

ON CHU HSI'S UNDERSTANDING OF *HSING*

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ABSTRACT

Much had been written about Chu Hsi's understanding of nature. But many of the materials frequently cited by scholars were often presented and arranged in such a way that the message of his thought failed to get across satisfactorily. For example, it is customary to discuss Chu Hsi's metaphysics first, followed by his cosmology and ethics. This is a natural sequence for anyone who has training in Western philosophy. Unfortunately however, Chu Hsi's mind did not work in this way. He started with an urgent existential concern. After much wavering in a long and hard searching process, he finally adopted a metaphysical position which could not but have far-reaching cosmological implications. I sincerely believe it is impossible to fully grasp the meaning of his thought if his problematic is not understood. In the following I try to combine a historical, developmental approach with a systematic, philosophical approach in order to prepare a comprehensive statement on Chu Hsi's understanding of nature.*

I. CHU HSI'S (朱熹, 1130-1200) APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF NATURE AND MIND

As is well known, Chu Hsi's understanding of *hsin* (心, mind-heart) and *hsing* (性, nature) did not reach its stage of maturity until he found his own answer to the problem of *chung-ho* (中和, equilibrium and harmony).⁽¹⁾ The text

* This article was first presented in an international symposium on Chinese Intellectual History held at Tsing Hua University from December 16 to 18, 1984.

(1) For a detailed study of how he found his own answer to the problem of *chung ho*, see Shu-hsien Liu, *Chu Tzu che hsüeh ssu-hsiang ti fa-chên yü wan-ch'eng* (朱子哲學思想的發展與完成, The Development and Completion of Master Chu's Philosophical Thought), Taipei, Student Book Co. (臺北, 學生書局), 1982, pp. 71-111. Hereafter the book will be referred to as Liu, *Chu Tzu*. Not long ago I completed an article in English: "A Study of Chu Hsi's Strife after the Way to Realize Equilibrium and Harmony," which had been presented in the International Conference of Philosophy On Harmony/Strife held at The Chinese University of Hong Kong from March 10 to 16, 1985 and will be published in a special issue of *New Asia Academic Bulletin*. In more recent years Chu Hsi studies received important breakthroughs after Professor Mou Tsung-san published his *Hsin-t'i yü hsing-t'i* (牟宗三, 心體與性體, The Substance of the Mind and the Substance of the Nature), Taipei, Cheng-chung shu-chü (正中書局), three volumes, 1968-1969, and Professor Ch'ien Mu published his *Chu Tzu hsin-hsüeh an* (錢穆, 朱子新學案, A New Study of Chu Hsi), Taipei, San-ming shu-chü (三民書局), five volumes, 1971. Both are monumental works from which I have learned a great deal; in fact my own book is an outgrowth of these two works. I am sorry that I cannot use Japanese sources. But from my discussions and correspondences with Japanese scholars such as Professor Tomoeda

of *The Doctrine of the Mean* says,

Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused it is called equilibrium (*chung*, centrality, mean). When these feelings are aroused and each and all attain due measure and degree, it is called harmony. Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish.⁽²⁾

Chu Hsi came up with an interpretation of the idea of *chung-ho* after years of searching and wrote to his friend Chang Shih (張栻, Nan-hsien 南軒, 1133-1180) to discuss the problem. Some of his letters are still extant, but he himself admitted that the view expressed in these letters was erroneous.⁽³⁾ There was a new breakthrough after he gave up his earlier view. Then, in his famous letter to the gentlemen of Hunan (湖南) on *chung-ho* he gave his own reflection on the matter as follows:

Concerning the meaning in the *Doctrine of the Mean* that equilibrium (*chung*, centrality, the mean) is the state before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused and that harmony is that state after they are aroused, because formerly I realized the substance of the operation of the mind, and, furthermore, because Master Ch'eng I (程頤) had said that 'whenever we talk about the mind, we refer to the state after the feelings are aroused,' I looked upon the mind as the state after the feelings are aroused and upon nature as the state before the feelings are aroused. However, I have observed that there are many inconsistencies in Master Ch'eng's works. I have therefore thought the matter over, and consequently realized that in my previous theory not only are the [contrasting] terms 'mind' and 'nature' improper but the efforts in my daily task also completely lack a great foundation. Therefore the loss has not been confined to the meaning of words.

The various theories in Master Ch'eng's *Wen-chi* (文集, Collection of Literary Works) and *I-shu* (遺書, Surviving Works) seem to hold that before there is any sign of thought or deliberation and prior to the

Rhytaro, I found that my interpretation of the development of Chu Hsi's thought was largely confirmed rather than disconfirmed by my Japanese colleagues. Naturally I find a number of things useful in papers presented in the International Conference On Chu Hsi held in July, 1982 at Honolulu, they were published in a volume edited by Professor Wing-tsit Chan for the University of Hawaii Press: *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*, 1986.

- (2) Wing-tsit Chan (陳榮捷) trans. and comp., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 98. For the sake of convenience I would like to quote from the source book wherever possible. Hereafter the book will be referred to as Chan, *Source Book*.
- (3) Liu, *Chu Tzu*, pp. 82-84.

arrival of [stimulus] of external things, there is the state before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused. At this time, the state is identical with the substance of the mind, which is absolutely quiet and inactive, and the nature endowed by Heaven should be completely embodied in it. Because it is neither excessive nor insufficient, and is neither unbalanced nor one-sided, it is called equilibrium. When it is acted upon and immediately penetrates all things, the feelings are then aroused. In this state the functioning of the mind can be seen. Because it never fails to attain the proper measure and degree and has nowhere deviated from the right, it is called harmony. This is true because of the correctness of the human mind and the moral character of the feelings and nature.

However, the state before the feelings are aroused cannot be sought and the state after they are aroused permits no manipulation. So long as in one's daily life the effort at seriousness and cultivation is fully extended and there are no selfish human desires to disturb it, then before the feelings are aroused it will be as clear as a mirror and as calm as still water, and after the feelings are aroused it will attain due measure and degree without exception. This is the essential task in everyday life. As to examination when things occur and seeking understanding through inference when we come into contact with things, this must also serve as the foundation. If we observe the state after the feelings are aroused, what is contained in the state before the feelings are aroused can surely be understood in silence. This is why in his answers to Su Chi-ming (蘇季明), Master Ch'eng discussed and argued back and forth in the greatest detail and with extreme care, but in the final analysis what he said was no more than the word 'seriousness' (*ching*, 敬). This is the reason why he said, 'Seriousness without fail is the way to attain equilibrium,' and 'For entering the Way there is nothing better than seriousness. No one can ever extend knowledge to the utmost without depending on seriousness,' and again, 'Self-cultivation requires seriousness; the pursuit of learning depends on the extension of knowledge.'

Right along, in my discussions and thinking, I have simply considered the mind to be the state after the feelings are aroused, and in my daily efforts I have also merely considered examining and recognizing the clues [of activities of feelings] as the starting points. Consequently I have neglected the effort of daily self-cultivation, so that the mind is disturbed in many ways and lacks the quality of depth or purity. Also, when it is expressed in speech or action, it is always characterized by a sense of urgency and an absence of reserve, and there is no longer any disposition of ease or profoundness. For a single mistake in one's viewpoint can lead

to as much harm as this. This is something we must not overlook.

When Master Ch'eng said that 'whenever we talk about the mind, we refer to the state after the feelings are aroused,' he referred [only] to the mind of an infant [whose feelings have already been aroused]. When he said, 'whenever we talk about the mind,' he was mistaken in the way he expressed it and therefore admitted the incorrectness and corrected himself [by saying, 'This is of course incorrect, for the mind is one. Sometimes we refer to its substance (namely, the state of absolute quietness and inactivity) and sometimes we refer to its function (namely, its being acted on and immediately penetrating all things). It depends on one's point of view']. We should not hold on to his saying which he had already corrected and on that basis doubt the correctness of his various theories, or simply dismiss it as incorrect without examining the fact that he was referring to something else. What do you gentlemen think about this?⁽⁴⁾

I quote this letter in its entirety because of the importance of its content. It marks the first time that Chu Hsi thought through his position and came up with a new understanding of nature and mind which he held on throughout the rest of his life. Therefore it merits our careful consideration.

In this letter Chu Hsi confessed that his earlier view was wrong. That view "looked upon the mind as the state after the feelings are aroused and upon nature as the state before the feelings are aroused." Nature and mind were regarded as two consecutive stages succeeding each other. The reason why the view was declared to be wrong was it leaves no place for self-cultivation as if nothing can be done before the feelings are aroused. The effect was that "the efforts in my daily task also completely lack a great foundation." Thus Chu Hsi returned to a study of Ch'eng I's works and finally found the key to solve the problem in Ch'eng I's famous dictum: "Self-cultivation requires seriousness; the pursuit of learning depends on the extension of knowledge."⁽⁵⁾ Self-cultivation applies to the state before the feelings are aroused, while the pursuit of learning is needed to deal with the state after the feelings are aroused. As before the feelings are aroused, what is implicit in nature is not yet manifest, it remains in a state of equilibrium, there is no need for the mind to do anything but to stay calm and keep serious, such effort of self-cultivation will help the mind to be its own master. When the foundation is thus firmly established, then, after the feelings are aroused, the mind is ready to respond to outside stimuli, it will proceed to examine and recognize the clues of activities of feelings, investigate things, search for principles, extend knowledge, as to achieve harmony as the result.

Although Chu Hsi did not talk much about nature in this letter, his ideas

(4) Chan, *Source Book*, pp. 600-602. With Slight modification.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 562.

about it were implicit there. Still it was the mind that occupied the foreground, the nature was kept in the background. The mind was now seen as covering the whole range encompassing both the state before the feelings are aroused and also the state after the feelings are aroused. It must practice self-cultivation in the formal case, and pursuit of learning in the latter case. Seriousness is that which applies in both cases. Without proper discipline the mind can easily go astray and get lost, it must follow the principles in nature in order to achieve equilibrium and harmony. Before the feelings are aroused, the principles in nature are already there, after the feelings are aroused, the mind must make effort to appropriate such principles in order to make them manifest in activities. The relationship between the two is that nature is transcendent while mind is immanent. There is a correlation between the two. Nature provides a solid foundation for mind to act, so it will not go astray and get lost, while mind has the ability to put the principles of nature to work in real life. What is remarkable is that Chu Hsi started with an existential concern, but the concern had forced him to develop a metaphysics of mind and nature. And his mentor was clearly Ch'eng I, not Ch'eng Hao (程顥). Ch'eng I's mind was highly analytical like Chu Hsi's. It was by no means an accident that Chu Hsi had such a great admiration for Ch'eng I. Not only Chu Hsi followed Ch'eng I's lead to solve the problem of equilibrium and harmony, he also followed Ch'eng I to make a sharp distinction between *hsing* (性, nature) and *ch'ing* (情, feeling). This distinction would shed even greater light on Chu Hsi's understanding of nature. He fully endorsed Ch'eng I's view that "love is feeling whereas humanity is the nature."⁽⁶⁾ This statement became the guideline for him to approach the problem of *jen* (仁), the most fundamental virtue in Confucian teachings. In his famous essay, "A Treatise on *Jen*," Chu Hsi said,

'The mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce things.' In the production of man and things, they receive the mind of Heaven and Earth as their mind. Therefore, with reference to the character of the mind, although it embraces and penetrates all and leaves nothing to be desired, nevertheless, one word will cover all of it, namely, *jen* (humanity).⁽⁷⁾

Here Chu Hsi explicitly stated that *jen* is the character of the mind, and that the human mind is essentially the same as the creative mind of Heaven and Earth. He further elaborated in the following way,

For *jen* as constituting the Way (Tao, 道) consists of the fact that the mind of Heaven and Earth to produce things is present in everything. Before feelings are aroused, this substance is already existent in its completeness. After feelings are aroused, its function is infinite. If we

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 559.

(7) *Ibid.*, pp. 593-594.

can truly practice love and preserve it, then we have in it the spring of all virtues and the root of all good deeds. This is why in the teachings of the Confucian school, the student is always urged to exert anxious and unceasing efforts in the pursuit of *jen*.⁽⁸⁾

Such thought was thoroughly consistent with his understanding of *chung-ho*. What intrigues us is that there was a set of question and answer on *jen* and love included in this essay.

Someone said: According to our explanation, is it not wrong for Master Ch'eng to say that love is feeling while *jen* is nature and that love should not be regarded as *jen*?

Answer: Not so. What Master Ch'eng criticized was the application of the term to the expression of love. What I maintain is that the term should be applied to the principle of love. For although the spheres of man's nature and feelings are different, their mutual penetration is like the blood system in which each part has its own relationship. When have they become sharply separated and been made to have nothing to do with each other? I was just now worrying about students' reciting Master Ch'eng's words without inquiring into their meaning, and thereby coming to talk about *jen* as clearly apart from love. I have therefore purposely talked about this to reveal the hidden meaning of Master Ch'eng's words, and you regard my ideas as different from his. Are you not mistaken?⁽⁹⁾

In Chu Hsi's answer *jen* was clearly understood to be the principle of love which is itself not a principle but a feeling. The relation between the two is that they are not to be mixed up with each other and at the same time not separable from each other. It was in this way that Chu Hsi defined *jen* as "the character of the mind and the principle of love," a formula he found happy with throughout his life.

Now we have got three important ingredients: mind, nature and feelings. Chu Hsi summed up his views in the following statement:

Some time ago I read statements by Wu-feng (五峯, Hu Hung, 胡宏, 1100-1155) in which he spoke of the mind only in contrast to nature, leaving the feelings unaccounted for. Later when I read Heng-ch'u's (橫渠, Chang Tsai's, 張載) doctrine that 'the mind commands (unites) man's nature and feelings,' I realized that it was a great contribution. Only then did I find a satisfactory account of the feelings. His doctrine agrees with that of Mencius. In the words of Mencius, 'the feeling of commiseration is the beginning of humanity.' Now humanity is nature,

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 594.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 595.

and commiseration is feeling. In this, the mind can be seen through the feelings. He further said, 'Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are rooted in the mind.' In this, the mind is seen through nature. For the mind embraces both nature and the feelings. Nature is substance and feelings are function.⁽¹⁰⁾

What is interesting here is that Mencius himself never made a sharp distinction between mind-heart (*hsin*) and feelings (*ch'ing*), and the term *ch'ing* used by Mencius means only *ch'ing-shih* (情實, as is the case) which has nothing to do with feelings.⁽¹¹⁾ Likewise mind and nature were not sharply differentiated in Mencius' thought, the essential goodness of nature is seen through the essential goodness of mind-heart. For Chu Hsi, however, only the transcendent nature (principle) is good, the empirical mind can be either good by following principles, or evil by acting against the principles.⁽¹²⁾ The tripartite division of mind, nature and feelings was actually something new and quite original developed by Chu Hsi. In fact he further developed a comprehensive metaphysics of *li* (理, principle) and *chi* (氣, material force) which he heavily relied upon to give an exact analysis of the ontological status of mind, nature and feelings.

II. THE IDENTITY RELATION BETWEEN NATURE AND PRINCIPLE

As feelings could run wild and become rampant, the mind has to govern them according to principles inherent in nature. Chu Hsi explicitly stated that nature is principle, here again he was following the guidance of Ch'eng I, and he further developed Ch'eng I's thought in the following way:

[Ch'eng I said,] 'The nature is the same as principle.' In relation to the mind, it is called the nature. In relation to events, it is called principle.⁽¹³⁾

Such being the case, nature and principle are actually two sides of the same coin, principles inherent in a person constitute the nature of the person. Other quotations may tell us more about the relation between the two. "The principle of life is called the nature."⁽¹⁴⁾ "The nature consists of innumerable principles created by Heaven."⁽¹⁵⁾ "The nature consists of concrete principle, complete with humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom."⁽¹⁶⁾ His ideas were succinctly

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 631, with slight modification.

(11) Mou Tsung-san (牟宗三), *Hsin-t'i yü hsing-t'i* (心體與性體, The substance of the Mind and the Substance of the Nature), Taipei, Cheng-chung shu-chü, (臺北, 正中書局), three volumes, 1968-1969, Vol. III, pp. 417-418. Hereafter the book will be referred to as Mou, *Mind and Nature*.

(12) Liu, *Chu Tzu*, pp. 239-240.

(13) Chan, *Source Book*, p. 614.

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) *Ibid.*

(16) *Ibid.*

expressed in the following conversation with his student Ch'en Ch'un (陳淳, 1153-1217).

The teacher asked how the nature is concrete embodiment of the Way. Ch'un replied: The Way is principle inherent in the nature. The teacher said: The term Way is used with reference to a universal order, whereas the term nature is used with reference to an individual self. How do we know that the Way operates in the world? Simply by putting it into operation in one's own experience. Wherever nature is, there is the Way. *The Way is the principle inherent in things, whereas nature is the principle inherent in the self.* But the principle in all things is also in the principle inherent in the self. One's nature is the framework of the Way. (*Italics mine*)⁽¹⁷⁾

According to Chu Hsi, pervading in the whole universe is just one principle which is the source of all principles. The metaphor he loved to use to illustrate the situation was that the same moon reflects itself in ten thousand streams.⁽¹⁸⁾ The Way is the concrete embodiment of principle in the world, and the nature is the concrete embodiment of principle in the self. Both the Way and the nature are the same as principle.

Once nature is understood as principle, we may also gain some insight into the relation between nature and mind.⁽¹⁹⁾ As principle is eternal and unchanging and the mind is active, it is impossible for the mind to be principle. In Chu Hsi's philosophy there are two fundamental ontological principles: *li* (理, principle) and *chi* (氣, material force). If the mind is not principle, it must be material force. In fact Chu Hsi himself explicitly stated that "the mind is the most refined and subtle kind of material force."⁽²⁰⁾ As principle is transcendent, for it to be embodied in the world, it would have to depend on something else. Thus Chu Hsi said, "Nature consists of principles embraced in the mind, and the mind is where these principles are united."⁽²¹⁾ He further gave a vivid metaphor to illustrate the relation between the two, as he said, "Nature is principle. The mind is its embracement and reservoir, and issues it forth into operation."⁽²²⁾ Chu Hsi particularly appreciated one of the sayings by Shao Yung (邵雍) and interpreted in such a way to illustrate his own point of view:

(17) *Ibid.*, p. 616.

(18) Fung Yu-lan (馮友蘭), *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, two volumes, 1952, 1953), Vol. II, p. 542. Hereafter the book will be referred to as Fung, *History*.

(19) Cf. my article, Shu-hsien Liu, "The Function of the Mind in Chu Hsi's Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. V (1978), 195-208.

(20) Liu, *Chu Tzu*, p. 234.

(21) Chan, *Source Book*, p. 631.

(22) *Ibid.*

Shao Yao-fu (邵堯夫, Shao Yung, 1011-1077) said that 'nature is the concrete embodiment of the Way and the mind is the enclosure of the nature.' This theory is very good. For the Way itself has no physical form or body; it finds it only in man's nature. But if there were no mind, where could nature be? There must be mind before nature can be gotten hold of and put forth into operation, for the principles contained in man's nature are humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, and these are concrete principles. We Confucianists regard nature as real, whereas Buddhists regard it as unreal. However, it is incorrect to equate mind with nature.⁽²³⁾

For Chu Hsi, the relation between nature and mind is exactly parallel to that between principle and material force, they are not to be mixed up with each other and yet they are not to be separated from each other. He gave us an explanation of the situation in the following manner:

The nature is comparable to the Great Ultimate, and the mind to yin and yang. The Great Ultimate exists only in the yin and yang, and cannot be separated from them. In the final analysis, however, the Great Ultimate is the Great Ultimate and yin and yang are yin and yang. So it is with nature and mind. They are one and yet two, two and yet one, so to speak.⁽²⁴⁾

These words appear to be vague and mysterious, but if you understand Chu Hsi's way of thinking, they are anything but vague and mysterious. The Great Ultimate is principle, and yin and yang are material forces; they are not to be equated with each other. But you cannot find principle without material force, and material force without principle, hence they are inseparable from each other. The same applies to the relation between nature and mind. They are one, because when you find one of them, you also find the other; and yet one pertains to principle, the other pertains to material force, hence they must also be said to be two. While they should never be equated with each other and must be regarded as two from an ontological point of view, in actuality they always work together and can never be separated from each other from a functional point of view, in this sense then they may also be said to be one. It is in this way preserving the mind and investigating principle must always go together for Chu Hsi, as he said,

The mind embraces all principles and all principles are complete in this single entity, the mind. If one is not able to preserve the mind, he will be unable to investigate principle to the utmost. If he is unable to investigate principle to the utmost, he will be unable to exert his mind

(23) *Ibid.*, pp. 615-616.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 630.

to the utmost.⁽²⁵⁾

Other seemingly enigmatic statements can be understood as well. For example, Chu Hsi said,

Although nature is a vacuity, it consists of concrete principles. Although the mind is a distinct entity, it is vacuous, and therefore embraces all principles. This truth will be apprehended only when people examine it for themselves.⁽²⁶⁾

For Chu Hsi, nature is a vacuity, because it is not made of material force, but it should never be understood as *shunya* in the Buddhist sense, as it consists of concrete principles which are real even though they are not actually existent. The mind is also vacuous, but it cannot be vacuous in the same sense that nature is a vacuity. Only when the mind is rid of selfish desires that it becomes vacuous and will be able to correlate with principles. It is like when the mirror is rid of the dust covering its face and becomes clear, the true state of things will find their reflections on the mirror. Furthermore, when the mind has been able to embrace principles, then it can function as a master, as Chu Hsi said,

The mind means master. It is master whether in the state of activity or in the state of tranquillity. It is not true that in the state of tranquillity there is no need of a master and there is a master only when the state becomes one of activity. By master is meant an all-pervading control and command existing in the mind by itself. The mind unites and apprehends nature and feelings, but it is not united with them as a vague entity without any distinction.⁽²⁷⁾

Chu Hsi summarized his views as follows:

Nature is the state before activity begins, the feelings are the state when activity has started, and the mind includes both of these states. For nature is the mind before it is aroused, while feelings are the mind after it is aroused, as is expressed in [Chang Tsai's] saying, 'The mind commands man's nature and feelings.' Desire emanates from feelings. The mind is comparable to water, nature is comparable to the tranquillity of still water, feeling is comparable to the flow of water, and desire is comparable to its waves. Just as there are good and bad waves, so there are good desires, such as 'I want humanity,' and bad desires which rush out like wild and violent waves. When bad desires are substantial, they will destroy the Principle of Heaven, as water bursts a dam and damages everything. When Mencius said that 'feelings enable people to do good,'

(25) *Ibid.*, p. 606.

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 630.

(27) *Ibid.*, p. 631.

he meant that the correct feelings flowing from our nature are originally all good.⁽²⁵⁾

It is clear by now that Chu Hsi indeed started with an existential concern and ended up with a comprehensive metaphysics of principle and material force. Heaven is the creative source of all things. In the evolutionary process there emerges the human species. The human mind has the ability to comprehend the heavenly mind because it correlates with the same principle or principles inherent in it. There are disruptions in nature as there are disruptions in the human world. Evils in the world are as a matter of fact due to malfunctioning of material force, as principle or principles are always good. The crux of the matter lies in whether material force can be induced to work according to principles. On the human level it is the decision and understanding of the conscious human mind that could make a whole world of difference. As nature is principle, so Chu Hsi could say with Mencius that nature is good. But Mencius did not have a comprehensive metaphysics of principle and material force to back his theory of human nature, he did not have to face the further complications that Chu Hsi had to face in the formulation of his theory of human nature.

III. THE MORAL NATURE AND THE PHYSICAL NATURE

At this point it would be instructive to have a very brief review of the development of the concept of nature in traditional Chinese thought. Confucius never said much about nature. The only thing he explicitly said was, "By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart."⁽²⁸⁾ Mencius declared that human nature is good, apparently what he referred to was the transcendent moral nature of man, while Hsün Tzu thought that human nature is evil, it appears that he was talking about the empirical physical nature of man. Since Han dynasty yin-yang thought became very popular. Especially in Wei and Chin dynasties, scholars were primarily concerned themselves with the physical nature of man.⁽³⁰⁾ Even in the Tang dynasty, when Han Yü (韓愈, 768-824) discussed the three grades in human nature, he was still referring to the physical nature of man.⁽³¹⁾ But in the Sung dynasty although Mencius' view was revived, discussions on the physical nature of man since Han dynasty could not be ignored. It was in Sung Neo-Confucian philosophies that we found a breakthrough. Chang Tsai perhaps was the first to have discussed both the physical nature and the original (moral) nature, and found a sharp distinction between the two, as he said,

(28) *Ibid.*

(29) *Ibid.*, p. 45.

(30) Cf. Mou Tsung san, *Tsai hsing yü hsüan li* (才性與玄理, Physical Nature and Speculative Reason), Taipei, Student Book Co., 1963.

(31) Cf. Fung, *History*, Vol. II, p. 413. The three grades are: the superior, the medium, and the inferior.

With the existence of physical form, there exists physical nature. If one skillfully returns to the original nature endowed by Heaven and Earth, then it will be preserved. Therefore in physical nature there is that which the superior man denies to be his original nature.⁽³²⁾

What Chang Tsai meant was even though we have the physical endowment as well, the superior man would not identify it to be his original nature. Then Ch'eng I issued his famous statement:

It would be incomplete to talk about the nature without including material force and unintelligible to talk about material force without including nature. (It would be wrong to consider them apart from each other.)⁽³³⁾

Chu Hsi followed the lead of Chang and Ch'eng and he believed by endorsing such a distinction problems concerning nature could be solved without the need of further debates. He elaborated on his own ideas in a discussion on the problem with his disciples:

Question: With whom originated the theory regarding the material force?

Answer: It began with Chang (Tsai) and the Ch'eng (brothers). I regard them as having enormously helped the School of the Sages, and as having done great service to the scholars who have come after. A reading of them fills one with a strong realization that, before their time, no one had touched on this point. Han Yü, for example, in his *On the Origin of the Nature*, propounded the theory of the three grades (of the nature). Yet though what he said is true, he failed to state clearly that what he was speaking about is only the nature as found in the material force. For, how in the nature (as originally constituted), could there be these 'three grades'?

When Mencius says that the nature is good, he speaks of it only with respect to its origin, and says nothing about it as found in the material force. Thus he, too, fails to make a clear distinction. Other philosophers have asserted that the nature is evil, or that in it both good and evil are intermingled. But if the doctrines of Chang and the Ch'engs had appeared earlier, there would have been no need for all this discussion and controversy. If, therefore, the doctrines of Chang and Ch'engs are admitted, those of the other philosophers go into discard.

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Moreover, if we are to say that humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom alone constitute the nature, how is it that there are some

(32) Chan, *Source Book*, p. 511.

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 552, with some modification. See also n. 92 on p. 536.

people born unruly in the world? It is only owing to the physical endowment that this is so. If one does not take this physical element into account, the theory will not be well rounded, and therefore will be incomplete. But if, on the contrary, one takes only the physical endowment into account, some of which may be good and some bad, while disregarding the fact that in the first place there were only these principles, then one will fall into obscurity.

Since the time when Confucius, Master Tseng (曾子), Tzu-ssu (子思), and Mencius understood these ideas, no one has propounded them (until Chang and the Ch'engs).⁽³⁴⁾

For Chu Hsi the physical nature in itself is not evil, nevertheless the origin of evils still lies in material force, as there is no room for evil in principles which are embodied in the original nature. For this reason in an earlier view he did not even like the idea of the physical nature, if nature is truly principle, then we can only say that the good nature has fallen into material force and undesirable consequences are the result, it does not seem right to talk about nature being physical. But in later years Chu Hsi tended to put more and more emphasis on material force, as principle and material force are inseparable, so he accepted the distinction and was convinced the two-nature theory could help him to give answers to many puzzling problems.⁽³⁵⁾ His views were summarized in the following statement:

Nature is principle only. However, without the material force and concrete stuff of the universe, principle would have nothing in which to inhere. When material force is received in its state of clearness, there will be no obscurity or obstruction and principle will express itself freely. If there is obscurity or obstruction, then in its operation of principle, the Principle of Heaven will dominate if the obstruction is small and human selfish desire will dominate if the obstruction is great. From this we know that the original nature is perfectly good. This is the nature described by Mencius as 'good,' by Master Chou Tun-i as 'pure and perfectly good,' and by Master Ch'eng I as 'the fundamental character of our nature' and 'the nature traced to the source of our being.' However, it will be obstructed if physical nature contains impurity. Hence, [as Chang Tsai said] 'In physical nature there is that which the superior man denies to be his original nature,' and 'If one learns to return to the original nature endowed by Heaven and Earth, then it will be preserved.' In our discussion of nature, we must include physical nature before the discussion can be complete.⁽³⁶⁾

(34) Fung, *History*, Vol. II, pp. 554-555, with slight modification.

(35) Liu, *Chu Tzu*, pp. 198-199.

(36) Chan, *Source Book*, pp. 623-624.

Thus for Chu Hsi, principle or nature is without any qualification good, but nature must be embodied in material force to make the principles inherent in it manifest. When material force is received in its state of clearness, there will be no obscurity or obstruction and principle will express itself freely. But this is not always the case, if the obstruction is great, then human selfish desire will dominate. Chu Hsi believed that everyone has the same original nature, but receives different material force. Through proper discipline everyone's original nature may shine through different material force, though the difficulties one encounters may be greater or smaller. Those who are able to make principles embodied in nature eminently manifest are sages and worthies, they are the model for common people to follow. In other words, the original nature endowed by Heaven is the same in everybody, but material force received is not the same, and the effort to recover one's original nature is not the same. It is here we find the difference between sages and worthies on the one hand, and common people on the other hand, even though in principle everyone can be sage, as each has received the same endowment of the original nature as the sages.

IV. A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY OF NATURE

In the above we have concentrated our discussion on Chu Hsi's theory of human nature, in fact Chu Hsi had stretched his theory to apply to the nature of things in the whole world. For Chu Hsi principle or nature is not different in man and other living species in the world. The only difference lies in that in other living species the material force received is turbid so that they are not in a position to manifest principles in a conscious fashion. He said,

Nature is like water. If it flows in a clean channel, it is clear, if it flows in a dirty channel, it becomes turbid. When physical nature that is clear and balanced is received, it will be preserved in its completeness. This is true of man. When physical nature that is turbid and unbalanced is received, it will be obscured. This is true of animals. Material force may be clear or turbid. That received by men is clear and that received by animals is turbid. Men mostly have clear material force; hence the difference between them and animals. However, there are some whose material force is turbid, and they are not far removed from animals.⁽³⁷⁾

Chu Hsi further elaborated on his case as follows:

Although nature is the same in all men, it is inevitable that [in most cases] the various elements in their material endowment are unbalanced. In some men the material force of Wood predominates. In such cases, the feeling of commiseration is generally uppermost, but the feeling of shame, of deference and compliance, and of right and wrong are impeded

(37) *Ibid.*, p. 625.

by the predominating force and do not emanate into action. In others, the material force of Metal predominates. In such cases, the feeling of shame is generally uppermost, but the other feelings are impeded and do not emanate into action. So with the material forces of Water and Fire. It is only when yin and yang are harmonized and the five moral natures (of humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and good faith) are all complete that a man has the qualities of the Mean and correctness and becomes a sage.⁽³⁸⁾

Clearly there was a strong empirical tendency in Chu Hsi's thought. Chu Hsi came up with an explanation why some men are sages while others are not. The sage has manifested the right combination between nature and material force. But still the emphasis must be put on man's effort to develop what is endowed in man than to relegate everything to fate by putting all the blames on physical endowment. Chu Hsi answered a disciple's questioning in the following way:

On being asked about (Chang Tsai's) section on moral character failing to overcome material force, (Chu Hsi) said: Master Chang Tsai merely said that both man's nature and material force flow down from above. If my moral character is not adequate to overcome material force, then there is nothing to do but to submit to material force as endowed by Heaven. If my moral character is adequate to overcome material force, however, then what I receive from the endowment is all moral character. Therefore if I investigate principle to the utmost and fully develop my nature, then what I have received is wholly Heaven's moral character, and what Heaven has endowed in me is wholly Heaven's principle. The cases in which material force cannot be altered are life, death, longevity and brevity of life, for these, and poverty and wealth, and honor and humble station, all depend on material force. On the other hand, the practice of righteousness between the ruler and his ministers and the exercise of humanity between father and son, are what we call matters of fate. But there is also man's nature. The superior man does not say they are matters of fate. They must proceed from myself, not from fate.⁽³⁹⁾

What Chu Hsi meant was, some people have extremely weak moral character, that must be due to material force; and for certain matters such as longevity and brevity of life, and poverty and wealth, they are not within our control, they are also due to material force. But righteousness and humanity, these are our moral duties, most people can fulfil these duties if they try hard enough to overcome the difficulties involved, however formidable they are, so we cannot say

(38) *Ibid.*

(39) *Ibid.*, pp. 612-613.

they are matters of fate, when what is endowed in nature is fully manifested in material force, then one's whole being transforms into a moral character which is the embodiment of Heaven's principle.

By adding the element of material force in his conceptual framework, Chu Hsi was able to provide rational explanations for many seemingly puzzling phenomena. A student of his worked out a very sophisticated theory concerning the problem of the nature of man and the nature of things under his guidance, it is worthwhile to quote the lengthy discussion as it provides a rather comprehensive picture of Chu Hsi's understanding of the matter.

Chi (Ch'en Chi, 陳杞) submitted to the Teacher the following statement concerning a problem in which he was still in doubt: The nature of man and the nature of things are in some respects the same and in other respects are different. Only after we know wherein they are similar and wherein they are different can we discuss nature. Now, as the Great Ultimate begins its activity, the two material forces (yin and yang, passive and active cosmic forces) assume physical form, and as they assume physical form, the myriad transformations of things are produced. Both man and things have their origin here. This is where they are similar. But the two material forces and the Five Agents, in their fusion and intermingling, and in their interaction and mutual influence, produce innumerable changes and inequalities. This is where they are different. They are similar in regard to principle, but different in respect to material force. There must be principle before there can be that which constitutes the nature of man and things. Consequently, what makes them similar cannot make them different. There must be material force before there can be that which constitutes their physical form. Consequently, what makes them different cannot make them similar. For this reason, in your *Ta-hsüeh huo-wen* (大學或問, Questions and Answers on the Great Learning), you said, 'From the point of view of principle, all things have one source, and of course man and things cannot be distinguished as higher and lower creatures. From the point of view of material force, that which receives it in its perfection and is unimpeded becomes man, while those that receive it partially and are obstructed become things. Because of this, they cannot be equal, but some are higher and others are lower.' However, while in respect to material force they are unequal, they both possess it as the stuff of life, and while in respect of principle they are similar, in receiving it to constitute his nature, man alone differs from other things. This consciousness and movement proceed from material force while humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom proceed from principle. Both man and things are capable of consciousness and movement, but though things possess humanity, righteousness, pro-

priety, and wisdom, they cannot have them completely. Now Kao Tzu (告子, c. 420-c. 350 B.C.) pointed to material force and neglected principle. He was confined to what is similar and ignorant of what is different, and was therefore attacked by Mencius. In your [*Meng Tzu*] *chi-chu* ([孟子] 集註, Collected Commentaries on the *Book of Mencius*) you maintain that 'in respect to material force, man and things do not seem to differ in consciousness and movement, but in respect to principle, the endowment of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom are necessarily imperfect in things.' Here you say that man and things are similar in respect to material force but different in respect to principle, in order to show that man is higher and cannot be equaled by things. In the *Ta-hsüeh huo-wen*, you say that man and things are similar in respect to principle but different in respect to material force, in order to show that the Great Ultimate is not deficient in anything and cannot be interfered with by any individual. Looked at this way, there should not be any question. When someone was puzzled by the discrepancies in the *Ta-hsüeh huo-wen* and the *chi-chu*, I explained it in this way. Is this correct?

The teacher commented: On this subject you have discussed very clearly. It happened that last evening a friend talked about this matter and I briefly explained it to him, but not as systematically as you have done in this statement.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Chu Hsi's ideas were well thought out. There is only one metaphysical principle in the whole universe and it is a creative principle. It is owing to this principle that material force may transform into myriad things in the world. Before there are things, there must be this principle, hence ontologically principle is prior to material force, but in reality principle and material force are inseparable. As all things come from the same origin, principle is the same, and they are made of different material force, which must be understood as the source of differentiation. But if we look at the problem from a different perspective, as principle is one while manifestations are many, the manifestations of the one principle may be loosely said to be composed of many principles. For example, although humanity in the primary sense is the perfect virtue which is the root of all virtues, yet it may be manifested in humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, each may be said to have a different principle. Humanity in this secondary sense is only one of the manifestations of humanity in the primary sense. By the same token, since all things are made of material force, they are similar in this respect, while they are different because they have embodied different principles, hence principles become the source of differentiation. A comprehensive picture of nature can only be brought out by combining these two perspectives.

(40) *Ibid.*, pp. 621-622.

Once Chu Hsi developed a comprehensive theory of nature, other related problems also popped up. He was engaged in a rather interesting debate on whether dry and withered things also have nature.⁽⁴¹⁾ His views may be seen in the following discussion.

Question: How is it that dry and withered things also possess the nature?

Answer: Because from the very beginning they possess this nature. This is why we say so. There is not a single thing in the universe that is outside nature.

Thereupon the Teacher walked up the step and said: The bricks of these steps have in them the principle of bricks. Then he sat down and said: A bamboo chair has in it the principle of the bamboo chair. It is correct to say that dry and withered things have no spirit of life, but it is incorrect to say that they have no principle of life. For example, rotten wood is useless except as fuel—there is in it no spirit of life. But when a particular wood is burned, a particular kind of force is produced, each different from the other. This is so because of the principle originally inherent in it.⁽⁴²⁾

As Chu Hsi identified nature with principle, he had to say that dry and withered things also possess nature, from his viewpoint not only there is the Great Ultimate in everything, but each and everything has a specific principle embodied in it. Chu Hsi also made some very interesting remarks on the problem of consciousness.

Question: Man and birds and animals all have consciousness, although with varying degrees of penetration or impediment. Do plants also have consciousness?

Answer: Yes, they also have. Take a pot of flowers, for example. When watered, they flourish gloriously, but if broken off, they will wither and droop. Can they be said to be without consciousness? Chou Mou-shu (Chou Tun-i) did not cut the grass growing outside his window and said that he felt toward the grass as he felt toward himself. This shows that plants have consciousness [in so far as it has the spirit of life]. But the consciousness of animals is inferior to that of man, and that of plants is inferior to that of animals. Take also the example of the drug rhubarb, which, when taken, acts as a purgative, and the drug aconite, which, when taken, produces heat (vitality and strength). In these cases, the consciousness acts in one direction only.

When asked further whether decayed things also have consciousness, the Teacher said: They also have, as when burned into ashes, made into

(41) Cf. Liu, *Chu Tzu*, pp. 212-216.

(42) Chan, *Source Book*, p. 623.

broth, and drunk, they will be caustic or bitter.⁽⁴³⁾

Not only these ideas may be compared to Leibniz's, they are even closer to Whitehead's ideas. A whole cosmology may be constructed out of Chu Hsi's speculations.

V. CHU HSI'S UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE: AN APPRAISAL

In sum, Chu Hsi started with an existential concern and developed a comprehensive theory of nature with metaphysical and cosmological implications. He claimed that he was transmitting the Way of Confucius and Mencius, but in fact he was really following the lead of Ch'eng I and further developed his insights into a comprehensive system of thought. In this system, ontologically, there are only principle and material force; while principle is ontologically prior, the two are not to be mixed up and not to be separated from each other. Cosmologically, Chu Hsi endorsed Chou Tun-i's "An Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate"⁽⁴⁴⁾ and taught an evolutionary theory based on a creative metaphysics. Man happens to have received the most refined kind of material force, hence he is capable of being conscious of principles and act according to them. Ethically, he must develop to the full what is inherent in his nature which is an endowment from Heaven. Equipped with such new ideas he was able not only to revive some of the fundamental insights of Pre-Chin Confucianism, he could also absorb theories of yin-yang and five agents flourished in the Han period into his comprehensive cosmological scheme, and truly provided an alternative for the intellectuals against the sophistication of Buddhist philosophies. It was by no means an accident he was regarded as the greatest thinker in Sung-Ming Neo-Confucianism.

Ironically, however, if we accept Chu Hsi's recommendation to take the line of Mencius as representing the orthodoxy in Confucianism, and use Mencius' thought as a criterion to give an appraisal of Chu Hsi's philosophy, some very strange consequences issue. As Professor Mou Tsung-san pointed out, when Chu Hsi used his scheme of tripartite division into *hsin* (mind-heart), *hsing* (nature), and *ch'ing* (feeling) to interpret Mencius' thought, he was really giving quite a twist of Mencius' philosophy.⁽⁴⁵⁾ For Mencius, the Mind-heart of commiseration is the first manifestation of the nature, and the full development of such a mind-heart is the realization of the nature, hence there is no gap between the two. The originally good mind-heart is identical with originally good nature. As for the term *ch'ing* used in the text of *Mencius*, it does not mean feeling or emotion as understood by later thinkers. But in Chu Hsi's system of thought, there is not only a sharp distinction between *hsing* and *ch'ing*, but *ch'ing* is regarded as a possible source of evils. For Mencius, however, in its essential state, nature,

(43) *Ibid.*

(44) *Ibid.*, pp. 463-464.

(45) Mou Tsung-san, *Mind and Nature*, Vol III, pp. 407-447.

mind-heart, and feelings and emotions all coincide with one another. In effect there is no need to make a distinction between the three. Of course we can always argue that by introducing new ideas and concepts to interpret Mencius' teachings, implications of his thought may be worked out, so that the spirit of his philosophy may come out even better in these interpretations. Could we make such a claim for Chu Hsi's interpretation of Mencius?

It appears that at least on two accounts Chu Hsi's interpretation of Mencius actually contradicts what Mencius has taught in his own words. Firstly, Chu Hsi has made a sharp distinction between principle and material force, the transcendent and the immanent. But we cannot find such a distinction in Mencius' thought. Mencius seldom talks about principle, but what is implicit in his thought seems to teach that principle is inherent in material force, so that if we can cultivate our strong, vital force, then we can act according to principles. Lu-Wang's position to hold that mind is principle seems much closer to what Mencius has taught. But Chu Hsi holds that the mind comprises principles, the relation between the two is that of correspondence, as principle is static while the mind is active. Since it is impossible to find the teaching of such a theory in Mencius' thought which implies that principle is the creative source, Professor Mou feels that although historically Chu Hsi was honored as the orthodoxy, in fact it was a side branch which assumed the position of orthodoxy.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Secondly, Chu Hsi taught a gradual approach to establish moral principle. He seems to have failed to make an all-important distinction between the educational order and the ontological order. There is no question that teaching has to be gradual. But in order for education to be successful, there must be a ground for it to be successful. Only if man has such a nature, so that he may be taught to act according to moral principles. For example, it would not make much sense to teach other animals to act according to moral principles, let alone in a conscious fashion. Empirical generalization cannot establish the legitimacy of moral principles, the only way for us to establish them is by self-realization, which comes through something like a sudden enlightenment. Lu taught that to learn we must first establish what is great, this is thoroughly consistent with Mencius' teaching that we must first establish the nobler part of human nature. Although Chu Hsi himself implied a leap to reach the kind of sudden enlightenment of moral principles, yet he could not admit that such is the case. It is here we find a serious limitation of Chu Hsi' thought.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In sum Chu Hsi did open up some

(46) *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 41-60.

(47) Liu, *Chu Tzu*, pp. 476-479. My discussant Professor de Bary raised the point that Professor Wing-tsit Chan was of the opinion that there was no sudden leap in Chu Hsi's thought as he had adopted a gradual approach, but Professor Wei-ming Tu and others supported my interpretation of the case. I sincerely believe that there is a difference between conscious realization of moral principles and mere conformity to social practices, as there is a difference between the human speech and a parrot's imitation of the

important dimensions in Confucian thought, but the line of thought he pursued was of a different type albeit within the Confucian tradition, hence his thought should not be taken for granted as to represent the orthodoxy in the Confucian and Mencian tradition as claimed by Chu Hsi himself.⁽⁴⁸⁾

human speech, the best illustration is the case of Helen Keller which was well documented and analyzed in Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay On Man* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 33-35.

- (48) Cf. my article, Shu-hsien Liu, "The Problem of Orthodoxy in Chu Hsi's Philosophy." The paper was presented at an international conference on Chu Hsi held in July, 1982 at Honolulu, and was published in a volume edited by Professor Wing-tsit Chan for University of Hawaii Press: *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*, 1986, pp. 437-460.

朱 子 的 性 論

劉 述 先

本文旨在對於朱子的性論有一全盤性的考察。全文共分五節。(一)、首先指出朱子是由做實踐的修養工夫，對於中和問題深入探討，才逼出他對於心性的成熟見解。(二)、朱子斷定性卽理，也卽要為做實際道德修養工夫立一超越的根據。他對心性的解析與他對理氣的解析有一種平行的關係。(三)、由此而朱子嚴分義理之性與氣質之性，認為必定要兼顧兩面，始能把握到性之全貌。(四)、朱子不僅討論人性，也兼及物性，建立了一個廣汎的性論，牽涉到有關「枯槁有性」一類問題的討論。(五)、最後，我對於朱子的性論有所評估。他的性論乃是儒家思想內部的一種可能的發展。但是這條思想的線索與孟子的性論實有相當距離，故此他雖建立道統之說，認為直承孔孟之緒，其實是有問題的。他主要是繼承程頤的思想有所發揮，而建構了一套在思想上有相當原創性的性論。