ming. For instance, when asked by a student about how to liberate himself from life and death, Zhou Rudeng said, “Both life and death are attributed to the mind. If you put down your mind, what life and death will there be? (生死俱是心。心放下，有甚生死可了。生死俱是心。心放下，有甚生死可了？)”³³ Zou Yuanbiao 鄒元標 (1551–1624), a Confucian scholar noted for his integrity and moral bravery in the late Ming, also said: “Thoughts are the source of life and death. Where there is calculating consciousness, there is life and death. Where there are not thoughts there will be no life and death. (人只是意在作祟，有意則有生死，無意則無生死。)”³⁴ A student of Zhou Rudeng's, Liu Gao 劉煥 directly quoted Buddhist concepts while criticizing them, saying, “The scattering and aggregation of the four elements (*mahabhuta*) is less important for life and death; the separation and joining together of thoughts is more important for life and death. If you forget the more important while cherishing the less important, this is known as not understanding life and death. (四大聚散，生死之小者也。一念離合，生死之大者也。忘其大而憚其小，此之謂不知生死。)”³⁵

To be fair, “the root and cause of life and death” and the way of liberation from death to the consciousness of the subject are ideas that originated in Buddhism. It is inappropriate to criticize the Buddhist understanding of life and death only from the perspective of the physical body, as Liu Gao did. The Buddhist understanding of the root and cause of death is actually “the separation and joining together of thoughts (*yi nian li he* 一念離合)” rather than “the scattering and aggregation of the four elements (*mahabhuta*) (*si da ju san* 四大聚散).” Although it is an expression of *vijnanavada* that

the root and cause of life and death lies in the seed of the *alaya-vijnana* ("storehouse consciousness"),³⁶ it is in general a common belief accepted by other branches of Buddhism, even those that do not use that terminology of *vijnanavada*. The crucial point is that while certain of Wang Yangming's followers had a totally different understanding of the consciousness of the subject than what one finds in Buddhism, both sides took the consciousness of the subject as the root and final cause of life and death. Precisely because of this, all those who took a concern with life and death as their focus of awareness—including those previously mentioned—conformably kept their Confucian identity because of their views about the way to liberate oneself from death. This suggests that despite the broad similarities noted here, a deep discrepancy remained between Confucianism and Buddhism regarding the issue of death.

What is the Confucian way of gaining liberation from death? Let us explore the answers provided by some of Wang Yangming's followers. At a meeting in 1575, when replying to a student's question about Kongzi's teaching that "while not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?" Wang Ji offered the following explicit illustration:

This one sentence already has explained everything. From birth to death, we only have this illuminating mind-heart as our commander. In the course of human life, there are always business and leisure, ups and downs, praise and blame, gain and loss, and so on. If this illuminating mind-heart can always lead us, we will not descend into emptiness while we are in leisure; we will not be led astray by things while we are busy. If, whether at leisure or busy, the illuminating mind-heart can always keep equilibrium, this will guarantee that we will maintain our poise throughout life and death: this must be the case whether there are ups or downs, praise or blame, gain or loss, and so on. Knowing life means knowing death. The illuminating mind-heart is one with the great cosmos: it is eternally present throughout infinite stretches of time; it lives from the beginning to the end and never knows death. (此已一句道盡。吾人從生至死, 只有此一點靈明本心為之主宰。人生在世, 有閑有忙, 有順有逆, 毀譽得喪諸境。若一點靈明時時做得主, 閑時不至落空, 忙時不至逐物, 閑忙境上, 此心一得來, 即是生死境上一得來樣子。順逆、毀譽、得喪諸境亦然。知生即知死。一點靈明, 與太虛同體, 萬劫常存, 本未嘗有生, 未嘗有死也。)³⁷

Late in life, Wang Ji further explicated his view of life and death and the way to gain liberation from death in a letter to Li Jian'an 李漸庵. Wang's elaboration is actually an interpretation of Kongzi's saying. Wang wrote

Kongzi said, "Not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?" This is a thorough and definitive teaching. There is nothing more to add. We live between heaven and earth; are influenced by and respond to a myriad of causes and conditions. We experience gain and loss, good and bad, praise and blame, benefit and harm. If our mind-heart is slightly moved by any one of these, we will also be moved when death comes. . . . Death is to life as night is to day. If we understand the day, we then understand the night. There is no duality. (孔氏云: "未知生, 焉知死。"此是究竟語, 非有所未盡也。吾人生於天地間, 與萬緣相感應, 有得有失, 有好有醜, 有稱有讒, 有利有害。種種境界, 若有一毫動心, 便是臨時動心樣子。 . . . 生之有死, 如晝之有夜, 知晝則知夜, 非有二也。)³⁸

Zhou Rudeng, echoing his teacher's words to "put down your calculating mind," and when asked by a student how to put down the mind, responded by saying, "If you really understand the teaching of Kongzi about knowing life and knowing death, it is not necessary to say 'put down.' (要知孔門說知生知死, 則放下二字俱多。)"³⁹ There is also a dialogue between Xu Yongjian 徐用檢 (1529–1611) and one of his students that reflects a similar orientation to the way of gaining liberation from death.

A student asked, "Since you, my master, don't deny the teaching about life and death, why don't you focus on that teaching? Instead, you always teach us the concepts of *xing* [human nature], of *xue* [learning], why?" The master [Xu Yongjian] said, "Human nature is to follow the five constant behaviors and learning is to return to your original human nature. This is the all-pervading and most correct way. We live according to this and we die according to this: is there anything that is not included? If I just focus on life and death, then life is nothing but a lodging, while death is nothing but a return. Such a teaching is nothing more than selfishness." (問: "先生既不非生死之說, 何不專主之? 而曰性、曰學, 何也?" 曰: "性率五常, 學求復性, 大公至正之道也。如此而生, 如此而死, 何不該焉? 專言生死, 生寄死歸, 自私耳矣。")⁴⁰

We can conclude that the basic attitude toward death and the way to gain liberation from death advocated by Wang Yangming's followers are both based upon the classical ground of Kongzi's saying, "Not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?" These views return to the fundamental standpoint of understanding death from the perspective of life, even though they take a strong concern with life and death as their central problematic. Obviously, for Confucian scholars such as Wang Ji, Zhou

Rudeng, and Xu Yongjian, the key to being liberated from life and death lies in gaining enlightenment about the meaning and significance of one's present life rather than in an exploration of the afterlife world. In their view, the more experience and appreciation we have of life, the deeper our understanding of death. So, Kongzi's saying does not necessarily overlook or underappreciate death. Instead, what it emphasizes is that knowing what life is about is a precondition for knowing what death is. In other words, the correct direction for understanding death should be from life to death, not the other way round. It is precisely in this sense that Kongzi's reply is quite different from his saying that "[n]ot yet understanding life, how could you understand death?" in response to Zi Gong's 子貢 question about death. In this latter case, Kongzi talked about death so much and positively that Zi Gong was deeply moved and exclaimed, "Death is so great! (大哉死乎!)"⁴¹ It is precisely through their interpretation of Confucian scholars in the mid-to-late Ming, discussed previously, that the real and deep connotation in Kongzi's teaching is fully deciphered and developed.

With the development of Buddhism, from early Buddhism to *Mahayana* Buddhism and then to Chan Buddhism, Buddhism in the Chinese context increasingly paid a great deal of attention to the idea that "life and death are unified with *nirvana* (生死即涅槃)," which was influenced by the notions of *dei-satya* (er di 二諦; the two truths) and *madhyamaprtipad* (zhong dao 中道; the middle way). This trend, paralleling the Buddhist influence on the Confucian tradition, was actually an outcome of the accumulated impact of Confucianism's this-worldly orientation on Buddhism. So, it seems that Buddhism and Confucianism were converging in terms of their views on life and death. But based upon the belief in the six ways of rebirth, Buddhism could not, after all, give up its commitment to an after-death world and still prayed for the pure land as a transcendental paradise away from the abyss of misery of this world.⁴² Exactly at this point, Buddhism, whatever subcategory it can be classified into, still exhibits its sharp contrast with the way Wang Yangming's followers sought liberation from death.

ONTOLOGICALLY DIFFERENT WAYS OF TRANSCENDING DEATH: CONFUCIAN VERSUS BUDDHIST

The reason the Confucian way of transcending life and death is ultimately different from the approach of Buddhism lies in an ontological contrast. As far as ontology is concerned, the standpoint of Confucianism is close to realism, whereas the standpoint of Buddhism is quite the opposite. In short, the former appeals to you 有 ("existence") while the latter relies upon *wu* 無 ("nonexistence" or "emptiness"). As mentioned before, in addition to Kongzi's saying, "Not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?" Wang Yangming's followers appealed to another Confucian idea.

the *Book of Changes*. They often invoked one sentence in particular: "Tracing it to its origin and returning to its end, we then may understand life and death. The refined *qi* 氣 [vital energy] constitutes things and wandering souls constitute changes. In this way, we understand the nature and form of ghosts and spirits. (原始反終，故知死生之說。精氣為物，遊魂為變，是故知鬼神之情狀。)" "Tracing it to its origin and returning to its end" actually refers to the endless circulation of vital energy. As an indispensable material basis for moral creativity, vital energy is an irreducible reality. Although Wang Yangming's followers did not talk about the vital energy very often, they never denied this point. The origin of life and death is indeed generated from the consciousness of the subject, as Zou Yuanbiao suggested: "There will be no life and death at all if the calculating consciousness can be gotten rid of (無意則無生死); "the scattering and aggregation of a concentration of the mind is the most important for life and death (一念離合，生死之大者也)." Eliminating the consciousness of life and death, however, does not mean accepting the Buddhist idea, namely, all phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, have no being of their own, are empty of a permanent self (*pratitya-samutpada*), and conceiving of the subject of life and death as an ephemeral, illusory expression of no self-substance (*svabhava*). From a Buddhist perspective, death means the scattering of the causes and conditions that constitute our life. Since life is nothing but a temporary constellation of causes and conditions without permanent reality, it has no ontological existence. It is precisely through death that this emptiness as the nature of life is revealed. In contrast, for Wang Yangming's followers, innate knowledge—which is an expression of the moral self—is indeed "never effaced throughout the ages. (千古不磨)"⁴³ As Wang Ji said, it "is identified with the great cosmos and exists eternally, even enduring through ten thousand eons (與太虛同體，萬劫常存)." He added:

This point of spiritual illumination exhausts all within heaven and earth, the four oceans, and the most ancient history. It has never been added to nor diminished; it cannot be gained or lost; it is the root of our nature and life. To realize it is called realizing our nature; to establish it is called establishing our life. Originally, there is no life and no death. The back and forth of life and death is just like the alternating of day and night. (緣此一點靈明，窮天窮地，窮四海，窮萬古，本無加損，本無得喪，是自己性命之根。盡此謂之盡性，立此謂之立命。生本無生，死本無死，生死往來，猶如晝夜。)⁴⁴

Specifically, our natural or biological life is the aggregating or scattering of vital energy rather than the generating or annihilating of the vital energy. (*Qi* is always you (existence) rather than *wu* (nonexistence); this offers a

view that is fundamentally different from Buddhist emptiness. Take the metaphor of day and night as an example, death for life is just like night for day; there is no termination or disconnection but the endless circulating of eternal continuity. From the perspective of both the creativity of moral substance and the everlasting circulation of vital energy, death absolutely does not mean that life is exterminated, nor does it lead to annihilation.

So, on the one hand, the Confucian way of transcending death is to sublimate the limited natural life into infinite spirituality through moral self-cultivation. On the other, behind this way of transcendence or liberation, there is an ontological and cosmological basis defined by vital energy. Just as Geng Dingxiang asserted, "At the start, it is generated out of the great undifferentiated state of the cosmos; in the end, it returns to the great undifferentiated state. Tracing it to its origin and returning to its end, there is actually no generation or termination. Everything in the cosmos is just like this. (始自太虛來, 終還太虛去。原始反終, 本自無生, 亦自無滅, 一切眾生, 總皆如是。)"⁴⁵ In this regard, roughly speaking, we may say that the ontological and cosmological basis of Confucianism is close to realism, whereas that of Buddhism is close to idealism.

Now, let me give two more examples of Confucians in the late Ming to reinforce the conclusion I have drawn here. Both Gao Panlong and Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578-1645) differentiate the Confucian way of transcending death from that of Buddhism in precisely the way that I have described. Strictly speaking, neither Gao nor Liu can be classified as followers of Wang Yangming. However, this shows that the contrast with Buddhism concerning the proper response to death can be taken as reflecting a consensus among Confucians in the mid-to-late Ming.

In 1618, Gao Panlong wrote twenty poems which were collected into the *Wuwu yin* 戊午吟; the following two poems appear therein:

Hearing what the way is like at dawn can one die at dusk,⁴⁶

Life and death have always been constants of the way.

No one has ever heard of there being day without night,

Who has ever seen yin without yang?

As long as there is the way, how can there be old age or early death?

If one's heart is at peace, one can regard both as equal and balanced.

If one seeks to pursue the way without attending to this,

One will travel throughout the entire world in vain.

聞道如何夕可死,

死生原是道之常。

不聞有盡可無夜,

幾見無陰只有陽?

道在何從見壽夭,

心安始可等彭殤。

更與此外求聞道,

踏遍天涯徒自忙。

Refined vital energy constitutes the achievement of producing
our bodies,

Wandering souls constitute changes vast and limitless!

If we take death as termination and annihilation,

Then we'll fall into the false vision that Chan Buddhism
criticized.

Spontaneous transformation is natural and unfathomable,

To be attached to neither existence nor nonexistence is true
emptiness.

Don't be misled by attributing emptiness to Buddhism;

The tenuous and the solid have always been the same as the
manifested and the subtle.

精氣為鍾造化功,

遊魂為變浩無窮。

如何謂死為滅盡,

反落禪訶斷見中。

神化自然稱不測,

有無不著是真空。

莫將空字謾歸佛,

虛實原與顯微同。⁴⁷

In addition, in a prose work titled *Xike shuo* 夕可說 ("Explanation of what one can do by dusk"), Gao further elucidated the same themes expressed in these two poems by interpreting Kongzi's saying, "If at dawn you learn of and tread the way, you will have no regret even if you die at dusk. (朝聞道, 夕死可矣。)"

Life and death are the way. They can be compared to bubbles or foam; when these dissolve, they are water: calm and unmoving. If we want to return to the original calm state [of our mind-heart], why must we abandon daily life and work to preclude the arising of any thoughts whatsoever? Let the ruler rule, the minister minister, the father be a father, and the son a son. The myriad phenomena are full of majesty; the constant principles do not change. When I interact with them, sometimes they calm and I am calm, sometimes they stimulate and I am stimulated. There is continuity in the myriad stimulations and calmnesses, and so there is continuity

in the myriad occurrences of life and death. (死生，道也。譬之於漚，其滅，一水也，寂然不動者也。吾欲復寂然者，豈遺棄世事，務一念不起之謂哉？君君、臣臣、父父、子子，萬象森羅，常理不易。吾與之時寂而寂，時感而感，萬感萬寂而一也，故萬死萬生而一也。)⁴⁸

As the last great Confucian scholar at the end of Ming dynasty, Liu Zongzhou made this point more explicitly in an appendix to a record of a meeting with his students:

Explanations for understanding life and death originated with Chan Buddhism. Kongzi's teaching about "tracing it to its origin and returning it to its end" concerns a common, shared principle of heaven, earth, and the myriad things and is not a reference to the life and death of a single body. Since the teachings of the sage has [sic] become obscured, students all look at things from a materialistic point of view and pay too much attention to personal life and death. Heaven, earth, and the myriad things are excluded from the realm of their concerns and the dynamic and creative force of the mind-heart has been cut off and become a dormant seed. As a result, their spiritual practice is exclusively concerned with exploring the [Buddhist] path of avoiding rebirth (i.e., nirvana). When they are reborn, as before they simply seek life and fear death. In contrast, the self-cultivation we Confucians follow takes the heaven, earth, and the myriad things as a single great body. The beginning of heaven and earth is exactly the beginning of the self; the end of the heaven and earth is also the end of the self. End upon end, beginning upon beginning, there is no conclusion to the process. Our teaching about life and death is nothing but this. So, from the start, life and death are simply ordinary things. Cheng Hao said, "If we can put our selves into the context of heaven and earth, and regard both small and great as equally important, how pleased we then will be!" I say that the teaching about life and death should precisely be put into the context of heaven and earth, and we should regard both small and great as equally important. Once we understand this, we will understand the learning that concerns how to fully grasp principle, develop our nature, and attain our destiny. If you only seek to understand while clinging to the perspective of living a physical life that endures no more than one hundred years, then the life you understand will only be the life that craves life and the death you understand will only be the death that fears death. Does this mean we don't need to understand our physical life (that is lived within the span of our hundred years)? I say, "Why should

we not try to understand it?" Kongzi's teaching, "If at dawn you learn of and tread the way, you can die at dusk without regret" is precisely the answer. What does it mean to learn of and tread the way? The crucial point lies in breaking through and eliminating the conscious concern with life and death. Grasping this point does not require searching in the distance for one hundred years; the rising and passing away of one's thoughts all contain the evil of a conscious concern with life and death. When there is no longer any arising or passing away, as a matter of course, there will be no life and death. (理會生死之說，本出於禪門。夫子言原始反終，這是天地萬物公共的道理，絕非一身生來死去之謂，與禪門迥異。自聖學不明，學者每從形器起見，看得一身生死事極大，將天地萬物都至之膜外，此心生之機早已斷滅種子了。故其工夫專究到無生一路，只留個覺性不壞。再做後來人，依舊只是貪生怕死而已。吾儒之學，宜從天地萬物一體處看出大身子，天地萬物之始即吾之始，天地萬物之終即吾之終，終終始始，無有窮盡，只此是死生之說。原來死生只是常事。程伯子曰：「人將此身放在天地間，大小一例看，是甚快活。」余謂生死之說正當放在天地間大小一例看也。于此有知，方是窮理盡性至命之學。藉令區區執百年以內之生死而知之，則知生之盡，只是個貪生之生；知死之盡，只是個怕死之死。然則百年生死不必知乎？曰：莫而不知也？子曰：「朝聞道，夕死可矣」是也。如何是聞道？其要只在破除生死心。此正不必遠求百年，即一念之間一起一滅，無非生死心造孽。既無起滅，自無生死。)⁴⁹

Life and death are commonly conceived of in terms of the emergence and termination of individual physical lives. If, however, we consider life and death in terms of the endless circulation of *qi* and "the continuity of being,"⁵⁰ the emergence and termination of a physical life is only the product of a mind attached to a narrow conception of life and death. There is only the transformation of different types of existence and the conservation of vital energy in the cosmos. From this point of view, there is virtually no life or death. The understanding and transcending of life and death that Gao and Liu exhibited exemplifies again the argument that the difference between the Confucian way of gaining liberation from death and that of Buddhism originates in a contrast between the Confucian *you* and the Buddhist ontology of *wu*.

Let us go back to the issue we raised at the very beginning of this essay. We set out to scrutinize death as an ultimate concern that caught and commanded the attention of mid-to-late Ming dynasty Confucian scholars in general and Wang Yangming's followers in particular. This led us to see that we no longer could say that the Confucian tradition, in relation to Buddhism, viewed the issue of death as a common and ultimate concern

of human beings. Quite to the contrary, Confucianism can contribute rich resources on this topic, just as other great religious and ethical traditions of the world have done. As a matter of fact, if complicity and nuance are given proper consideration, we find that the issue of death has not always been the focus of every great mind in the course of the history of Western thought. In addition, in various historical periods, we find a remarkably diverse range of views and levels of attention when it comes to responses to death.⁵¹ The present study reveals that much the same can be said about the Confucian tradition.

NOTES

1. Kang Yunmei 康韻梅, *Zhongguo gudai siwang guan zhi tanjiu* 中國古代死亡觀之探究 (Taipei: National Taiwan University, 1994), 198–236. Unfortunately, the Confucian materials this book employed are limited to classical Confucianism. The Neo-Confucian period was entirely overlooked.

2. For English translation of the *Analects*, I use Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998); D. C. Lau, *Confucius: The Analects* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University, 1983). Occasionally, I alter the cited translation. All English translations of Song and Ming material are mine unless otherwise noted.

3. See Zhu Xi, "Ba Zheng Jingyuan jian 跋鄭景元簡" (Epilogue to Zheng Jing-yuan's writings), in *Zhu Wengong wenji* 朱文公文集, vol. 80.

4. See Ying-shih Yu 余英時, "Views of Life and Death in late Han China" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1962); Ying-shih Yu, "Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol. 25, (1964–65): 80–122. Ying-shih Yu, "'O' Soul, Come Back! A Study in the Changing Conception of the Soul and afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.1 (1987): 363–395. Also see Michael Loewe, *Chinese Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth and Reason in the Han Period, 202BC–AD220* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982); P. J. Ivanhoe, "Death and Dying in the *Analects*," in *Confucian Spirituality*, ed. Wei-ming Tu and Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroad Press, 2003), vol. 1 (revised version appears in this volume).

5. See Wm. de Bary and Irene Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1: 684.

6. See Wang Ji's "Zisong wenda 自訟問答," in *Wang Longxi xiansheng quanji* 王龍溪先生全集, vol. 15.

7. See Zhou Rudeng's "Wulin huiyu 武林會語," in *Dongyue zhengxue lu* 東越證學錄, vol. 3. In Huang Zongxi's *Mingru xue'an* 明儒學案 (Records of the Ming Confucian Scholars), Zhou was regarded as a disciple of Luo Rufeng 羅汝芳 (1515–1588) and was arranged in Taizhou School (taizhou xuepai 泰州學派). Accordingly, the students of Zhou in Zhejiang, such as Tao Wangling 陶望齡 (1562–1609) and Liu (劉) 劉, were all included in Taizhou School. As a matter of fact, this categorization is totally wrong and misleading. I have presented a clear and thorough analysis of this issue based on exhaustive source materials. Guoxiang Peng 彭國翔, "Zhou Hanren de xuepai guishu yu Ming Ru xue'an siyongtan yanjiu jianyi" (周海門的學派歸屬

與《明儒學案》相關問題之檢討》," in *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 (*Tsinghua journal of Chinese studies*), 31, 3(2002), 339–374.

8. See Guan Zhidao's "Zhu guan'zai puta mingshi mofa zhong biqiu huimie zhengfa yishi wu shi fayu yin 注觀自在菩薩冥示末法中比丘毀滅正法一十五事法語引," in his *Xianzhang yuji* 憲章錄集, vol. 2.

9. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 93–101.

10. See Herbert Fingarette, *Death: Philosophical Soundings* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1996).

11. See Cheng Hao's 程顥 "Duanbo fu shishuo 端伯傅師說," in *Henan chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書, vol. 1.

12. See *Chuanxi lu* 傳習錄, vol. 3.

13. See Geng Dingxiang's "Chudi shengsi shuo 出離生死說," in *Geng Tian'ai xiansheng wenji* 耿天臺先生文集, vol. 7.

14. See Jiao Hong's "Da youren wen 答友人問," in his *Danyuan ji* 澹園集, vol. 12.

15. See Yang Qiyan's *Taishi Yang Fusuo xiansheng zhengxue bian* 太史楊復所先生證學編, vol. 2.

16. See Wang Ji's "Da Yin Q-ming 答殷秋溟 (A reply to Yin Qianming)," in *Wang Longxi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 20.

17. See Zha Duo's "Zai yu Xiao Duiyu shu 再與蕭兌燭書 (Second letter to Xiao Duiyu)," in *Yizhai Zha xiansheng chandao ji* 毅齋查先生闡道集, vol. 2. The record of Wang Ji's death is also in *Yizhai Zha xiansheng chandao ji*, vol. 9.

18. Also see "Zai yu Xiao Duiyu shu 再與蕭兌燭書."

19. See Wang Gen's 王艮 *Chongjuan Wang Xinzhai xiansheng quanji* 重鵬王心齋先生全集, vol. 1.

20. See Luo Rufang's 羅汝芳 *Luo Jinxi xiansheng quanji* 羅近溪先生全集, vol. 1.

21. See Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

22. See Gao Panlong's *Gaozi yishu* 高子遺書, vol. 1.

23. See *Hanshan dashi mengyou quanji* 憨山大師夢遊全集, vol. 3, *Fayu, Shi Miaozhan quozhu* 法語·示妙湛座主.

24. See *Nianpu* 年譜, vol. 1. Wang Yangming's enlightenment happened in 1508.

25. See Huang Zongxi's *Mingru xue'an* 明儒學案, vol. 11, *Zhezong wangmen xue'an yi* 浙中王門學案一.

26. See Huang Zongxi's *Mingru xue'an* 明儒學案, vol. 19, *Zhezong wangmen xue'an si* 江右王門學案四.

27. *Ibid.*

28. See, "Wang Longxi xiansheng nianpu 王龍溪先生年譜 (The Chronological Biography of Wang Ji) in Guoxiang Peng 彭國翔, *Liangzhi xue de zhankai: Wang Longxi yu zhongwan Ming de Yangming xue* 良知學的展開——王龍溪與中晚明的陽明學 (The Unfolding of the Learning of the Innate knowing of the Good: Wang Longxi and Yangming Learning in the Mid-to-late Ming) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2003), traditional Chinese version, 574–575; (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2005), simplified Chinese version, 528–529.

29. See Huang, *Mingru xue'an*, vol. 17, *Jiangyou wangmen xue'an er* 江右王門學案二.

30. See *Chuanxi lu* 傳習錄, vol. 1.

31. I need to make a clarification of my English translation of the term *xin* 心 here. We know that *xin* has basically two different meanings in Neo-Confucian tradition. One is *daoxin* 道心 or *benxin* 本心; the other is *renxin* 人心. I use "mind-heart" to translate the former while simply "mind" or "calculating mind" to translate the latter. In the paragraph I quote, *xin* refers basically to the latter, which is why I simply use "mind" rather than "mind-heart" as the translation of *xin*.

32. See Wang Ji's "Xin'an doushan shuyuan huiyu 新安門山書院會語," in *Wang Longxi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 7.

33. See Zhou Rudeng's "Shangzhong huiyu 剡中會語," in *Dongyue zhengxue lu*, vol. 5.

34. See Huang, *Mingru xue'an*, vol. 23, *Jiangyou wangmen xue'an ba* 江右王門學案八.

35. See Huang, *Mingru xue'an*, vol. 36, *Taizhou xue'an er* 泰州學案二.

36. See Yin Shun 印順, *Weishi xue tanyuan* 唯識學探源 (Taipei: Zhengwen Press, 1987), 163.

37. See Wang Ji's "Huayang minglun tang huiyu 華陽明倫堂會語," in *Wang Longxi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 7.

38. See Wang Ji's "Da Li Jian'an di er shu 答李漸庵第二書," (The second letter to Li Jian'an), in *Wang Longxi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 11.

39. See Zhou, "Shangzhong huiyu 剡中會語."

40. See Huang, *Mingru xue'an*, vol. 14, *Zhezong wangmen xue'an si*.

41. There is a dialogue between Zi Gong and Kongzi about death recorded in *Xunzi* rather than in the *Analects*. See Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jiji* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 510-511. Zi Gong's final sigh that "death is so great" is exactly the concluding remark of that dialogue.

42. See Fu Weixun 傅偉勳 (Charles Wei-hsun Fu), *Shengming de zunyan yu siwang de zunyan* 生命的尊嚴與死亡的尊嚴 (*The Dignity of Life and The Dignity of Death*) (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1994), 152-153.

43. Here I borrow this phrase "never effaced throughout the ages" from a well-known poem that Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139-1193) composed when he met Zhu Xi at Ehu 鵞湖 in 1175.

44. See Wang Ji's "Liulu huiji 留都會紀," in *Wang Longxi xiansheng quanji*, vol. 4.

45. See Geng, "Chuli shengsi shuo."

46. This phrase is obviously from the *Analects*.

47. See Gao, *Gaozi yishu*, vol. 6.

48. See Gao, *Gaozi yishu*, vol. 3.

49. See Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周, "Zhengren she yulu dijiu hui fuji 證人社語錄華九會附記," in *Liu Zongzhou quanji* 劉宗周全集 (Taipei: The Institute of Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, 1996).

50. Here I borrow the title of one of Wei ming Ti's thought-provoking articles "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature," in *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John

Bertrrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1998), 105-122.

51. See Geoffrey Scarre, *Death* (Stockfield, U.K.: Acumen, 2006).

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