ON THE CONCEPT OF WELL-BEING
FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF WANG YANG-MING'S MORAL SYSTEM

I-HING TUNG

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
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IN PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION
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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the concept of well-being discussed in reference to Wang Yang-ming’s major work, *Instructions for Practical Living*. Wang Yang-ming (王陽明, 1472-1529) was a Chinese Neo-Confucian scholar and an official in the Ming Dynasty (明朝, 1368-1644). He is considered to be the third most important Confucian thinker and outranked only by Confucius and Mencius. His thoughts started the last philosophical spiritual movement in China before the massive invasion of Western culture in the late nineteenth century. As his main publication, *Instructions for Practical Living* is highly representative of the philosophical work of Confucianism.

This dissertation first in Chapter I presents an introduction of the overall background, objectives and the significance of the study, as well as the research methodology employed; then it moves on to Chapter II to provide the readers with a description and exposition of Wang Yang-Ming’s concept of well-being, together with an interpretation of Wang Yang-ming’s moral system, concepts, principles and theories in particular with regard to the innate knowing of the good which gives rise to an extraordinary philosophy of life. Next, it discusses in Chapter III how Wang Yang-ming’s theory of innate knowing of the good can be examined in three different aspects of knowledge, intention and emotion. Moreover, with regard to how his philosophy can be applied to interpret our contemporary world and provide relevant responses to the ethical dilemma people face in today’s society is thus brought forward in Chapter IV, which sheds light on especially the issues of moral middle ground: the domain of obedience to the unenforceable, a conception proposed by Lord John
Fletcher Moulton (1844-1921) exemplifying the middle path between law and free choice. Then combining with the retrospection of this research, considerable deliberation of the relevance of this study and recommendations for further research is delivered in Chapter V.

This dissertation aims to provide a detailed analysis of Wang Yang-ming’s concept of well-being and how it relates to the concept of innate knowing of the good. Further, it intends to discuss the arguments of both the proponents and detractors of Wang Yang-ming’s concepts of innate knowing of the good and well-being, as well as to explain how Wang Yang-ming’s concept of innate knowing of the good and well-being can be applied to today’s world and make the argument that, in keeping with these concepts, people can formulate their own values from within.

This dissertation offers a different perspective on life and presents an alternative for people to consider when looking for a “Way” to reach a state of well-being and happiness. It also gives people a sense of purpose and overall meaning in life. Furthermore, the dissertation is a call for more self-discipline as it aspires to demonstrate that one should be able to build up one’s own values from within and develop one’s own outlook instead of having values instilled from external beliefs, religions or societies, which, when achieved, will give us a sense of well-being and happiness.
Chapter I: Introduction

This dissertation begins with a quote from Feng (2005) which will help provide context to this research study and bring to the fore some of the key concepts at its core. These concepts are then briefly discussed. Next, attention turns to the dichotomy between the rising materialism (with greater access to material things equated with greater well-being) and the growing number of people feeling the lack of meaning in their life, thereby suggesting that the key to a fulfilling life may not be in the mere pursuit of ever more worldly possessions. This dissertation ends with an explanation of the relationships between the concepts thus expounded and the growing “disillusion” of some people with an ever more materialistic world.

Key concepts are discussed first in light of a quote below from Feng (2005). The dichotomy between material well-being and happiness is the considered.

The quote discussed first reads as follows:

“All things acquire their virtues by following their Way, meaning, that all things have their own innate nature or natural disposition, and well-being will come about if one’s innate nature or disposition is followed and fulfilled naturally.” (Feng, 2005, p.16, my translation)

The key operative terms in this quote are “innate nature”, “natural disposition”, and “well-being”. They find their source in the work of Wang Yang-ming, a Chinese Neo-Confucian scholar and an official in the Ming Dynasty (明朝, 1368-1644), and in one of his

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1 Original text: “凡物各由其道而得其德，即是凡物皆有其自然之性，苟循其自然之性，则幸福當下即是。” 《人生哲学》, 頁 16.
books in particular, *Instructions for Practical Living* 《傳習錄》 (*chuan-xi-lu*). On the concept of innate nature or disposition, Wang Yang-ming stated that “The nature of heart/mind, innate nature and Heaven are identical. The effect is the same once you successfully extend your innate knowing” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.297, my translation). For him innate nature means the heart/mind (xin, 心), which is identical to innate knowing. It is the self-determining principle capable of bringing a man to his/her highest goals. Therefore, to cultivate and follow innate knowing is the path to well-being.

1.1 Four Chinese Viewpoints on Human Nature

China has a long tradition of philosophical inquiry concerned with the human nature. It is deemed important to first look at different views in order to have a clearer picture regarding the relevance to the origin of Wang Yang-ming’s moral thoughts.

When one tries to understand the Chinese interpretation on human nature, four major Chinese viewpoints are thus considered as follows (Wikipedia, 2016):

1) Human nature is good: the Confucian Mencius (孟子, 372-289 B.C.E.) as the representative. The opening of the book *Three Character Classic* 《三字經》 (*san-zi-jing*) says: “Men at their birth are naturally good. Their natures are much the same; their habits become widely different…”

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2Original text: “心也，性也，天也。故及其知之成功則一。《傳習錄玉話本》卷中，頁297.
3With respect to the translations done by the researcher, *Instructions for Practical Living*, the Chinese title of the primary source, *Instructions for Practical Living* (*chuan-xi-lu*), is abbreviated to “CXL”, while content-wise references from Jiu Gu and Bo Jiang’s books are condensed into “GT” and “JT” separately.
2) Human nature is evil: the Confucian Xunzi (荀子，479-221 B.C.E.) as the representative. His famous quote: “Human nature is evil, and goodness is caused by intentional activity.”

3) Human nature is neither good nor bad: Gaozi (告子，420-350 B.C.E.) as the representative. His famous metaphor: “Human nature is like the willow tree and righteousness is like cups and bowls. Drawing humanity and right from human nature is like making cups and bowls from willow wood.”

4) Human nature is both good and bad: Yangxiong (楊雄，53-18 B.C.E.) as the representative. He believed that “Human nature is both good and evil. Cultivate one’s aspect of goodness, and then one becomes good. On the contrary, if the aspect of evil is cultivated, then one becomes wicked.”

Wang Yang-ming had the same belief as Mencius who developed his entire philosophy from two basic propositions: “the first, that Man’s original nature is good; and the second, that Man’s original nature becomes evil when his/her wishes are not fulfilled” (Chan, 1996, p.208).

1.2 Wang Yang-ming the Person

Wang Yang-ming (王陽明, 1472-1529) was a Chinese Neo-Confucian scholar and an official in the Ming Dynasty (明朝, 1368-1644). Initially expounding the philosophical system of idealist thoughts advanced by Lu Jiu-yuan (陸九淵, 1139-1193) during the Southern Song Dynasty (南宋, 1127-1279), he later established his own dynamic system of thoughts which he developed both as a result of the hardships he endured in his life and his
criticism of the orthodox philosophy of Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200), considered to be the third most important Confucian thinker and outranked only by Confucius and Mencius.

During Wang Yang-ming’s time, which was Ming Dynasty in China, people who wanted to pass the imperial civil service examination had to study Zhu Xi’s orthodox philosophy. In other words, knowing Zhu Xi’s philosophy well could guarantee one’s rise in the Chinese bureaucracy in those days. But it was said that, “students of Zhu Xi’s philosophy became noted for their extreme memorization and recitation, their substantial and abundant knowledge, their enormous information, and their flowery compositions” (Betty, 1980, p.118). Wang Yang-ming detested the artificial scholarly phenomenon then by proclaiming that the highest good disappeared from sight is rightfully due to the results of fragmented knowledge, empty content and falsehood; and hence forth introduced his own system of thoughts.

As with other Neo-Confucian scholars, Wang Yang-Ming’s comprehensive system of thoughts was erected with Confucianism at its core combining with the principles of the other major schools of philosophy, especially Buddhism and Taoism, in order to respond to the direct philosophical challenges made by the other schools of thoughts, such as Buddhism, Neo-Taoism, the School of Names and the Yin-Yang tradition.

What they all achieved was a “synthesis of Taoist cosmology and Buddhist spirituality around the core of Confucian concern with society and government, a synthesis which predominated in the intellectual and spiritual life of China, Korea, and Japan prior to the modern period.” (Faculty, 2016)

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For both Confucians and Neo-Confucians, as Koller (2002) stated in his book:

“The three activities of learning or applied philosophy, namely, cultivation, rectification and development are all part of the same program of moral self-cultivation, for when human relations are rectified and the virtues developed, ren will be cultivated.” (Koller, 2002, p.313)

While this quote clearly outlines basic Confucian and Neo-Confucian principles, one of the words used, the term ‘Ren’, is likely to leave readers not familiar with Chinese philosophy perplexed as to its meaning, which is discussed next.

1.3 “Human-Heartedness” (Ren, 仁) and “Principle” (Li, 理)

The Chinese term “Ren” has several meanings, all of which having to do with emotions. They include human-heartedness, benevolence, love and compassion. The term “Ren” in Chinese actually conveys added meanings. “Ren” in Chinese character refers to a combination of two people together, which has led to the following rendering by Co. “consciousness-of-human-others” (Co., 1992, p.107). The moral concept of this rendering of the term ‘Ren’ is that a man who is aware of being part of a community is never alone. But he/she will need to be conscious at all time of the consequences of his/her thoughts, words and deeds on others.

Another layer of meanings was added by Zhu Xi who deemed “Ren” to be a reference to the original goodness of human nature; a reflection of Zhu Xi’s belief that the basic human nature is of pure goodness, i.e. principle, while secondary human nature, created by Chi (or Qi, 氣) is impure and the source of evil. Expounding on Zhu Xi’s theory, Koller (2002) explained that:
"According to Zhu Xi’s theory, the source of goodness is human nature itself. But this human nature is embodied in a person, giving rise to feelings. It is the feelings, originating in bodily passions that give rise to evil." (Koller, 2002, p.314)

Another quote from Zhong (2009) can at the same time provide a more in depth explanation:

"Man’s nature is superior to anything else morally speaking. It deteriorates when dispositional character involves. Dispositional character is originated from Qi. The latter can be clear, transparent, or just the opposite. Those who possess clear and transparent Qi become the sages while those possessing the opposite become the ignorant." (Zhong, 2009, p.157)

Based on this belief, Zhu Xi articulated a methodology for differentiating between basic and secondary human nature in order to identify and recognize the reality of the heart/mind and that of things external to the heart/mind. As pointed out by Ivanhoe (2009), “Zhu Xi postulated that the heart/mind contained principles (xin-ju-li, 心具理), much the same way a dictionary contains words” (Ivanhoe, 2009, p.107). The only way to help the heart/mind recollect and remember these principles is to let ourselves be guided by lessons we draw from outside. This is precisely what Wang Yang-ming objected to from what he observed the corruptive scholarly atmosphere of Zhu Xi’s followers. As over focusing on the external lessons results in superficiality without substance at the core. Although Wang Yang-ming concurred with Zhu Xi that the basic human nature is of pure goodness, i.e. principle as propounded by Zhu Xi, he advocated the importance of turning one’s attention to one’s heart/mind because for him the utmost sincerity can rise only when one’s heart/mind is pure.
In order to provide further explanation on the importance of turning one’s attention to one’s heart/mind, below is Ching’s (1976) description of Wang Yang-ming’s declaration of the teaching of the sages.

“......the teaching of the sages is that of heart/mind, that profound and unitary source of man’s moral judgements and actions as well as his vital consciousness, the ‘substance of which he called ren (humanity)’.” (Ching, 1976, p.180)

1.4 The “Heart/Mind” (Xin, 心)

Wang Yang-ming insisted that the heart/mind is principle and firmly believed that “nothing is outside the heart/mind; no justice is outside the heart/mind and no goodness is outside the heart/mind either (He, 1994, p.41)” (xin-wai-wu-wu, xin-wai-wu yi, xin-wai-wu-shan, 心外無物，心外無義，心外無善). This belief is at the root of learning and the starting point for knowing internally at the level of heart/mind. For him, it is the whole person that should be developed, not by investigating one thing after another in the manner of an assiduous scholar and exegete, but by cultivating heart/mind. Ivanhoe (2009) has, in addition, interpreted this to mean that the conscious, active, and knowing mode of principle—and that learning occurs only and whenever one properly applies one’s heart/mind to the ‘things’ of the world” (Ivanhoe, 2009, p.107).

Eventually, Wang Yang-ming’s own philosophy ended up giving birth to what is known today as “The School of Universal Heart/Mind” (xin-xue, 心學), one of the two leading schools of thought in the history of Neo-Confucianism. The School of Universal Heart/Mind centralizes not only the knowledge of knowing, but also the knowledge of life
and the knowledge of practice. The other one, “The School of Principle” (li-xue, 理學), was started by Zhu Xi, and its philosophy directly called into question by Wang Yang-ming.

1.5 Wang Yang-ming’s Moral System

Wang Yang-ming’s system of thoughts is based on three fundamental pillars: (i) “The heart/mind is principle” (xin-ji-li, 心即理); (ii) “Unity of knowing and acting” (zhi-xing-he-yi, 知行合一); and (iii) “The extension of the innate knowing of the good” (zhi-liang-zhi, 致良知). He explicated these three pillars by concluding his life experiences based on his own realization and understanding, together with what he taught his students, and proposed specific methods at different stages. His explication enabled him to finally complete the construction of The School of Universal Heart/Mind. Wang Yang-ming’s thoughts, according to Geng (2014), “started the last philosophical spiritual movement in China before the massive invasion of Western culture in the late nineteenth century” (Geng, 2014, p.6). His school of thoughts, with a large number of important followers in China, surpassed all others of its kind before and since to have neither predecessors nor successors; and influenced the entire spiritual culture in Ming Dynasty, as well as the Chinese intellectual landscape during his entire lifetime and for the following one hundred and fifty years.

In Wang Yang-ming’s moral system, because he placed the main emphasis on the individual, particularly his/her own application, i.e. actions, as well as transforming the

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6 The concept of innate knowing of the good is very similar to innate ideas, one of the three categories in Descartes’ Theory of Ideas. Innate ideas hold that the mind is born with ideas/knowledge, and that therefore the mind is not a “blank slate” at birth (Smith, 2016).
heart/mind during the process of practicing, heart/mind rectification can be considered as the major pragmatic step, which connotes a circular movement involving the dynamic activity of heart/mind, engaged in perfecting and determining itself. The meaning of heart/mind rectification is that “through remedying and righting the human heart/mind, the human heart/mind can become the ‘heart/mind of Tao’ (dao-xin, 道心), so as to achieve the purpose of social governance” (Dong, 2014, p.62). As Betty (1980) provided additional clarification as follows:

“What is essential for Wang is to examine oneself, to make the will\(^7\) sincere, and above all to extend one’s innate knowledge—that is, to follow the infallible voice of righteousness which exists prior to learning.” (Betty, 1980, p.119)

To further explain what heart/mind of Tao indicates. The metaphor Wang Yang-ming applied reads as follows:

“Right in front is the sky that is bright and sunny and the sky outside this courtyard is also bright and sunny. The reason we cannot see all the sky is because part of it is blocked by many walls and houses. Once you remove the walls and houses, the sky is one and the same.”\(^8\) (CXL, JT, 2012, p. 334, my translation)

Wang Yang-ming’s system of thoughts not only includes strong and compelling ethical and moral implications, but also promotes universality as it deals with how people are at one with others and other parts of the world, and even at one with the universe at large. This is especially true when Wang Yang-ming expounds his views on “the extension of the innate knowing of the good, which also happens to be his greatest contribution to Chinese philosophy.

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\(^7\) The word "will" in this dissertation means "intention".

\(^8\) Original text: “比如面前見天，是昭昭之天；四外見天，也只是昭昭之天，只為許多房子遮蔽，便不見天之全體，若撤去房子牆壁，總是一個天矣。”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 333.
1.6 The Purpose of Philosophy according to New Confucianism

According to Liang Shu-ming (梁漱溟, 1893-1988), a renowned philosopher and educator in the late Qing dynasty and one of the principal representatives of the New Confucianism movement that began in the early 20th century in Republican China, philosophy has two main purposes:

“One, in the strict academic sense with regard to the philosophical system of life, is to provide a well-ordered and methodical interpretation to the concepts, scope, principles, theories, etc. on the philosophy of life; the other is to give a point of view on life, as it relates to the issues and problems of man and society, as well as how that particular viewpoint can be applied in life.” (Liang, 2013, p.5, my translation)

These two purposes as expounded by Liang Shu-ming will inform this dissertation throughout. However, before expounding on this particular point and discuss in details the purpose of this study, it is necessary first to take a look at today’s world.

1.7 Background of Study

By all accounts, never before in the whole history of mankind have human beings enjoyed so much material well-being. Driven in part by the liberalization of international trade and the rapid advent of technology and innovation, people have now access to many consumer goods which, on the face of it, contribute to making their lives easier, more convenient and happier. Marketers, among others, do a good job of leading us to believe,
rightly or wrongly, that more worldly possessions equate greater happiness; hence rapidly growing consumerism trends around the world.

But while the dramatic expansion of the world economy has led to an unimaginable level of material possessions it has not necessarily translated into greater happiness as contemporary statistics sadly remind us that the number of people suffering from cancer, suicide, depression, and drug addiction (America has one million heroin addicts, of which about 50,000 die from drug overdoses every year\(^\text{10}\)) (Drugwarfacts, 2016), is not only on the rise but out of control.

This dissertation posits that not knowing either one's essence or the meaning of one's life could be one of the principal reasons for these afflictions, for it is assumed that without an immaterial meaning and purpose in life, one could feel despair, hopeless and empty inside because one no longer feels satisfied with one's material status. But since there is no option to this 'body consciousness', and nothing to replace this sense of despair and feeling of emptiness inside, one could come to seriously question who he/she is, why he/she is here and where he/she is going, with no clear answer in sight. It is assumed that this sense of purposelessness and meaninglessness at a deeper level could bring on an existential crisis, resulting in depression, cancer, drug addiction and suicide.

The researcher believes that by advocating Wang Yang-ming's philosophy and his thoughts on the meaning of life, it is hoped to provide general people who have no purpose and who have lost hope with a different outlook on life, the importance of examining one’s

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purpose of existence and presumably to improve the situation of the rise of depression and suicide rate.

1.7.1 Depression and Suicide on the Rise

According to statistics published by the WHO (World Health Organization) in 2015, globally, an estimated 350 million people of all ages suffer from depression, one of the priority conditions covered by the WHO’s Mental Health Gap Action Program\(^{11}\) (WHO, 2015). In the meantime, statistics from the ISS (International Suicide Statistics) reveal that over one million people die by suicide worldwide each year. It was the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds globally in 2012. But suicide is not limited to one age group, it occurs throughout individual’s life span\(^ {12}\) (Suicide, 2015).

Another pointer is health care. According to the WHO, cancers figure among the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide. In 2012, alone approximately 14 million new cases and 8.2 million cancer related deaths were reported. And it is expected that annual cancer cases will rise from 14 million in 2012 to 22 within the next 2 decades as reported by WHO\(^ {13}\) (WHO, 2015). The rise in cancers reflects a deterioration of our environment subject to many new chemical substances. But there is also strong suspicion that depression-prone individuals are more likely to suffer from cancer than happy people.

1.7.2 Urbanization: a Contributing Factor

Another interesting finding recently released by the UNFPA (UNFPA, 2015) and possibly another factor contributing to the sentiment of distress in our societies is the fact


\(^{13}\) Retrieved from: http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs297/en/ on 11.10.2015
that for the first time in history, more than half of the world’s population is now living in towns and cities. By 2030, the urban population will swell to almost 5 billion. With a majority of people now residing in cities artificially created and disconnected from nature, urban modes of life are prevalent. Living far away from nature, urban dwellers tend to busy themselves with all sorts of activities, be the work-related or just a simple electronic gadgets, which segregates them from their inner natural world and cause them to neglect their natural dispositions. With people more and more removed from both outer and inner nature, man has become more and more cut off from life's natural rhythms and his own natural instincts and rhythms, which accounts for many of our problems. But, apart from urbanization, what else accounts for the exponential rise in the number of people suffering from depression as reported by the WHO?

While there is, admittedly, no ready-made one-fit-for-all answer, it is widely agreed that the emphasis the modern world places on material acquisition plays a significant role.

1.7.3 The Vicissitudes of Modern Life

Modern life has left many people feeling unbelievable stressed, lonely and alienated, and no matter how many new stress-relieving drugs are for all to take and how much support new technologies provide in the performance of our daily tasks, the overall dissatisfaction, loneliness and pessimism felt by contemporary man persist. People cannot simply go on living exclusively artificial lives, completely disconnected from their natural roots.

It seems almost axiomatic to say: “I have everything I want and need in life, but what’s the point?” On the Better Life index 2015 compiled by the Organization of
Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to determine one’s happiness as measured by countries (the Index uses eleven criteria that include housing, income, job, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, safety and work-life balance), the countries ranked in the top ten countries for best quality of life in the world are those in northern Europe (OECD, 2015). Yet, the suicide rate in northern Europe is also known to be very high. Of course, one should not jump to conclusion and assume that there is a direct correlation between material well-being and unhappiness. This is not that simple.

Some elements of an answer as to why unhappiness and psychological dissatisfaction are so widespread are provided by the World Happiness Report. The report states in part that:

“One reason is that individuals compare themselves to others. They are happier when they are higher on the social (or income) ladder. Yet when everybody rises together, relative status remains unchanged. A second obvious reason is that the gains have not been evenly shared, but have gone disproportionately to those at the top of the income and education distribution. A third is that other societal factors—safety, loss of social trust, a declining confidence in government—have counteracted any benefits felt from the higher incomes. A fourth reason is adaptation: individuals may experience an initial jump in happiness when their income rises but then at least partly return to earlier levels as they adapt to their new higher income.” (Sachs & Helliwell & Layard, 2012, p. 5)

All this goes to prove that another dimension of man cannot be overlooked. People cannot go on leading essentially artificial lives completely disconnected from their natural roots. Although consumerism on the rise (and widely encouraged), it is not the appropriate response to human woes. This is not to say, however, that material well-being and happiness are not compatible. What is suggested is that the search for well-being cannot be
solely rooted in material pursuits. What is more important is that man's purpose in life is to realize one's own essence.

According to Aristotle, everything in Nature is seeking its natural balance and harmony within nature. In order to achieve that end, each thing has to have an essence or potential (from where it comes), a form (its material nature), a cause (why it comes into existence), and a future (where it is heading) that is striving for that balance. For Aristotle, all four conditions are required as a basis for existence and ultimate reality.

There is order in nature and the universe because everything is in a process of moving towards the realization of its essence. That is everything's purpose, and because everything is doing what it is supposed to, doing what comes to it naturally and inherently, there is order, balance and harmony in the universe. Seen in this light, man is no different. Like everything else in nature, he/she is striving to realize his/her own essence and purpose, too. There are alternatives. And it is the belief of this research that one such alternative can be found in the philosophy of Wang Yang-ming, which brings us back to the purposes of philosophy as expounded earlier.

In keeping with the two man purposes of philosophy as articulated by Liang (2013), this dissertation thus aims: first, to provide an interpretation of Wang Yang-ming's moral system, concepts, principles and theories and the extraordinary philosophy of life it propounds; and second, to provide an account of how Wang Yang-ming's philosophy can be applied to interpret our contemporary world as well as relevant responses to the issues and problems man faces in today's society. By doing so, it is the hope of the researcher to put forward an alternative for people to consider when looking for a "Way" to attain well-being and happiness in today's world.
Based on the above basic information, the researcher would like to further a study on the topic of well-being in relation to Wang Yang-ming’s moral system according to the framework below:

1.8 Thesis Statement

This dissertation is rooted in the researcher’s belief that Wang Yang-ming’s moral system offers a perspective on life that is utterly relevant to our world even though it was formulated more than eight hundred and fifty years ago. The concept of well-being is at its core; not simply as a central concept in Wang Yang-ming’s system of thoughts as explained earlier for cultivating oneself not as we are often led to believe, for avidly pursuing consumption and acquiring ever more worldly possessions. Or to put it another way, well-being as related to Wang Yang-ming has a philosophical dimension, whereas, the concept of well-being in today’s world solely denotes a material dimension (in fact, they are diametrically opposed). Simply put, in exploring Wang Yang-ming’s moral system and discussing how it can be interpreted in terms of the issues and problems of man in contemporary societies and how it can be applied to our life and times, the hope is to offer a different perspective and an alternative for people to consider when looking for a “Way” to reach a state of well-being and happiness. It also gives man a sense of purpose and overall meaning in life. The hope is also to demonstrate that we should be able to build up our own values from within and develop our own outlook instead of having values instilled in us from external beliefs, religions or societies, which, when achieved, will give us a sense of well-being and happiness.
1.9 Objectives of Dissertation

This research study seeks to attain the following objectives:

a. To provide a detailed analysis of Wang Yang-ming’s concept of well-being and how it relates to the concept of innate knowing of the good.

b. To discuss the arguments of both the proponents and detractors of Wang Yang-ming’s concepts of innate knowing of the good and well-being.

c. To explain how Wang Yang-ming’s concept of innate knowing of the good and well-being apply to today’s world and make the argument that, in keeping with these concepts, people can formulate their own values from within.

1.10 Significance of the Research

In discussing Wang Yang-ming’s theories and moral system, this research hopes to familiarize people, especially Western people with a philosopher with a unique perspective on life, especially when considered from a Western standpoint. This dissertation is also significant in that it offers an alternative for people to attain a state of well-being in today’s world. Last but not least, it also shows that Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy is still relevant to interpret today’s complex world.

1.11 Limitation of the Research

The limitations of the research are as follows:

a. This is a focused research on the concept of well-being only from the viewpoint of Wang Yang-ming’s moral system. The other authors cited are for the purpose of an in-depth study.
b. Since the research perspective is philosophical, while the approach of the applicability is discussed, it only plays a secondary role in this dissertation.

c. Wang Yang-ming’s work, *Instructions for Practical Living* 《傳習錄》 (chuan-xi-lu), is the main source for this dissertation which does not include any other of his work.

### 1.12 Research Methodology

This research study requires both primary and secondary sources, including books and journal articles in English and Chinese languages. Reference books and journal articles are available at the library of Assumption University and some universities in Taiwan and online. Many reference books have also been purchased in Taiwan and mainland China.

The primary source used for this research is a book called *Instructions for Practical Living* 《傳習錄》, compiled by Wang Yang-ming’s disciples. The book is a concise record of the questions and answers between Wang Yang-ming and his disciples and the letters Wang Yang-ming wrote in response to people’s inquiries about his thinking and theories. The book includes Wang Yang-ming’s thoughts central to his philosophy and as such is a representative philosophical work of Confucianism.

The book includes three volumes. Volume I mainly elaborates on the concepts of “The heart/mind is principle”, and “Unity of knowing and acting”. Volume II is a collection of eight letters personally written by Wang Yang-ming not only to answer the questions about the unity of knowing and acting and “investigating things” (ge-wu, 格物), but also to explain the content, meaning and purpose of Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy. In addition,
there are two essays on Wang Yang-ming's views on education. Volume III predominantly
talks about "The extension of the innate knowing of the good" with concrete illustration of
Wang Yang-ming's thoughts at a later stage in his life.

Several other books used for this dissertation pertains to issues with translating.
Since Instructions for Practical Living is written in classical Chinese, also known as
"Literary Chinese" (a written form of Old Chinese not used by native speakers of modern
Chinese), understanding it can be difficult all the more as there are many
literary references and allusions. Compounding the challenges, the book also uses an
extremely abbreviated style. Five books have been selected as references. Two books
translated from classical Chinese into modern Chinese by Jiu Gu and Bo Jiang respectively
are used to facilitate the translations done by the researcher given the absence of English
translations. Three other books written by Chin Ju Lia, Chan, Wing-tsit and Xiao, Jiefu & Li
jinquan, respectively are also used for the same purpose.

It should be noted that with respect to the translations done by the researcher, 《傳習
錄》(chuan-xi-lu), the Chinese title of the primary source, Instructions for Practical Living,
is abbreviated to "CXL", while content-wise references from Jiu Gu's and Bo Jiang's books
(translated from classical Chinese into modern Chinese) are condensed into "GT" and "JT"
separately. The original texts in Chinese are also provided in the footnotes functioning as
points of reference for the reasons: 1) readers who are Chinese literate in the relevant field
are able to criticize if there are mistakes with my translation; 2) through my own review in
the future to achieve a better version of translation; 3) as a verification to the English
translated version thus far; and 4) the important concepts and sentences of the original texts are easier to understand comparing with the corresponding translations.

1.13 Definitions of Terms

**Emotion**

It is, from a moral perspective, a sense of sympathy means the feeling of pity unable to bear seeing the suffering of others, a sense of shame suggests a feeling of shame toward bad behaviors, a sense of modesty signifies giving preference and honor to someone before yourself out of courtesy and thoughtfulness, and a sense of right and wrong connotates a feeling of liking goodness and disliking evil. Emotion can be put into seven categories, which are joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, hatred, desire. Therefore, the word emotion is also called seven emotions.

**Heart/Mind**

It means the conscious, active, and knowing mode of principle—and that learning occurs only and whenever one properly applies one's heart/mind to the "things" of the world (Ivanhole, 2009, p.107) What is called heart/mind is that which is able to see, hear, speak and move. This is innate nature, it is also the Principle of Heaven.
**Innate knowing of the good**: It refers to the moral consciousness and moral sentiments innate in all human acquiring without depending on external environment and education (Chen, 1991, p.166). It is an inborn moral sense, common to all, which gives all people their fundamental dignity and equality. It is also a capacity to know the good which is neither foreknowledge nor retrospective knowledge. It is knowledge about what is going on (Huang, 2006, p.396).

**Innate nature/disposition**: It means the heart/mind.

**Intention**: It expresses the intended aspect of heart/mind or innate knowing of the good. This intended aspect is the functioning acts of the moral subject, meaning heart/mind or innate knowing of the good. Intention emanates from the heart/mind; it also initiates the dictation of Heavenly Principle. Intention does not exist in emptiness. The rise of intention has to depend on objects, events and affairs.

**Knowledge**: It means the wisdom one has to enable one to verbally explain what one knows, to comprehend and to understand. It also means the heart/mind which can distinguish between right and wrong of moral values.

**Nature**: It means all things in the universe, the sum of biological and non-biological universe, meaning the phenomenal world and the
natural noumenal world. Each natural thing, including man, can be explained in terms of its essence, the goal for the sake of which a thing is the way it is.

Sagehood : It is a state in which one can obtain sagely ease. It is tied to having a disposition to respond well to the situations one encounters and it is a disposition that springs from a fine internal state rather than from self-control. (Angle, 2009, p.53)

Subjectivity : The meaning of subjectivity (our original Self/the soul) is that the only person who can illuminate the quality of self-knowing and innate knowing of the good is the individual himself/herself. Nobody can do it on his/her behalf.

Virtues : They are excellences of character, trained behavioral dispositions that result in habitual acts of moral goodness. They are also special moral qualities which can enable individuals to internalize their moral convictions and do the right thing spontaneously without having to reflect on and struggle over the situation.

Well-being : It indicates avoiding misfortune so as to have fortune, as well as to have protection and help from the Heaven (Anonymous, 2015). It can be reached if one’s innate nature or disposition is followed and fulfilled naturally. All things have their own innate nature or natural disposition, which is the Way endowing by
Heaven. If the Way is followed, then virtues will be acquired.
Chapter II: Description and Exposition of Wang Yang-ming’s Concept of Well-being

2.1 Introduction

As a philosophical theme, the concept of well-being has long been discussed; as early as the time of Plato and Aristotle in the west, and Confucius and Laozi in China. In both worlds, the notion of well-being is in many respects the essence and reasons of human existence. But what does well-being really mean?

Very often when we consider the concept of well-being, the ideas of balance, harmony and health would be brought into the equation, but hardly can the definitions and meanings be clearly and distinctively elucidated as a definition of life on which all can agree has not been able to be put forward.

This chapter, by first introducing the Chinese long-standing interpretation of well-being, and then gradually bringing out the kernel conceptions referring to Wang Yang-ming’s major work Instructions for Practical Living which is also the representative philosophical work of Confucianism, will pinpoint Wang Yang-ming’s concept of well-being.
2.2 The Notion of Well-Being in Chinese Context

The word, well-being in English can be a misnomer since the concept of being is still very much in debate while well means good which is easy to understand. However, when one puts together the meaning good and the on-going debate of being, it is predictable that people would have a baffling idea towards the word well-being. Nevertheless, well-being in Chinese means 幸福 (xin-fu), which on the contrary, is direct and simple to grasp. According to Shuowenjiezi14, 福 (xin) indicates avoiding misfortune so as to have fortune (ji-er-mian-xiong-ye, 吉而免兇也), while 福 (fu) suggests protection and help from the Heaven (you-ye, 禾也) (Anonymous, 2015).

Well-being, for the ancient Chinese, came about from cultivating one’s innate virtue. It did not, unlike in our world today, come about as a result of realizing one’s dreams or by fulfilling one’s desires, nor was it the object of one’s life; it came about as a result of how one lived his/her life. It came about as one acquired wisdom. Wisdom was concerned with the “how” of living life, not the “what”. It was concerned with leading a good life. For the ancient Chinese, a good human life was a state of well-being.

The ancient Chinese did not believe that man’s presence on earth was an accident; rather it was full of purpose. That purpose for which man is here is expressed through nature. One cannot just pursue knowledge and expect to live a life of well-being, because well-being comes from integrating wisdom with knowledge. Therefore, to know and learn about nature is part and parcel what it means to be human.

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Nature, in this dissertation according to Handian (Anonymous, 2015) (漢典<自然>, Chinese Dictionary\(^{15}\)), means all things in the universe, the sum of biological and non-biological universe, meaning the phenomenal world and the natural noumenal world. Each natural thing, including man, can be explained in terms of its essence, the goal for the sake of which a thing is the way it is. Thus, if you want to know who you are, start by knowing what nature is, then follow those principles to your inner nature and the universal principles, The Way, reflected in all of life, both in the phenomenal and noumenal worlds, as well as the external and internal worlds.

According to Feng You-Lan, “all things acquire their virtues by following their Way, meaning, that all things have their own innate nature or natural disposition, and well-being will come about if one’s innate nature or disposition is followed and fulfilled naturally\(^{16}\)” (Feng, 2005, p.16, my translation)

On the concept of innate nature or disposition, Wang Yang-ming said in his book Instructions for Practical Living, “The nature of heart/mind, innate nature and Heaven are identical. The effect is the same once you successfully extend your innate knowing of the good."\(^{17}\)” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.297, my translation) The same inference was also drawn by Ching in her book on Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy that “heart/mind and innate nature are one and the same, and, so to speak, co-extensive (Ching, 1976, p.163). Thus, at the end of this section, we can conclude that for Wang Yang-ming, innate nature means the...

\(^{15}\) Retrieved from: \url{http://www.zdic.net/c/a/142/311419.htm} on 11.10.2015.

\(^{16}\) Original text: “凡物各從其道而得其德, 即是凡物皆有其自然之性，翕順其自然之性，則幸福當下即是。” 《人生哲學》, 頁 16.

\(^{17}\) Original text: “心也，性也，天也。故及其知之成功則一。” 《傳習錄自語本》卷中，頁 297.
heart/mind, which is identical to innate knowing of the good. Therefore, to cultivate and follow innate knowing of the good is a means to well-being.

2.3 Wang Yang-ming’s Conceptual Framework

As it was explained earlier, the dynamic system of thoughts Wang Yang-ming developed was the results of both the hardships he endured in his life and his criticism of the orthodox philosophy of Zhu Xi. His comprehensive system of thoughts was erected with Confucianism at its core combining with the principles of the other major schools of philosophy, especially Buddhism and Taoism.

The most significant and revolutionary act Wang Yang-ming did germane to his belief in Confucianism was to reinterpret one of the Four Books\footnote{The Four Books: Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean, Analects and Mencius. They are Chinese classic texts illustrating the core value and belief systems in Confucianism. They were selected by Zhu Xi in the Song dynasty to serve as general introduction to Confucian thought, and they were, in the Ming and Qing dynasties, made the core of the official curriculum for the civil service examinations. (Wikipedia, 2016) Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Books_and_Five_Classics on 08.03.2016.}, the Great Learning (《大学》da-xue), as he gained a new understanding of the central idea of the book itself. The Eight Stages leading to the harmony of the world suggested in the book were i) to investigate things and affairs (ge-wu, 格物); ii) to extend knowledge (zhi-zhi, 致知); iii) to make one’s intention sincere (cheng-yi, 誠意); iv) to make one’s heart/mind upright (zheng-xin, 正心); v) to cultivate oneself (xiu-shen, 修身); vi) to harmonize one’s family (qi-jia, 齊家); vii) to rule the country (zhi-guo, 治國); and viii) to bring peace to the world (pin-tian-xiu, 平天下). Among which, the first four stages centralize self-cultivation at the individual level, meaning the small I (xiao-wo, 小我), whereas the last four stages concentrate on the
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governance of the family, country and the world, meaning the big I (da-wo, 大我). Wang Yang-ming conceived that cultivation of the self is nothing more than the following of one’s intuitive knowledge and extending it through our daily experience in dealing with ordinary affairs, he proposed to change the sequences of the first four stages and moved the third and the fourth stages to be the first and second. The reason for this alternation, which was notable to many, is that for Wang Yang-ming, he objected to Zhu Xi’s new arrangement of the text of the Great Learning, which put investigation of things and affairs before that on making one’s intention sincere. For Wang Yang-ming, sincerity of thought is nothing more than the rectification of affairs and the extension of the innate knowing of the good (zhi-liang-zhi, 致良知), both being carried out with the utmost sincerity. He did not believe the possibility of events and affairs to be conducted rightfully if one’s intention and heart/mind are not sincere and upright. In his view, the cultivation of the self is the same as the extension of the innate knowing of the good, which this dissertation asserts to be the method of obtaining well-being.

Owing to this conviction, Wang Yang-ming reduced all his teachings to the innate knowing of the good and he called it ‘Treasury of the True Dharma Eye to the Door of Sagehood’ (sheng-men-zhen-fa-yan-zang, 正門正法眼藏) (Takase, 2014, p.216). He deemed it as his own understanding of the Confucian Way and the orthodox transmission of the truth. The following quote can further demonstrate how much importance Wang Yang-ming attached to it in response to the comment from a student of his.

“Chongyi said, ‘Master has given the most incisive and thorough explanation of the aim and purpose of the extension of the innate knowing of the good. It seems that further elucidation is unable to provide concerning this issue.’ Master said, ‘How could you have
said it so casually. You should see how you understand it after six-month of putting it into practice. And then see how you understand it after one-year of putting it into practice. The longer the time you make an effort, the more you will feel differently. This feeling is beyond verbal description! 19” (CXL, JT, 2012, p. 324, my translation)

The subsequent sections will present detailed expositions on Wang Yang-ming’s moral system and his theory on the innate knowing of the good in particular.

2.3.1 The Fundament of Wang Yang-ming’s Moral System

Wang Yang-ming’s system of thoughts is based on three fundamental pillars: (i) “The heart/mind is principle”; (ii) “Unity of knowing and acting”; and (iii) “The extension of the innate knowing of the good”.

The first pillar brings forward his understanding, according to Feng (1966) that “the universe is a spiritual whole, in which there is only one world, the concrete actual world that we ourselves experience. Thus there is no place for that other world of abstract Li.” (Feng, 1966, p.309) Wang Yang-ming believed the truth or the law of things is inseparable from the heart/mind. He also believed that if we separate ourselves from our innate knowing of the good which is identical to heart/mind, then everything in this world ceases to exist. For him, this innate knowing of the good is the basis of all existence.

With the introduction of the second pillar, Wang Yang-ming made further efforts to expound the meaning of human knowledge. He viewed human knowledge as an understanding of the innate knowing of the good, which is equal to self-knowing. It is

19 Original text: “先生曰：‘先生致知之旨發盡經筵，看來這裡再去不得。’ 先生曰：‘何言之易也！再用功半年看如何？又用功一年看如何？功夫愈久，愈覺不同。此難口說。’”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁324.
heavenly principle that every human being possesses. All worldly events and affairs, as well as their laws are contained in this innate knowing of the good. If one can fully extend it, one can reach the understanding and realization of all truth. Hence, unity of knowing and acting is not just a normal perception of putting what you know into practice, but making knowledge and action into one. What it means is that knowing is doing and doing is the manifestation of knowing. It also signifies knowing is the beginning of doing, and doing is the completion of knowing. In short, knowing and doing mutually contain each other, just like milk and water are inseparable and indistinguishable.

Wang Yang-ming is greatly known for his advocacy of the third pillar. At the later stage of his life, even before he died, he devoted himself solely to the teaching of the innate knowing of the good. As it is mentioned earlier, Wang Yang-ming reduced all his teachings to the innate knowing of the good and treated it as the essence of sagehood, a state in which one can obtain sagedly ease. It is tied to “having a disposition to respond well to the situations one encounters and it is a disposition that springs from a fine internal state rather than from self-control” (Angle, 2009, p.53).

The third pillar, the innate knowing of the good which is an inborn moral sense, common to all, that gives all people their fundamental dignity and equality. It is the core of this dissertation, which the researcher believes to be a means to attain well-being. However, before exploring its concept, it is advisable to first deal with the linguistic expression of the term itself so as to clarify the possible misconception.
2.3.2 Various Translations of the Key Operative Term “the Innate Knowing of the Good” (Liang-Zhi, 良知)

Innate knowing of the good is one of the key operative terms in this dissertation, which is the kernel of Wang Yang-ming’s thoughts as well. As Huang (2009) states, for Wang Yang-ming, innate knowing of the good represents “the most salient features of Confucianism” (Huang, 2009, p.393). It is a capacity to know the good. Both Ching (1976) and Chen (1991) have suggested that this capacity “does not depend on reflective thinking which works with ease and knows where danger is” (Ching, 1976, p.164) and it is “the moral consciousness and moral sentiments man naturally have without depending on the external environment or education” (Chen, 1991, p.166).

In consonance with Geng’s (2014) description, the term itself has been translated into “intuitive knowledge”, “innate knowledge”, “knowledge of the good” and “intuitive knowledge of the good” in English, “connaissance innée” in French, and “angeborenes Wissen”, “intuitives Wissen”, “Wissen um das Gute”, “angeborenes Wissen” in German, while some scholars maintain that it is untranslatable and persist on using “liang-zhi” as how the term is pronounced in Chinese.

After careful deliberation and intimation of the translations from Ivanhoe (2009), Angle (2009) and Huang (2006), together with the meanings mentioned above, the researcher proposes to use “the innate knowing of the good” as the direct English translation for the term liang-zhi in Chinese as she believes it best conveys Wang Yang-

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21 Ivanhoe, Angle and Huang translated liangzhi into “pure knowing”, “innate good knowing” and “innate moral knowledge” respectively.
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Wang Yang-ming’s philosophical thoughts. It is worth noting that “liang” in this dissertation denotes knowing without thinking and being able to practice without learning.

2.3.3 “The Extension of the Innate Knowing of the Good” (Zhi-Liang-Zhi, 致良知)

“A moral doctrine is always ordained to practice. If it is impracticable, it can hardly be called moral” (Ching, 1976, p.172). To extend one’s innate knowing is simply the great principle, to do always in one’s life what one’s heart/mind says is right and good.

“The extension of the innate knowing of the good” is Wang Yang-ming’s greatest contribution to Chinese philosophy and also the core idea of his thoughts even though the term innate knowing of the good was hardly used and talked about by the Confucian scholars before him. Nonetheless, the view of which is actually derived from Mencius’ propositions of “the innate moral ability” (liang-neng, 良能) and “the innate knowing ability of the good” (liang-zhi, 良知) (Chineseclassic, 2016). “The innate moral ability” means what a person can do without learning, whereas “the innate knowing ability of the good” refers to what a person knows without thinking. “Without learning” connotates that innate knowing is a priori, whereas “without thinking” expresses the intuitive aspect of innate knowing. For Wang Yang-ming, innate knowing is to detailed actions and changing circumstances as compasses and measuring rods are to areas and lengths. As Ching explained:

“Detailed actions and changing circumstances cannot always be known in advance. But if innate knowing of the good is genuine, and its basic and pivotal role well understood, detailed actions can always

be decided upon as the changing circumstances arise.” (Ching, 1976, p.167)

For Mencius, the term “the innate knowing ability of the good”, is the infallible voice of conscience, which also indicates the moral subjectivity. Wang Yang-ming inherited the terms heart/mind and the innate knowing of the good from Mencius. However, he did have more and deeper discussions of the meaning of these words, which is one of the major reasons why his theory was later named as the "School of Heart/Mind" or “Teaching of the extension of the innate knowing of the good”.

The definitions of “the innate knowing ability of the good” Wang Yang-ming provided in Instructions for Practical Living is that “it is the spirit of creation which produces heaven and earth, spiritual beings, and the Lord” (CXL, JT, 2012, p. 367, my translation). It is also “the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused. It is the state of broadness and extreme partiality. It is the original substance that is absolutely quiet and inactive” (Betty, 1971, p.117).

“The innate knowing of the good” in this dissertation refers to the moral consciousness and moral sentiments innate in all human acquiring without depending on external environment and education. It is an inborn moral sense, common to all, which gives all people their fundamental dignity and equality. It “does not either depend on reflective thinking which works with ease and knows where danger is” (Ching, 1976, p.164). It is also close to the connotation of the word conscience.

23 Original text: “良知是造化的精靈，這些精靈，生天生地，成鬼成帝。” 《傳習錄全譯自話本》下，頁367.
24 Original text: “良知，未發之中也，寂然不動之體也，廓然大公也。” 《傳習錄自話本》卷中，頁231.
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Wang Yang-ming, the founder of The School of Heart/Mind, identified directly “the innate knowing of the good” as the original substance of man. “As Wing-tsit Chan explains that Wang’s philosophy reached its zenith in the doctrine of innate knowledge in 1521 and that from then until his death it remained the foundation stone of his teachings” (Betty, 1980, p. 115). Wang Yang-ming attempted to introduce the self-cultivating method of “extending the innate knowing of the good” in order to guide us to reach a state of “clarity” (cheng-ming, 聲明), which is the highest ethical and moral destination man can arrive at.

Man is a unity, and the work of acquiring wisdom is a unique endeavor. It is a work which takes up the whole of man, the whole of his time. It can neither be broken into fragments, nor organized into a system in terms of steps.

With the innate knowing of the good as the fundamental starting point, Wang Yang-ming’s moral philosophy has a rich ethical implication.

2.4 Wang Yang-ming on the Notion of Heart/Mind

Heart/mind in Chinese philosophy has always meant the combination of the emotional and rational parts, or knowledge and intuition, where we can see a marked contrast from the contemporary interpretation, which mainly focuses on the idea of mind itself.

Throughout Chinese history, different schools of thoughts have looked at this world and how humans behave according to the laws of the universe through different angles. As we experience the world around us, we cannot escape from interpreting these experiences with our heart/mind. Thus, since everything is being interpreted by heart/mind in some way or the other, the notion of heart/mind, therefore, would be analyzed in various ways.
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2.4.1 The Definitions of Heart/Mind

Even though the first and foremost meaning of the heart/mind in ancient Chinese is the organ inside the bodies of man and animals that controls blood circulation (漢典<心>), Chinese Dictionary\textsuperscript{25}) (Anonymous, 2015), Wang Yang-ming pinpointed his definition of heart/mind as follows:

“This so-called your heart/mind is not just that flesh-and-blood organ. If it is so, then whoever is now dead still has that flesh-and-blood organ. Then why can’t a dead person see, hear, speak or move? What is called heart/mind is that which is able to see, hear, speak and move. This is innate nature, it is also the Principle of Heaven. With this innate nature, the Principle of continuous reproduction in an endless succession is brought with, this is called Ren.\textsuperscript{26}” (CXL, JT, 2012, p. 149, my translation)

When Wang Yang-ming lectured on the concept of “to investigate things and affairs”, he provided the following explanation on the relationship between heart/mind and body to describe further what heart/mind is.

“Ears, eyes, mouth, nose and four limbs are body parts. How can they see, hear, speak and move without heart/mind? When heart/mind wants to see, hear, speak and move, nothing can be done without ears, eyes, mouth, nose and four limbs. Therefore, if heart/mind is not there, body is not there either; if body is not there, then heart/mind is not there either. The space that can be filled up with is the body, what dictates is the heart/mind...” (CXL, JT, 2012, p. 312, my translation)

\textsuperscript{25} Retrieved from: http://www.zdic.net/z/19/js/5FC3.htm on 20.03.2016.

\textsuperscript{26} Original text: “所謂汝心，亦不專在一圍血肉。若是一圍血肉，如今已死的人，一圍血肉還在。緣何不能視聴言動？所謂汝心，即是能視聴言動的。這個便是性，便是天理。有這個性，才能生這性之生理，便謂之仁。”《傳習錄白話本》卷上，頁 149.

\textsuperscript{27} Original text: “耳、目、口、鼻、四肢、身也，非心安能視、聼、言、動？心欲視，聼、言、動，無耳、目、口、鼻、四肢亦不能。故無心則無身，無身則無心。但指其充塞處言之謂之身，指其主宰處言之謂之心......”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 312.
In conclusion, Wang Yang-ming believed the truth or the law of things is comprehended by the heart/mind. He also believed that if we separate ourselves from the heart/mind, then everything in this world ceases to exist. For him, this heart/mind is the basis of human knowledge in terms of how we make sense of our surroundings.

2.4.2 Heart/Mind and its Moral Function

Although Wang Yang-ming still held the meaning of heart/mind as that which can see, hear, speak and move; he, at the same time, pointed out that there are two different types of heart/mind. One type of heart/mind is the one we use to acquire our understanding of this world via senses, which for Wang Yang-ming, he called it the heart/mind of acquiring (xi-xin, 知心) or the dispositional heart/mind, which “deals with the empirical and practical aspects towards the worldly good or evil” (Zhong, 2009, p.156). The heart/mind of acquiring for Wang Yang-ming is the “human heart/mind” (ren-xin, 人心) (Dong, 2014, p.63).

The other type of heart/mind is innate nature, the Principle of Heaven, and is called Ren as well. This heart/mind for Wang Yang-ming is transcendent and is the “heart/mind at its original state” (ben-xin, 本心), which is the heart/mind of Tao. It can be induced that heart/mind at its original state is neither an awareness produced from general experiences, nor conscious or perceptive function, but moral function or moral subjectivity. Thus, for Wang Yang-ming, to dictate is the essential meaning of heart/mind and only when the heart/mind is at its original state can the dictating function be brought forward. The
difference lying between the heart/mind of acquiring and the heart/mind at its original state is whether or not there exists falsity or deceitful pretenses in the heart/mind.

In the *Instructions for Practical Living*, one passage reads:

“If one’s heart/mind is of pure heavenly principle without any selfish desires, then it is the sincere heart/mind of filial piety. The result of which is one will naturally be concerned about whether or not one’s parents are cold in winter, and in summer will naturally be concerned about whether or not one’s parents are bothered by the heat. And one will, without a doubt, voluntarily seek methods to keep the parents warm in winter and cool in summer. It is the sincere heart/mind of filial piety that generates all these specific acts, which means the presence of the sincere heart/mind of filial piety is the only prerequisite for the voluntary corresponding acts to take place.”

(CXL, JT, 2012, p. 20, my translation)

From this passage, Wang Yang-ming pinpointed exactly that when the heart/mind is of sincere filial piety, meaning heart/mind at its original state, one will naturally be concerned about whether or not one’s parents are cold in winter, and in summer will naturally be concerned about whether or not one’s parents are bothered by the heat, which illustrates the denotation of the dictating function be brought forward.

Heart/mind can also be understood as not only the moral function, but also the root of all morality, which is also the source of good and evil. More appropriately, heart/mind can be considered as the law of morality.

The reason why Wang Yang-ming reintroduced the significance of shifting one’s attention to one’s heart/mind was because during his time, pursuant to Chan’s (1969) description as follows:

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28 Original text: “此心若無人欲，純是天理，是能誠於孝親的心，冬時自然思量父母的寒，自要求保溫的道理。夏時自然思量父母的熱，自要求避熱的道理。這都是孝於心發出來的條件。卻是須有這誠孝的心，然後有這條件發出來” 《傳習錄白話本》卷上，頁 20.
“......the examinations were no longer an avenue for serving the people and bringing peace to the world but for personal profit and success......scholars trifle with things and lose their purpose in life because their mind is divided and devoted to external things. For him this was the reason for the decline of the Confucian teachings, which in turn brought on the intellectual, political, and moral decay of his time.” (Chan, 1969, p.656)

Those scholars, mainly the followers of Zhu Xi’s philosophy since during Wang Yang-ming’s time, the only way to become a government official is to pass the imperial examination. The preparation for the imperial examination is to familiarize oneself with Zhu Xi’s assigning special significance to the Four Books, namely the Analects (lun-yu), the Mencius (meng-zi), the Great Learning (da-xue), and the Doctrine of the Mean (zhong-yong). Due to the reason of Zhu Xi’s philosophy externalizing the a-priori principle into the “principle in things” (Xiao & Li, 2008, p.592), scholars would undoubtedly be under his influence and to investigate and examine principles in exterior things and events.

However, for Wang Yang-ming there is no difference between heart/mind and principle, and thus no difference between one person and another for the principle of all others were part and parcel of one’s own heart/mind. To counter this attitude of knowledge acquisition, Wang Yang-ming says as follows:

“To seek the principle in each individual thing is like looking for the principle of filial piety in parents. A question arises when one tries to seek the principle of filial piety in one’s parents: Does the principle of filial piety really exist in one’s heart/mind, or does it really exist in the person of one’s parents? Provided the principle of filial piety really exists in the person of one’s parents, would there be no
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principle of filial piety as soon as one’s parents pass away? (Xiao & Li, 2008, p.592)

Wang Yang-ming considered reality a unified whole. For him, the starting point of understanding this world and make sense of what is around us is this heart/mind; therefore, first and foremost is to look within. Only when one looks within to ensure one’s heart/mind is of undisguised and genuine sincerity can corresponding appropriate acts take place. He used tree as a metaphor to explain to his students. It reads:

“Take a tree for an example. The sincere heart/mind of filial piety is the root of the tree, corresponding appropriate acts are the branches and leaves of the tree. What one does is definitely not to first find the branches and leaves, then to plant the root; but to first plant the root, which is a must, with branches and leaves growing afterwards.” (CXL, JT, 2012, p. 20, my translation)

To look within means to investigate things, events and affairs inwardly, i.e. to be one with one’s heart/mind. “Inasmuch as being one with one’s heart/mind, harmony will naturally felt and one will experience the presence of love” (Betty, 1980, p.120). If we consider things, events and affairs only outwardly, conflict will co-occur.

2.5 Innate Knowing of the Good

Even though the concept of innate knowing of the good is the most significant contribution Wang Yang-ming made to the Chinese philosophy, the term itself was not invented by him from vacuum. The ensuing sections will first probe into the correlation

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29 Original text: “求孝之理於其說之謂也。求孝之理於其說，則孝之理其果在於吾之心邪？抑果在於親之身邪？然而果在於親之身，則親沒之後，吾心遂無孝之理哉？”《傳習錄白話本》卷中，頁179.

30 Original text: “譬之樹木，這誠孝的心便是根。許多條件便是枝葉。須先有根，然後有枝葉，不是先尋了枝葉，然後去種根。”《傳習錄白話本》卷上，頁20.
between innate knowing and Mencius’ notion of heart/mind, then explain how this term originated from Mencius thoughts.

2.5.1 Innate Knowing and Heart/Mind

"Knowing is the original substance of heart/mind. The heart/mind knows naturally. One naturally knows filial piety when one sees one’s father. One naturally knows brotherly respect when one sees one’s elder brothers. One naturally knows commiseration when one sees a child falling into a well. The knowing of goodness is innate in man, so one has no need to seek it outside." (CXL, GT, 2008, p.32, my translation)

The conception of innate knowing of the good, as mentioned earlier, stems from Mencius. To Wang Yang-ming, innate knowing of the good is most of the time a synonym for heart/mind. He has repeatedly said that, “knowing is the original substance of the heart/mind”32 or “innate knowing of the good is the original substance of the heart/mind”33. The term innate knowing of the good was used by Mencius occasionally; however, the same term has become the core concept of Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy.

"Everybody is born with this innate knowing of the good. It does not die out no matter what one does. Even a thief or robber would know that he should not be a thief or robber himself, so when being called a thief or robber, he blushes and feels embarrassed." (CXL, JT, 2012, p.322, my translation)

According to the above passage, each and every one of us is born with this inherent nature and innate knowing of the good according to Wang Yang-Ming: the key to return to

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31 Original text: “知是心之本體，心自然會知。見父自然知孝，見兄自然知弟，見孺子入井自然知惻隱，此便是良知，不假外求。”《傳習錄全錄》卷一，頁 32.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Original text: “良知在人，隨你如何不能泯滅，雖盗賊亦自知不當為盗，聞他作賊，他還赧愧。”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 322.
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the original state of the mankind is to extend this innate knowing of the good, which means to rediscover or restore it by disciplining our heart/mind. As in the Book of Mencius, it is said, “The great end of learning is nothing else but to seek for the lost original heart/mind” (Lin, 2011, p.298; xue-wen-zhi-dao-wu-ta, qiu-qi-fang-xin-er-yi-yi, 學問之道無他，求其放心而已矣) (Chineseclassic, 2016).

What Mencius meant by lost does not mean that our heart/mind disappears, but it means our heart/mind is scattered and uncontrollable like wild horses run unbridled. For Mencius whether a man is a profound man or not depends on whether he succeeds in retaining his heart/mind. This heart/mind is something we possess originally and is something very easy to lose. Hence, it is necessary to emphasize the retention of the heart/mind. To seek for the lost original heart/mind means that the goal to learn, to inquire and to seek guidance is to bring back the lost heart/mind and not let go of it.

2.5.2 The Extension of Mencius’ Four Sprouts

The way Wang Yang-ming used the term innate knowing of the good, in fact, has assimilated the main significance of Mencius’ Four Sprouts (Richey, 2016). As Wang Yang-ming once said,

“Innate knowing of the good is just the heart/mind of knowing right from wrong, knowing right from wrong is just likes and dislikes. Knowing sincerely one’s likes and dislikes, one can see what is right and what is wrong clearly. By seeing what is right and what is wrong


36 A heart-mind that sympathizes is the sprout of co-humanity [ren]; a heart-mind that is aware of shame is the sprout of rightness [yi]; a heart-mind that defers to others is the sprout of ritual propriety [li]; a heart-mind that approves and condemns is the sprout of wisdom [zhi]. Retrieved from: http://www.iep.utm.edu/mencius/ on 25.03.2016.
clearly, one can understand all things and affairs in this changing and transient world.\(^{37}\) (CXL, JT, 2012, p.388, my translation)

“Right and wrong” and “likes and dislikes” in the above quote have already contained the meaning of a heart/mind that approves and condemns, which is the sprout of wisdom (\(zhi\), 智) and a heart/mind that is aware of shame, which is the sprout of rightness (\(yi\), 義); whereas a heart/mind that sympathizes is the sprout of co-humanity (\(ren\), 仁) and a heart/mind that defers to others is the sprout of ritual propriety (\(li\), 禮) are encompassed in the words of “commiseration” and “sincere” in another quote below from Wang Yang-ming.

“Innate knowing of the good is the Principle of Heaven, the natural and spontaneous knowing and being aware is the sincere commiseration which is the original substance of the innate knowing of the good.\(^{38}\)” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.293, my translation)

Even though innate knowing of the good has assimilated the main significance of Mencius’ Four Sprouts, Wang Yang-ming, however, attached particular importance to the sprout of wisdom, which is the heart/mind that approves and condemns. He clearly stated that innate knowing is this a prior every man has as to guidelines of right and wrong. And it is the system of man’s inner moral judgment and evaluation. To further substantiate this point, Chen (1991) states in his book that “if the moral consciousness is a prior of the moral principle, its function is simply to provide guidelines of right and wrong” (Chen, 1991, p.167). And for Ching (2013), she stated that “innate knowing is the master of man’s heart/mind, it is called ‘Tao’” (Ching, 2013, p.109).

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\(^{37}\) Original text: “良知只是個是非之心，是非只是個好惡，好惡就盡了是非，是非就盡了萬事萬變。” 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 388.

\(^{38}\) Original text: “蓋良知只是個天理自然明覺發見處，只是一個真誠無他，便是他本體。” 《傳習錄白話本》卷中，頁 293.
Once a student asked Wang Yang-ming how to extend innate knowing of the good, his response below demonstrates his clear focus on the heart/mind that approves and condemns.

"Your liang-chih\textsuperscript{39} (the innate knowing of the good) is your own criteria. As your thoughts and intentions arise, it knows what is right and what is wrong. You cannot deceive it at all...\textsuperscript{40}" (Ching, 1976, p.165)

To approve and condemn are the rational principle of morality, whereas likes and dislikes that arrive prior approving and condemning are the sentimental principle of morality. Thus, innate knowing of the good is the union of moral consciousness and moral sentiments.

For Wang Yang-ming, each and every one of us is endowed with this innate knowing of the good. The reason why we lose our heart/mind that is at its original state is because it is buried by our selfish desires and therefore cannot be illuminated. Henceforth, desire is the major source that makes people lose their way. The only remedy is to disroot the issue of inflated selfish desires, which we have to do from righting our heart/mind. And to right our heart/mind is to bring innate knowing of the good to light.

Wang Yang-ming once said, "there is no human nature that is not good, so there is no knowing that is not good either\textsuperscript{41}" (CXL, JT, 2012, p.231, my translation). In conclusion, the notion of innate knowing of the good in some way is very similar to categorical imperative in Kant's moral philosophy. It expresses another important meaning of the

\textsuperscript{39} The spelling of liang-chih is from the old spelling system in China, but the contemporary Chinese spelling is liang-zhi, which is applied in this dissertation. Both spellings refer to the same term "致良知" proposed by Wang Yang-ming.

\textsuperscript{40} Original text: "怕那一點良知, 是怕自無盡期。爾念愈著處, 他是便知是, 非便知非, 更瞞他一些不得。" 《傳習錄白話本》卷下, 頁 320.

\textsuperscript{41} Original text: "性無不善, 故知無不良。" 《傳習錄白話本》卷中, 頁 231.
heart/mind that innate knowing of the good itself is the ultimate goodness with absolute moral value.

2.6 Summary of this Chapter

The formation and establishment of Wang Yang-ming’s thoughts on the extension of innate knowing of the good were due to the gradual ossification of thoughts of The School of Principle which observes the orthodox philosophy of Zhu Xi. The thoughts and philosophy became empty and useless; meanwhile, the learning methodology and scholarship were also in decline. Further, the thoughts of the School of Principle had become the tool of ideological domination for the emperors. Witnessing all this, Wang Yang-ming strongly advocated the essentiality of doing what one knows. What one knows for him does not need to be taught or learned, the only thing one needs to apply is uprighting one’s heart/mind and be utmost sincere. Then act in accordance with one’s heart/mind without any selfish desires.

For Wang Yang-ming, extension of innate knowing of the good is the most important part of scholarly excellence since innate knowing of the good is identical to innate nature which also means the heart/mind. It is the first prerequisite a saint would teach. Everybody is born with it, be he/she a saint or dump. It is a natural inner strength we all have without a need of the external force to cause it to generate. According to Ching (1976), “it is an all-inclusive way of self-cultivation which transcends all divisions between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ realms of life, between activity and tranquility” (Ching, 1976, p.163). Innate knowing is always tranquil, as it is also always active. One should simply stay alert, remaining always attentive to the task of keeping the heart/mind as such pure and free from
selfishness. This is what Mencius means by “always be doing something”\textsuperscript{42} (Chineseclassic 2016): a positive manner of stating the negative imperative.

It is necessary to reiterate Wang Yang-ming’s position that to cultivate and follow innate knowing of the good is a means to well-being.

The next chapter will examine the concept of extension of innate knowing of the good in details from three different aspects.

\textsuperscript{42} Original text: “必有事焉而勿正，心勿忘，勿助長也。” 《孟子》公孫丑上. Retrieved from: http://www.chineseclassic.com/content/26 on 30.07.2016. Translation: Always be doing something without precipitation (expectation, anticipation). Let the mind not forget its objective, but let there be no artificial effort to help it grow (my translation).
Chapter III: Three Aspects of Innate Knowing of the Good

3.1 Introduction

When it comes to the theme of subjectivity of ethics and morality, traditional philosophers generally would distinguish among the three main aspects of knowledge, feelings and intentions (i.e., reason, emotion and will). Chinese philosophers often combine knowledge, feelings and intention to form their own thinking without separating either one of these three, which is quite different from Epicurus, Leibniz and Schopenhauer who, respectively, took feelings, rationalism and will as the main basis of their ideas on the subjectivity of morality. Laying particular stress on either one of these three aspects is, however, a common practice applied by many ethicists.

Since innate knowing of the good for Wang Yang-ming was “the highest good, the key to harmonious living; the one thing needful— in short, the ultimate reality” (Betty, 1980, p. 124), the following sections will make a further attempt to look into the concept of innate knowing of the good put forward by Wang Yang-ming from the aspects of knowledge, emotions and intentions.\(^{43}\)

\(^{43}\) Cf. Liu (1999), “A Discussion on the Main Concepts of the heart/mind is principle proposed by Wang Yang-ming”< 論王陽明心即理說的主要觀念>
3.2 The Aspect of Knowledge (Zhi, 知)

For the Chinese, knowledge and information are very different. Even though we may be in possession of lots of information, that does not necessarily mean we are in possession of knowledge; indeed, it is highly possible that even though one is in possession of a mountain of information and data, he/she has, in fact, no knowledge at all. That is to say, the person who holds such information and data does not comprehend the concept, the basic relationships and basic structures that lie behind the information and data. Since information is very often obtained externally, one tends to be “concerned only with fragmentary details and will lack the essentials” (Chan, 1969, p.655).

Strictly speaking, if we do not read and digest thoroughly, even though we are presented with a large amount of information, there are still problems because the increase of the amount of knowledge does not equate to the integrative understanding of the knowledge. Therefore, in this case, we are in no position to claim that we know, since we have not been able to integrate this understanding with the whole and therefore unqualified to articulate.

3.2.1 The Meaning of Knowledge

Zhi in ancient Chinese means knowledge. Knowledge in contemporary Chinese is zhi-shi (知識). According to Handian (Anonymous, 2015) (漢典<知識>, Chinese Dictionary44), the first character of the word zhi (知) has several meanings, such as to be able to verbally explain what one knows, to comprehend and to understand. Nonetheless,

44 Retrieved from http://www.zdic.net/z/1F/5f77E5.htm on 31.01.2016
what is worth noting is that it is also the very ancient character of the word zhi (智), which
means wisdom in English. The second character of the word shi (識) is the synonym to zhi
(知).

Zhi used by Wang Yang-ming focuses on the cognitive function, which is also the
main meaning of “the heart/mind which can distinguish between right and wrong” (shi-fei-
shi-xin, 是非之心) Mencius talked about. Therefore, it focuses on the angle of moral values.

3.2.2 The Correlation between Knowledge and the Heart/Mind

The logical starting point of the study of the heart/mind for Wang Yang-ming is that
“Heart/Mind is Pattern”, which is also his world view. For him, objects do not exist
separately from the heart/mind because, first of all, heart/mind must experience them, and
secondly, because the heart/mind directly gives them shape and form. He believed that it is
not the world that shapes the heart/mind, but the heart/mind that shapes and gives reason to
the world. Therefore, the heart/mind alone is the source of all reason, pattern, and the
source of all existence.

In the Instructions for Practical Living, one passage reads:

“While the Master was taking recreation at Nan-chen, one of our
friends, pointing at the flowers and trees on a cliff, said: ‘You say
there is nothing under heaven that is external to the mind/heart. What
relation, then, do these high mountain flowers and trees, which
blossom and drop of themselves, have to my mind/heart? The Master
replied: ‘When you do not see these flowers, they and your
mind/heart both become quiescent. When you see them, their color at
once becomes clear. From this fact you know that these flowers are not external to your mind. 45 (Fung, 1966, p.309)

We can say that flowers and trees grow and die in the forest. But we can never really know until our heart/mind perceives that fact. Before perceiving it, however, we are not able to describe which flowers and trees grow or die there. Nor are we able to describe their appearance, color, texture and scent. Only when we actually perceive them, when we experience them personally, can we articulate them in detail; only then can we know.

According to Wang Yang-ming, the heart/mind he understood has in fact three aspects which are reason, emotion and will (knowledge, feeling and intention) respectively. He called the rational aspect of the heart/mind zhi.

Wang Yang-ming repeatedly stressed that “nothing is outside the mind; no justice is outside the mind and no goodness is outside the mind, either” (xin-wai-wu-wu, xin-wai-wu-yi, xin-wai-wu-shan) 46 (He, 1994, p.41). In the book of The Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming 47, he also proclaimed that “learning of a gentleman is not on agreeing or disagreeing, but on discovering what is authentic” (jin-zi-zhi-xue, qi-you-xin-yu-tong- yi, wei-qi-shi-er-yi) 48 (Ching, 2013, p.81).

Once he gave a very direct explanation on the concept of “knowing is the original substance of the heart/mind”, he said:

“Knowing is the original substance of heart/mind. The heart/mind knows naturally. One naturally knows filial piety when one sees one’s father. One naturally knows brotherly respect when one sees

45 Original text: “先生游南鎮，一日指樹中花樹問曰：‘天下無心外之物，如此花樹，深山中自開自落，於我心亦何相聞？’先生曰：‘你未看此花時，此花與汝心同歸於寂。你來看此花時，則此花顏色一時明白起來。便知此花不在你心外。’《傳習錄白本》卷下，頁377.
46 Original text: “心外無物，心外無義，心外無善。”
47 《王陽明全書》
48 Original text: “君子之學，豈有心於同異，惟其是而已。”
one's elder brothers. One naturally knows commiseration when one sees a child falling into a well. This is the knowing of goodness that is innate in man.⁴⁹ (CXL, GT, 2008, p.32, my translation)

Here, Wang Yang-ming used *zhi* to explain heart/mind. Like what has been mentioned earlier, the notion of the innate knowing of the good originated from Mencius' advocacy as follows:

"What a person can do without learning is called innate ability. What a person knows without thinking is called innate knowing of the good. A child, who still needs to be carried in the arms, knows naturally that he loves his parents. And the older child naturally knows to be respectful of his elder brother. Loving the parents is benevolence. Respecting the elders is righteousness. For no other reason (these emotions) one reaches all under heaven.⁵⁰ (my translation)

Obviously, knowing refers to the cognition of moral meaning because "love", "respectfulness", "benevolence" and "righteousness" in the above quote are all related to morality. Nevertheless, in Wang Yang-ming's famous "Four-Sentence Teaching"⁵¹ (*Si-ju-jiao*, 四句教), the third sentence "knowing right from wrong is the innate knowing of the good" can further ascertain the object of knowing is not the true or falsity of empirical facts, but rather the good and evil or right and wrong of moral values.

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⁴⁹ Original text: "知是心之本體，心自然會知。見父自然知孝，見兄自然知弟，見孺子入井自然知側隱，此便是良知。" 《傳習錄全譯》卷上，頁32.

⁵⁰ Original text: "人之所得而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童無不知愛其親者，及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。謁親，仁也；敬長義也；無他，達之天下也。" 《孟子》盡心上.

⁵¹ Generally speaking, the Four-Sentence teaching is considered to be the essence of Wang Yang-ming's philosophy. It best demonstrates the core meaning and the order of "zhi-liang-zhi". The meaning of which is "the substance of heart/mind has no good or evil, good or evil appears when intentions arise; knowing right from wrong is the innate knowing of the good, to do good and eliminate evil is to investigate affairs." The original text is "無善無惡是心之體，有善有惡是意之動；知善知惡是良知，為善去惡是格物。" 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁410.
3.2.3 Two Types of Knowledge

Wang Yang-ming has clearly stated that the knowing of innate knowing is not knowledge we acquire from external factors per say, but the knowing of moral values. He inherited Zhang Zai’s thoughts on the knowing of virtues (天德良知) and the knowing of knowledge (見聞之知), and said, “the moral innate knowing of the good is not acquired from the knowledge gained by listening and seeing.” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.195, my translation). This is why Wang Yang-ming called it “innate” knowing as this type of knowing has the characteristic of not relying on external experience and hearing and seeing. It is heavenly given, inner and a prior. Chen (1991) further substantiated this view by stating that “to strengthen moral consciousness does not depend on our accumulation of experience and knowledge of external things” (Chen, 1991, p.183). Besides, according to Huang (2006), he defines the knowing of virtues as “moral knowledge and the knowing of knowledge as nonmoral knowledge” (Huang, 2006, p.395).

Wang Yang-ming proposed this view of knowing was to directly oppose the perversions of Zhu Xi’s orthodox philosophy propagated by its followers, which can be corroborated by the following passage.

“Wang says ‘There are two ways to pursue learning. Some pursue it with their bodies and minds and some with their mouths and ears.’ These latter, he felt, were motivated not by love of truth and goodness but by success and profit.” (Betty, 1980, p.118)

52 Zhang Zai, who, like Wang, was a key representative of Chinese Neo-Confucian, and a moral philosopher and cosmologist, put forward two kinds of knowing. “One is the knowing of virtues (天德良知), and the other is the knowing of knowledge (見聞之知)” (Chen, 2008, p.140).
53 Original text: “德性之良知，非由於聞見耳。”《傳喜錄白話本》卷中，頁195.
In another place, Wang Yang-ming also said when checking his student’s spiritual practice on extending innate knowing,

"Jiuchuan said, ‘I do feel differently from before. In the past, I quite often failed to grasp just the right place, but now I can.’ Master said, ‘your example has demonstrated that there is a significant difference between knowing gained from personal experience and knowing gained from hearing and listening’.\(^{54}\) (CXL, JT, 2012, p.325, my translation)

Even though Wang Yang-ming made a clear distinction between these two different kinds of knowing functions, he believed that they are not independent and mutually exclusive. He said:

"Seeing and hearing do not give rise to the innate knowing of the good, but are the use of the innate knowing of the good. Hence, the innate knowing of the good does not stop at seeing and hearing, and does not separate from seeing and hearing either.\(^{55}\) (CXL, JT, 2012, p.255, my translation)

It can be concluded that the difference between knowing of virtues and knowing of knowledge only exist at the level of speculation. In practice, these two cannot be cut apart and separated. Wan Yang-ming did not think that knowing could be gained only by knowing of knowledge, nor did he believe that knowledge of virtues could only be gained through personal practice, either. Rather it is in the combination of both aspects where we see knowledge of virtue most in evidence. In other words, genuine knowledge must involve personal practice, i.e. action, such knowledge which makes a person virtuous or good necessarily flows into action.

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\(^{54}\) Original text: “九川曰：自覺不同，往時操持常不得個恰好處，此乃依好處。先生曰：可知是體來與勝別不同。”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 325.

\(^{55}\) Original text: “良知不由見聞而有，而見聞莫非良知之用，故良知不滞於見聞，而亦不離於見聞。”《傳習錄白話本》卷中，頁 255.
Koller’s interpretation can also further corroborate this idea. He wrote that:

“Intellectual knowledge of the kind characteristic of the sciences can, of course, be separated from choice and morality. But practical knowledge of the value of things has no significance apart from human choice and action. When doing is regarded as more fundamental than knowing, then the practical kind of knowledge required for making choices becomes more important than theoretical knowledge.” (Koller, 2002, p.319)

The knowledge that we think we need to learn is the nonmoral knowledge, such as science, medicine, arts, history and literature. Knowledge of this kind is only useful when it can facilitate the knowing of virtues to function. “Our search for such knowledge should be guided by our innate moral knowledge so that we can ensure that such nonmoral knowledge will not be put to immoral use” (Huang, 2006, p.396).

3.2.4 The Goal of Knowledge: Unity of Knowing and Acting (Zhi-Xing-He-Yi, 知行合一)

For Wang Yang-ming, knowledge was not in the form of an objective fact, as in Zhu Xi’s thoughts, outside of man, but in how we can bring our innate a prior ability out naturally and spontaneously. For this innate a prior ability to be fully functioning in a natural way, one should always put efforts in listening to his/her conscience and constantly act accordingly. Through this steady effort of acting in line with one’s conscience, knowledge is no longer a mere objective fact, but becomes part of an individual in the way he/she acts. Wang Yang-ming said, “Knowledge is the beginning of action, and the action is the completion of knowledge. Learning to be a sage involves only one effort: Knowledge and action should not be separated” (Xiao & Li, 2008, p.598). So real knowledge is the
manifestation of one’s essence in terms of his/her behavior; it is the integration of the inner
and outer worlds. It is in man’s oneness, not his separation.

What should we know? What is the target of human knowledge? In the book
Instructions for Practical Living, Wang Yang-ming said as follows:

“Knowing is the original substance of heart/mind. The heart/mind
knows naturally. One naturally knows filial piety when one sees
one’s father. One naturally knows brotherly respect when one sees
one’s elder brothers. One naturally knows commiseration when one
sees a child falling into a well. This is the knowing of goodness that
is innate in man.” (CXL, GT, 2008, p.32, my translation)

The passage above discloses Wang Yang-ming’s assertion that all people do indeed
have spontaneous ethical responses and that these prove that we are actually born with a
moral sense. For him, the target of human knowledge is to bring out this innate knowledge,
the a priori, the innate virtues we all have. If we do not utilize innate knowledge, but focus
only on the externals, i.e., the knowledge accumulated through external research and
examination, then perhaps we lose the point of the target. As Xiao and Li proclaimed that
“the key to pursuing true scholarship does not concentrate only on hearing more and seeing
more, but also on applying the innate knowing of the good we are born with” (Xiao & Li,
2008, p.595). Huang further illustrates this point affirming that “the knowledge that sages
need to learn is the knowledge that is necessary for moral knowledge to function” (Huang,

The spirit of this theory of the unity of knowing and acting is when moral knowledge
is to function naturally and spontaneously. It is the learning of the Way, depicting Wang

56 Original text: “知是心之本體，心自然會知，見父自然知孝，見兄自然知弟，見孺子入井自然知憫
懼，此便是良知不假外求。”《傳習錄全譯》卷上，頁32.
Yang-ming's attempt to propose personal morality as the main way to social well-being and to gain a genuine understanding of one's self and its relation to the world.

### 3.3 The Aspect of Intention

As Setiya classifies theories of intention on two axes, meaning to find unity in the guises of intention and how to understand the relation between intention and evaluative thought, which "bears on the possibility of akrasia or weakness of will, and the relation between intention and belief, which bears on the nature and scope of self-knowledge" (Setiya, 2008), Chinese philosophy, however, takes on a different approach of stressing to put morality into practice. Therefore, intention has always been regarded very highly. Take for example in *The Doctrine of the Mean*, which is one of the Four Books, it says "Study it (the way to be sincere) extensively, inquire into it accurately, think over it carefully, sift it clearly, and practice it earnestly." (Du, 2008, p. 92). To study, inquire, think over and sift is the practice of knowing, whereas to practice is to put into actions.

The principle of working on knowledge acquisition and putting it into practice has always been complied by the Confucian scholars. When it came to the time of Wang Yang-ming, he introduced and encouraged the idea of "unity of knowing and acting" which had brought the significance of carrying out what one learns and knows to the peak.

Unity of knowing and acting, in other words, signifies paying equal attention to moral theory and moral practice. From the perspective of individual subjectivity, it also represents the equal importance of intention and reason.

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57 Original text: "博學之，【為誠之道】，審問之，慎思之，明辨之，篤行之。" 《中庸》第 20 章第 19-21 節，《中庸-洞見》
Wang Yang-ming mainly used the concept of intention (yi, 意) to express the intended aspect of heart/mind or innate knowing of the good. This intended aspect is the functioning acts of the moral subject, meaning heart/mind or innate knowing of the good. He used a lot of similar ways to express this meaning. For example, “what emanates from the mind is the will” (Chan, 1996, p.208) and “to initiate the dictation of Heavenly Principle is called intention” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.269, my translation). Intention does not exist in emptiness. The rise of intention has to depend on objects, events and affairs.

3.3.1 The First Characteristic of Intention: Being Good and Evil

From the value point of view, the characteristic of intention lies in having good and evil, or can be both good and evil, which depends on whether or not the action initiating by the intention is in compliance with the moral law, i.e. Heavenly Principle. Thus, in Wang Yang-ming’s famous “Four-Sentence Teaching”, the second sentence “good or evil appears when intentions arise” expresses what he meant by intention.

Ivanhoe (2009) uses “thoughts” to disclose the meaning of intention as follows:

“Thoughts should clearly be distinguished from pure knowing. Whenever an idea arises in response to anything or affair, this is called a “thought”. Thoughts can be either correct or incorrect. That which is able to know which thoughts are correct and which incorrect is called pure knowing.” (Ivanhoe, 2009, p.127)
According to Wang Yang-ming’s theory of innate knowing of the good, intention is the intended aspect for any possible actions to take place, it nevertheless varies from innate knowing of the good, which as a matter of fact is “the inner principle of judgement of intention and plays a role of supervising and guiding intention” (Chen, 1991, p.168). As it is mentioned earlier, Wang Yang-ming clearly stated that innate knowing is this a prior every man has as to guidelines of right and wrong since for him if intentions are not generated from the original state of the heart/mind, then they are selfish desires. And it is the system of man's inner moral judgment and evaluation.

The quote in this regard reads as follows:

“Your hang-chih (the innate knowing of the good) is your own criteria. As your thoughts and intentions arise, it knows what is right and what is wrong. You cannot deceive it at all....” (Ching, 1976, p.165)

“Innate knowing is the master of man’s heart/mind, it is called ‘Tao’” (Ching, 2013, p.109). It is the inner principle of judgement of intention, not intention itself. The function of innate knowing does not only direct us to generate good intentions, but also functions as an inner evaluation system to monitor our heart/mind activities. Here, we can also clearly see the emphasis Wang Yang-ming put on “the heart/mind which can distinguish between right and wrong” (shi-fei-zhi-xin, 是非之心). Chen (1991) has provided a further clarification by stating that “if the moral consciousness is a prior of the moral principle, its function is simply to provide guidelines of right and wrong” (Chen, 1991, p.167). This is to
say that if one constantly employs one’s innate knowing of the good, then one will always act on correct course and in right line.

3.3.2 The Second Characteristic of Intention: Being Wholly Private

Another characteristic of intention is being wholly private since it is generated from the inner world, which is everyone’s possession alone, other people cannot probe into to see and understand. This is a crucial concept in Confucianism as it attaches great importance to the level of personal moral cultivation, moral fortitude and code of conduct, which is the highest standard of individual cultivation and development.

Wang Yang-ming once said, “The basis of sincerity is the extension of innate knowing of the good. The so-called ‘what I know but unknown to others’ is exactly what innate knowing of the good is” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.417, my translation). Based on this, Chen (1991) further explains that “the reason for moral ethics depends on one’s intention and motivation which is entirely personal and private unknown to others” (Chen, 1991, p.167). Therefore, moral practice requires us to be mindful of the ‘activities’ inside our inner world. These activities inside our inner world are the good and evil intentions, which can only be known and recognized by innate knowing of the good. To be alert and mindful does not mean only to be aware of the fact of one’s inner activities, i.e. intentions, but also to identify right away the good and evil of one’s intentions when they arise at the very beginning.

“Once the evil intentions are rid of, we are left with good intentions, then the original state of the heart/mind is recovered. It is similar to

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62 Original text: “然誠意之本，又在於致知也。所謂‘人雖不知而已所獨知’者，此正是吾心良知處。”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 417.
the sun being covered by the clouds. When the clouds are no longer there, the sun shines once again.\textsuperscript{63} (CXL, JT, 2012, p.347, my translation)

The quote from Wang Yang-ming above echoes the metaphor of the sun used by Ivanhoe earlier, and at the same time, it illustrates the importance of being mindful of the ‘activities’ inside our inner world. This mindfulness is the difference between sages and commoners. For Wang Yang-ming, attaining sagehood is man’s real goal in life. The development or extension of innate knowing is the necessary condition of sagehood, which guides one to become a person of moral excellence who cannot help doing good—it is as natural as the change of seasons or the rotation of the planets.

Wang Yang-ming’s interpretation is not new, but a further clarification of the notion from \textit{The Great Learning}. In the book, it says:

“'The so-called' to make one's intention sincere is as simple as not to deceive oneself. Hating evil is like hating a hateful odor and loving good is like loving a lovely sight. It is called self-serenity. Therefore, a profound man must be mindful and cautious when being alone.\textsuperscript{64}” \textit{(The Great Learning}, p.110, my translation)

With regard to moral development, Wang Yang-ming focused on whether the intention itself is moral or not. Since morality depends on intention which is solely private, it can be deduced that moral practice requires us to be watchful of the heart/mind activities in our inner world. We can do everything to deceive the world, but there is always one person we cannot deceive, that is ourselves. Therefore the practice of sincerity is not to delude ourselves. In our countless thoughts and deliberations, we must only extend innate

\textsuperscript{63} Original text: “既去惡念，便是善念，便復心之本體矣。譬如日光被雲來遮蔽，雲去光已復矣。” 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 347.

\textsuperscript{64} Original text: “所謂誠其意者，毋自欺也，如惡惡臭，如好好色，此之謂自慊，故君子必慎其獨也。” 《大學全集》，頁 110.
knowing. "The more we think, the more innate knowing becomes clear and discerning" (Ching, 1976, p.166).

Intention being wholly private expounds Wang Yang-ming's views on innate knowing as the internal laws of evaluation and judgment, which signifies that innate knowing, as moral conscience, is independent of intention. His thinking highlights the moral subjectivity of an individual, and the innate perfection of this subjectivity. For Wang Yang-ming, we all possess innate knowing. He also pointed out the potentiality everyone has to become a sage. The difference between the sage and the ordinary man is one of degree, not of kind, a degree of the intensity of innate knowing. What sages do is to ensure that their innate knowing is not for one bit obscured.

More elucidation on this section is to be provided when practical application is discussed in Chapter IV.

3.4 The Aspect of Emotion

As it was discussed in the first chapter, "Ren" is undoubtedly the basis of the concept of Confucianism. It has several meanings, all of which having to do with emotions. They include human-heartedness, benevolence, love and compassion. Wang Yang-ming agreed with Zhu Xi on the perspective of "Ren" to be a reference to the original goodness of human nature; a reflection of Zhu Xi's belief that the basic human nature is of pure goodness. "Ren" as the emotion is the true primordial sense precedes subjectivity, prior to the existence of all beings themselves.

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65 Original text: "這良知人人皆有，聖人只是保全無些障蔽。" 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 332.
3.4.1 Mencius on Emotion

Mencius had long taken emotion as one component of moral subject. Mencius speaks about the goodness of human nature or Four Sprouts, which is the combination of two aspects, i.e. emotion and reason. He explicates benevolence (仁, ren), righteousness (義, yi), propriety (禮, li) and wisdom (智, zhi) from the aspect of moral principles or reason, and a sense of sympathy, a sense of shame, a sense of modesty, a sense of right and wrong, the corresponding feelings from the aspect of emotions. In simple terms, a sense of sympathy means the feeling of pity unable to bear seeing the suffering of others, a sense of shame suggests a feeling of shame toward bad behaviors, a sense of modesty signifies giving preference and honor to someone before yourself out of courtesy and thoughtfulness, and a sense of right and wrong connotates a feeling of liking goodness and disliking evil.

These Four Sprouts to Mencius are the same as those called “cardinal virtues to Plato (wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice) and theological virtues to the New Testament by Paul (faith, hope, and charity)” (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, p.147).

3.4.2 Wang Yang-ming on Emotion

Wang Yang-ming inherited this prevailing view of the Confucian scholars since Mencius that heart/mind has both reason and emotion, and deemed emotion as an aspect of heart/mind. He said “although innate knowing of the good does not stop at joy, anger, sorrow and fear, joy, anger, sorrow and fear are not outside innate knowing of the good
either. For Wang Yang-ming, emotions are innate in man. Once one of Wang Yang-ming’s students asked him whether or not selfish desires are like emotions are inborn in man, he said,

“Joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, hatred, desire are so-called seven emotions. All men, with no exception, are born with these seven emotions. But we need to understand well what innate knowing of the good is. It is like sunlight that does not choose a particular direction to shine. As long as there is a tiny bit of interspace, there will be the place where the sunshine can penetrate. Even though the sky is covered with dark clouds, provided that colors could still be vaguely discerned between heaven and earth, it is an expression of sunshine not being obliterated. We cannot force the sky not to produce clouds just because clouds can cover the sun. The natural flow of these seven emotions is the functioning display of the innate knowing of the good, which cannot be distinguished as being good or evil. Seven emotions are not to be greatly attached. If one is too attached to these emotions, then it becomes desires. Desires are hindrances to innate knowing of the good. 67”

This quote, on one hand, has demonstrated that Wang Yang-ming categorized emotions into seven different kinds, therefore, the word emotion is also called seven emotions: on the other hand, he pinpointed the relationship between emotion and heart/mind, or innate knowing of the good, meaning they are inseparable. In other words, emotion has both positive and negative sides. The negative side of emotion is that if one is greatly attached to it, it can become a desire. Desire is the hindrance to innate knowing of the good, which can hold up moral practice.

66 Original text: “良知雖不淪於喜、怒、愛、懼，而喜、怒、愛、懼亦不外於良知。” 《傳習錄白話本》巻中，第頁237

67 Original text: “喜、怒、哀、懼、愛、惡、欲，謂之七情，七者俱是人心合有的，但要認得良知明白，比如日光，亦不可指著方所，一際通明，皆是日光所在。雖雲霧四塞，太虛中色象可辨，亦是日光不滅處，不可以雲蔽日光，教天不要生雲。七情既其自然之流行，皆是良知之目，不可分別善惡；但不可有所著。七情著著，但謂之欲，俱為良知之蔽。《傳習錄白話本》巻下，頁389.”
3.4.3 Deviation from the Mean: the Negative Side of Emotion

Attachment arises due to our diffused and undisciplined heart/mind. If we closely examine how we lead our daily lives, we will observe that most of us are being led by our emotions and senses, and as such, are led by desires. Few are led by their inherent nature; indeed few people even know what that is. Instead, most of us are simply too busy responding to our senses and attempting to realize our wants and desires.

Due to this incapacity or unwillingness to be led by our inherent nature and its capacity for innate knowing of the good, we are led by our senses and their desires. For example, when we smell something good, we let our nose lead us; when we see something beautiful, we let our eyes lead us; and when we taste something good, we let our mouth lead us.

Consequently we are completely under the spell of our senses and their sensorial fulfillment. Because we are on this path of gratifying our senses and their desires, our innate nature is smothered by superficial and material stimuli rather than by profound and spiritual ones. Why do we behave this way, so unnaturally, out of sync with our inherent nature and its innate knowledge?

The reason for this, according to Ivanhoe (2009) is that,

“If we look for the source of these various shortcomings [i.e., in regard to speech, passion, and anger and desire], it does not lie in the original state of pure knowing (innate knowing of the good); they only arise when pure knowing has become obscured and blocked up. When pure knowing arises, it is like the sun shining forth; all ghosts and demons dissolve and disappear.” (Ivanhoe, 2009, p. 129)
When our senses are in control they want to be satisfied and satiated. This activates the human heart/mind and gets it to think about how to satisfy the desires. When this happens, the heart/mind veers away from its natural state, i.e. its inherent state, and heads toward the unnatural state, i.e. its artificial state, by seeking ways of gratifying the objects of senses. The heart/mind becomes unnaturally stimulated.

When this happens, the evil side of human heart/mind appears. Master Cheng Hao (程颐, 1032-1085) once said, "Good and evil in the world are both the Principle of Nature. What is called evil is not originally evil. It becomes evil only because of deviation from the Mean" (shen-e-jie-tian-li. Wei-zhi-e-ke, fei-ben-e, dan-yu-ben-xing-shang-guo-yu-bu-ji-zhi-jian-er) (Chan, 1969, p.684).

If our mind is being controlled by our senses, it will in turn over-stimulate our emotions and our attachments and cravings. The stimulation of the senses in this way become like thieves, since they are robbing the heart/mind of its equanimity and the body of its energy.

We can identify these thieves as the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. When the senses are over stimulated, they activate and excite the internal organs and their emotional counterparts, such as joy, anger, sadness, fear, longing, and desires. When these emotions are stimulated in excess, they will disrupt our health, well-being and our inner world and any sense of peace, wellness and harmony.

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68 Original text: “善惡皆天理。謂之惡者，本非惡，但於本性上過與不及之間耳。”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁 337.
3.4.4 Conformity to the Mean: the Positive Side of Emotion

The positive side is what has been mentioned earlier on Mencius’ Four Sprouts, which are the emotions to encourage and promote moral practice. Take one of the Four Sprouts, benevolence, as an example. Benevolence for Mencius is a sense of sympathy which means the feeling of pity unable to bear seeing the suffering of others. When we see a dog being hit badly by a car, our heart/mind naturally feels its pain especially when hearing the dog wailing. This emotion naturally urges us to search for the right act and propels us to reach out to help voluntarily. However, what stops us from reaching out to help would be the calculative heart/mind with selfish desires.

Another example below can be seen in the answer Wang Yang-ming provided when being asked how joy can be maintained when a person is experiencing a great sorrow, such as the death of his parents.

“Question: ‘Happiness is the original substance of the heart/mind. But when one suffers from traumatic experiences, and cannot not help but feel sad and weep, does this happiness still exist?’ Master answered: ‘one must be in floods of tears first before happiness arises. If one doesn’t cry, then one won’t feel happy. Even though one cries, crying itself is the natural response to the event for one’s heart/mind to gain comfort which is also happiness.” (CXLLJT, 2012, p.390, my translation)

To follow the course of nature, one must see to it that the emotions are in proportion to the events which arouse them. Ching (1976) stated that “one must control anger, even in face of provocation, in order to avoid being carried away by anger. On the other hand, one need not fear giving in to sorrow, when there is just reason for it” (Ching, 1976, p.175).

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69 Original text: “問：‘樂是心之本體，不知遇大故，於哀哭時，此樂還在否？’先生答：‘須是大哭一番方樂，不哭便不樂矣。雖哭，此心安處即是樂也。’”《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁390.
What needs to be done essentially is to maintain peace since it is the key contributing factor for the existence of equilibrium and harmony.

If we ever hope to know our inherent nature and the innate knowing of the good that accompanies it then we must get control over the thieves, meaning the senses that are poisoning our inherent nature and robbing us of any innate knowing. In other words, we must get control over our senses and get the heart/mind to regulate them, not to satisfy them.

When Wang Yang-ming answered the question put forward by his student, Xu Ai, on the heart/mind and the highest good, Wang said:

“The mind and principle are identical. When the mind is free from the obscuration of selfish desires, it is the embodiment of the Principle of Nature, which requires not an iota added from the outside. When this mind, which has become completely identical with the Principle of Nature, is applied and arises to serve parents, there is filial piety; when it arises to serve the ruler, there is loyalty; when it rises to deal with friends or to govern the people, there are faithfulness and humanity. The main thing is for the mind to make an effort to get rid of selfish human desires and preserve the Principle of Nature.” (Chan, 1969, p.667)

If we can find a way to stop all the cravings, our inherent nature and the pristine Heart/Mind of The Tao will appear. When it appears, we are able to naturally control the senses and their desires. Then the human heart/mind and its reasoning faculties will be still and clear, and not under the negative influence of the greedy, arrogant and passionate side of the heart/mind or the ego. When the human heart/mind is clear and pure, the innate knowing of the good can return.

70 Original text: “心即理也，此心無私欲之蔽，即是天理，不須外面添一分。以此純乎天理之心，發之事父便是孝，發之事君便是忠，發之事友、治民便是信與仁。只在此心去人欲，存天理上用功便是。” 《傳習錄全譯》卷上，頁19.
Furthermore, Wang Yang-ming believes that innate knowing of the good provides us with guidelines of differentiating right and wrong. At the same time, it enables us to have psychological and emotional reactions towards one’s intention, thought and action. Self-serenity is the result one feels for oneself when/after one fulfils one’s moral obligations, which is self-cultivation, a spiritual task one ought to engage.

3.5 Summary of this Chapter

Emotions are one aspect of human heart/mind and are not outside innate knowing of the good. They are innate in man and natural to man. His criterion is not the movement of emotions, but the moral intention. Conforming to Ching’s (1976) interpretation, “when the intention is correct, no distinction need to be made between states of heart/mind as tranquility and activity” (Ching, 1976, p.169). The cruciality lies in regulation. This can be substantiated by the reply Wang Yang-ming provided when answering the question on anger, one of the seven emotions. Wang Yang-ming said:

“When one is angry and cares too much, rage arises easily. As a result, one’s heart/mind loses its original state of openness, tranquility and impartiality. Anger stops heart/mind from being unprejudiced; therefore, when emotions like anger emerges (such as distress and rage), one just go with the flow without caring too much. Then one’s heart/mind can naturally be open, tranquil and impartial, so as to achieve fairness and placidity.” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.343, my translation)

Wang Yang-ming, like most other Chinese philosophers, looks at emotion from two perspectives. On one hand, emotion is experiential. It is independent of morality. Which can

71 Original text: “凡人懷怨，著了一分意思，便怒得過當，非廓然大公之體了，故有所懷怨，便不得其正也。如今凡懷怨等件，只是物來順應，不要著一分意思，便心體廓然大公，得其本體之正了。” 《傳習錄自話本》卷下，頁 343.
be both good and evil. On the other hand, emotion is also transcendental and is the ultimate
goodness. It is the component of moral subject.

The quote below from *Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming* can well conclude how
emotions and heart/mind, or innate knowing of the good correspond with one another.

“When it is time to abandon wealth, one ought to abandon it, this is
the extension of innate knowing; when it is time to follow the order
of your father and your elder brother, one ought to follow, this is also
the extension of innate knowing. While weighing and considering the
importance, if selfish desires arise, even for a bit, the innate knowing
of yours will not be at peace.” (Chen, 1991, p.176)

The three aspects of the heart/mind Wang Yang-ming brought forward, as a matter of
fact, are not independent of and separated from each other. They, as the various
components of the moral subject, are rather, the different aspects of the same substance in
the tradition of Confucianism. In actuality, knowledge, emotions and intentions, the three
aspects of innate knowing of the good can be relatively unconnected in terms of intellectual
speculative enquiries; nonetheless, in practical term they are unable to be divided from the
heart/mind.

72 Original text: “當棄貧貴則棄貧貴，只是致良知。當從父兄之命則從父兄之命，亦只是致良知。其
間權量輕重，稍有私意，于良知便不自安。” 《陽明全書》卷六，頁 117.
Chapter IV: Application of Innate Knowing of the Good: Two Important Dimensions

Wang Yang-ming's system of thoughts includes strong and compelling ethical and moral implications. The framework and concept of innate knowing of the good together with the co-relation between innate knowing of the good and knowledge, intention and emotion have been discussed in the previous two chapters. This chapter will centralize the exposition on the functions and impact that can be generated once one makes a "commitment" (li-zhi, 立志) to extending one's innate knowing of the good, which is equal to attaining sagehood as sage is an example of the ideal personality one can develop in Chinese culture. However, it is recommended to first review the implications of ethics and morality in our contemporary time.

Ethical implication is normally associated with defining the ideal human character, e.g., in terms of his/her ideals as described by Plato, his/her goodness and sincerity as articulated by Aristotle, and by his/her principles and righteousness as associated with Confucius; whereas moral implication is connected to manner, habit, custom, way of life, and conduct. Morality typically attempts to describe whatever is good, right or proper. Goodness, on the other hand, is typically associated with an individual's habits, behaviors, or conducts. It refers to our inner impulses, actions, judgments and duty and how they adhere to that which is intrinsically moral. The key word is "that which is intrinsically
Two Important Dimensions

"moral". Seen in this light man has an intrinsic nature, which is naturally good and moral; all he/she has to do is to bring out that inherent nature.

Taken together, ethical and moral behavior and goodness would constitute a way of life, meaning the way of character and honor that manifests through moral and virtuous living, i.e. through a life governed by an individual’s sense of principle, righteousness and love. Thus, the ideal and profound human is defined by first of all his/her innate or intrinsic understanding of what is right and good; and, secondly, by his/her conduct, and the way he/she naturally puts that knowledge into practice, by acting lovingly and righteously.

But without any intrinsic sense of propriety and virtue, how can one know this? Where is that innate understanding coming from? How can one know what is right and good if there isn’t already a pre-existing knower?

If we feel it, it isn’t known; it is perceived and felt. If we think it, it isn’t known; it is thought to be right. To know something we must be one with what is known, not outside of it. And the only way of being one with something is by being of, or part of that which is known. One would not have to think about what is right, or feel what is wrong. Nor would one have to obey the law to be good. One would do what is right because he/she is right and good, that is his/her intrinsic nature and as a consequence, there is no other way to act. Acting in this way one could never be wrong or act wrongly.

One inherently knows what is right and good, because one is by nature right and good. All one has to do is to unify with that nature—the essence within—and one will always obey the inner voice by manifesting its virtuous living. Nobody will have to speak or govern on its behalf or frighten one to take certain actions. That is one’s nature, because one’s essence is good and virtuous, and as a virtuous person. one can only act virtuously.
If we are in possession of virtue, it distinguishes us from other animals; without it, we are the same, or worse, which is in accordance with Mencius’ assertion below.

“The difference between man and animals is slim. Normal people abandon it, but a profound man preserves it. King Shun understands the general truth of things and the human nature. Therefore, he follows the path of human-heartedness and righteousness, rather than to act for the sake of human-heartedness and righteousness.” (Wenyanhanyu, 2016) (my translation)

The problem, however, is that you cannot force a man to be good or moral. You can force him/her to obey a law or an army, but you cannot make him/her be good, kind, loving, courageous, just, tolerant, respectful, or truthful; those qualities have to come from within. Only the individual himself/herself can determine the values and attitudes. But a society can manipulate man into thinking and feeling that he/she is doing good and acting morally.

4.1 Domains of Law and Free Choice

There is the domain of positive law, the domain of free choice and the domain of ethics and morals. In human society, there is the domain of law which is characterized by laws binding upon us which must be obeyed. This is called the “obedience to the enforceable”, because punishment, or fear of it, results in obedience. In this way, man can be controlled to act in such a way, not because he/she is naturally good or virtuous, but because he/she fears acting badly, because he/she will be punished if he/she does.

The domain of free choice refers to all actions where man can claim and enjoy complete freedom. This is the domain where spontaneity, originality, and energy are born.
and where it is believed the spirit and character find their individual expression. While it may be smaller than the domain of law, it is important, since it includes having the freedom to choose who you marry, what you do in life and how you vote.

4.2 Domain of Obedience to the Unenforceable

Taken together, the domain of law and the domain of freedom represent the polar opposites, or the two extremes, and are by nature antagonistic to each other. Between law and free choice lies the middle path, the domain where no law can determine our course of action, and at the same time, where we are not so free to choose as we might want. This is called, "the domain of obedience to the unenforceable" proposed by Lord John Fletcher Moulton (1844-1921) about one hundred years ago (Silber, 2016). That obedience is the obedience of a man to that which he/she cannot be forced to obey; he/she is the enforcer of the law unto himself/herself. This is the domain of ethics and morals. Because this ethical middle ground lies between the region of absolute choice and the region of absolute law it is constantly at risk of encroachment from both sides.

On the one hand, there may be pressures coming from outside to enlarge the sphere of positive law, to make laws, or to regulate everything, even our personal conduct, like banning smoking in public places. On the other hand, there is a growing inclination to treat matters as not regulated by positive law as being matters of free and absolute choice.

However, the true test of a man's worth, value or character and integrity lies in the scope of the middle ground. As the saying goes, "If he doesn't stand for something, he will fall for anything." Or, like Lord John Fletcher Moulton once claimed, "The greatest test of
a nation is measured by the extent to how its citizenry obey the unenforceable” (Silber, 2016).

Just obeying the law does not measure either the greatness of an individual or a nation. History abounds of an entire nation of individuals obeying the law, while massacring individuals in other nations, or its own peoples, all the while thinking they were doing the right thing.

Thus, mere obedience to law does not measure a great nation. Such obedience can easily be obtained by unscrupulous leaders, and most easily of all from frightened, insecure and passive people. Nor is unlicensed individuality a proof of a great person or nation.

The true test of the greatest an individual or nation can be is the extent to which each is tested in difficult times and how each can obey self-imposed laws despite the adversity. It is how well we can bring ourselves to obey the unenforceable, not because our society or family says it is right, or because we feel guilty or think it is wrong; that is the mind at work; rather, because there is no other way to act but the right and good way.

We do not have to think about what is right, or feel what is wrong. Nor do we have to obey the law to be good. We will do what is right because we are right and good, that is our nature and as a consequence, there is no other way to act. Our conduct is motivated by our nature itself, and, as such, there is no other way to act, but the good and right way.

The domain of obedience to the unenforceable provides a golden mean to the two—with enough obedience to mitigate the selfishness that can come from freedom and individuality, but enough unenforceability to permit real creativity. This is the ethical and moral middle ground, and the ground on which Wang Yang-ming sought to find a way through his system of thoughts on extending innate knowing of the good.
The following sections will provide analysis via two dimensions of extending innate knowing of the good to make explicit why Wang Yang-ming’s theory can enhance the ethical and moral middle ground: the domain of obedience to the unenforceable. One dimension is the quality of self-knowing; the other dimension is the expression of this innate knowing of the good.

4.3 First Dimension: Bring out the Quality of Self-Knowing

The reason we are here as a person for Wang Yang-Ming is to establish our authentic subjectivity (our original Self/the soul). The meaning of subjectivity is that the only person who can illuminate the quality of self-knowing and innate knowing of the good is the individual himself/herself. Nobody can do it on his/her behalf. This self-knowing according to Wang Yang-Ming is private knowing. As quoted from Chen (1991), “innate knowing of the good is private knowing, there is no knowledge outside this knowledge” (Chen, 1991, p.170, my translation). This also implies that innate knowing of the good, as the inner light inside us, functions as a direct moral sense and moral judgment.

As a direct subject of moral judgment, innate knowing of the good must have the fundamental capabilities of self-knowing and self-awareness without relying on external forces. As soon as an intention arises, innate knowing of the good activates to judge and supervise that particular intention. Good and evil is thus known naturally. With regard to this characteristic, in one of Wang Yang-ming’s poems, it says “you are the only one who

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Original text: “良知即是良知時，此知之外更無知。” -- 阮明詠良知詩《有無之境—王陽明哲學的精神》，頁 170.
knows your own pain and itchiness” (zi-jia-tong-yang-zi-jia-zhi, 自家痛癢自家知) (Wu & Sun, 2015, p.400).

The right and wrong, good and evil of a moral act depends only on the judgment of the self-knowing of innate knowing of the good without having to resort to all the external norms. In other words, the external social norms are eventually subject to the scrutiny of innate knowing of the good in order to facilitate moral behaviors. Nevertheless, the internal thrust that propels the display of moral behaviors, on the contrary, lies in innate knowing of the good rather than obeying the external norms. Innate knowing of the good is one’s own sole criteria and the development or extension of which is the necessary condition of sagehood.

Sagehood as discussed in Chapter two is a state in which one can obtain sagely ease. It is tied to having “a disposition to respond well to the situations one encounters and it is a disposition that springs from a fine internal state rather than from self-control” (Angle, 2009, p.53). Innate knowing of the good, as a Neo-Confucian conception of wisdom, at this stage is “neither foreknowledge nor retrospective knowledge. It is knowledge about what is going on” (Huang, 2006, p.396).

As Ching (2013) states, “all of us are born with innate knowing, but it is not known to us when we were born” (Ching, 2013, p.107) which is similar to Plato’s argument that knowledge is indeed innate but is forgotten when born. For Wang Yang-ming, we need to make constant and uninterrupted “spiritual efforts” (gong-fu, 功夫) to bring innate knowing of the good to light. These spiritual efforts signify eliminating selfish desires and becoming one with the whole, which can be referred to the following citation from Inquiry into the
Great Learning《大學問》(da-xue-wen), one of Wang Yang-ming’s most significant works.

“The learning of the great man consists entirely in getting rid of the obscuration of selfish desires in order by his own efforts to make manifest his clear character, so as to restore the condition of forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, a condition that is originally so, that is all. It is not that outside of the original substance something can be added.” (Chan, 1969, p.660)

The same notion can be drawn from the following passage as well on the unity of knowledge and action in Wang’s book Instructions for Practical Living:

“There have never been people who know but do not act. Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know. When sages and worthies taught people about knowledge and action, it was precisely because they wanted them to restore the original substance, and not simply to do this or that and be satisfied.” (Chan, 1969, p.669)

If the original substance cannot be restored, then the knowledge and action will fail to be unified which can possibly result in many divisions of ethical and moral concepts in terms of individual cultivation. This can further generate the confusing and chaotic values of human life. The establishment of values is the subjectivity of a person as to why a person is born as a person. And this establishment is the manifestation of humanity because via establishment one can attain wisdom and the pursuit of wisdom will bring him/her happiness, not because he/she is seeking it, but because he/she is doing what he/she is meant to do, which is finding out who he/she is and why he/she is here in the first place, and that will bring him/her happiness. That is man’s nature, and for Wang Yang-ming man’s purpose is to realize his/her potential, i.e. to regard Heaven, Earth and the myriad...
things as one body which is what a sage achieves. He told his students that “inside everybody is a sage. Because of lacking confidence, that sage is deeply buried” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.322, my translation).

For him, the only difference lying between a sage and a commoner is the restoration of innate knowing of the good. Once his student responded to his teaching by replying:

“Innate knowing of the good is blinded by material desires. It has always been there in human heart/mind, never disappeared. It is like the sun shadowed by the dark clouds. The sun is always there never vanishes.” (CXL, JT, 2012, p.322, my translation)

Innate knowing of the good is ingrained by all people. It is originally not only clear and limpid, but also has the capacity to illuminate. The loss of its function is subject to external factors. As stated by Deng (2012), “Even though it is covered by dust or cloud, innate knowing of the good has its own power to rid of the coverage” (Deng, 2012, p.96).

The knowledge concerned is not merely the inborn capacity, but also what has been acquired and realized, what has passed from potentiality to act. The implication of which is substantiated by Wang Yang-ming as follows:

“The knowledge (or wisdom) of the sage can be compared to the sun in a clear sky, that of the worthy man to the sun in a sky that is partly clouded, and that of the fool to the sun on a dark and dismal day. These three kinds of knowledge (seem to) differ in clarity, but have all the power of discerning between black and white.” (Ching, 1976, p.168)

76 Original text: “人胸中各有個聖人，只自信不至，都自埋倒了。” 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁322.
77 Original text: “只是物慮遮蔽，良心在內，自不會失。如雲自蔽日，口何嘗失了。” 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁322.
78 Original text: “聖人之知，如青天之日；賢人如浮雲之日，愚人如陰霾之日。雖有昏明不同，其能辨黑白自明一。” 《傳習錄白話本》卷下，頁388.
The method to illuminate this quality is by self-introspection and self-reflection. When the self, meaning the authentic “I”, the individual, can truly contemplate on his/her daily intentions, motives and actions, then he/she can actually establish himself/herself in this world, between Heaven and Earth. When this authentic “I” is in charge, the real subjectivity (the soul) can be revealed.

When one starts to look inside and examine himself/herself, his/her intentions will naturally be pure and sincere and his/her heart/mind will naturally be upright, too. When the heart/mind is upright, then it conforms to Wang Yang-ming’s definition of heart/mind, which is “the clear and intelligent master of the person” (Chan, 1969, p.664). So if we lead our life with this natural attitude, then it would be difficult that the human affairs that follow accordingly would be incorrect and unjust.

Very often Wang Yang-Ming referred to our heart/mind as a mirror because the heart/mind of Tao can easily be covered by human heart/mind that is full of desires. Furthermore, in most situations happening in daily life is that we are under the control of our own habits which causes the heart/mind of Tao to be covered or polluted by human heart/mind which is full of desires. In other words “the Big Self is manipulated by the little self” (Dong, 2014, p.62). The following passage is about when Lu Cheng explained to Wang Yang-ming about his understanding of true learning, he said to Wang:

“Our mind/heart is like a mirror. The mind/heart of a sage resembles a bright mirror, whereas the mind/heart of an ordinary person resembles a rusted mirror......Master, your illustration on investigation of things is like polishing a mirror so as to make the mirror clear and bright.”

(CXL, GT, 2008, p.88, my translation)

79 Lu Cheng, from Wuxing, Zhejiang province. He was one of Wang Yang-ming’s known students.
80 Original text: “心猶鏡也。聖人心如明鏡，常人心如昏鏡，……先生之格物，如磨鏡而使之明……”. 《傳習錄》卷上，頁 88.
Chapter IV: Application of Innate Knowing of the Good: Two Important Dimensions

Hence, to Wang Yang-Ming, there are two types of mirrors—one that is clear and one that is rusted. The rusted mirror cannot reflect things and objects clearly and as the way they actually are, unlike the clear mirror. However, if we want the rusted mirror to resume its correct and proper function which is to reflect things and objects clearly as the way they are, all we need to do is rub away the rust.

To discipline our heart/mind is the same as to rub away the rust on the mirror. In order to discipline our heart/mind, we have to get control over our senses. To do that, we have to analyze our intentions and motives. For him, the original heart/mind is clear and upright; the source of all problems is our unnatural and unhealthy intentions and motives. The rise of these intentions and motives is due to the conditions and circumstances coming externally. In other words, it is due to the stimulation of our senses.

It is the external conditions and circumstances that make our heart/mind move, i.e., it is the stimulation of our senses that generate desire and which further generates affairs. With the presence of affairs we get values and distinctions, such as good or bad, and right or wrong. If the heart/mind of man is in control, it will analyze the situation and circumstances and make decisions based on utility or pleasure.

However, if we are governed by the heart/mind of Tao, our innate knowing of the good instantly knows what is good or bad and what is right or wrong. It does not have to deliberate or reflect on what to do; it knows innately. The heart/mind of the Tao is like the clear mirror, thus, it reflects purity and clarity and manifests both in terms of pure intentions, spontaneity and integrity.

Therefore, through the method of self-examination, self-introspection and self-reflection, innate knowledge is able to manifest itself as what it has always been like
originally, in its natural and pure state. To enable innate knowing of the good to regain its primordial state is to establish the subjectivity of the real self in this universe, in other words, it is to realize and fulfill the natural state and purpose of the soul.

In order to achieve this, we have to begin with our intentions and motives by keeping our eyes on both unceasingly. During the momentary rise of our intentions and motives, we whole-heartedly follow what innate knowing of the good tells us what is good and wrong by doing good and ridding of wrong to fulfill the true meaning of cultivating our life.

Through carrying out what our innate knowledge guides us to do in our daily life, this for Wang Yang-Ming is to actualize the concepts advocating in the book of *Great Learning*: making one’s intentions sincere, making one’s heart/mind upright and extending knowledge (*cheng-wi-zhong-xin-zhi-zhi*). This can be further explained as follows:

“The essential teaching of the *Great Learning* lies in making one’s intention sincere. This is also the meaning of extending knowledge, which is achieved through the rectification of heart/mind, as expressed in the cultivation of self, which is nothing else than manifesting illustrious virtue— with reference to self—and loving the people— with reference to others.” (Ching, 1976, p.122)

Innate knowing of the good is self-knowing. This thinking of Wang Yang-ming’s highlights the moral subjectivity of an individual, and the innate perfection of this subjectivity.
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4.4 Second Dimension: The Expression of the Innate Knowing of the Good

The second dimension is the expression of the innate knowing of the good. Wang Yang-Ming said, "Extend our innate knowing of the good to all affairs and things" (zhi-liang-zhi-yu-shi-shi-wu-wu, 致良知於事事物物). First of all, by extension it is meant to reach the limit. The continued explanation from Chan (1969) of which is referred to as below.

"In the Book of Changes it is said: 'Knowing the utmost, one should reach it.' Knowing the utmost means knowledge and reaching it means extension. The extension of knowledge is not what later scholars understand as enriching and widening knowledge. It is simply extending one's innate knowledge of the good to the utmost. This innate knowledge of the good is what Mencius meant when he said, 'The sense of right and wrong is common to all'. The sense of right and wrong requires no deliberation to know nor does it depend on learning to function. This is why it is called innate knowledge. It is my nature endowed by Heaven, the original substance of my mind, naturally intelligent, shining, clear, and understanding." (Chan, 1969, p.665)

4.4.1 To Reach the Limit

To reach the limit, as Chen (1991) stated, means "reaching the peak after going through a process" (Chen, 1991, p.179), namely, to expand innate knowing of the good, i.e. conscience, to its whole. To its whole specifically suggests every aspect of our life when dealing with human affairs from day to day.

In line with Wang Yang-ming's thoughts, to reach the limit connotes making one's intentions utmost sincere as well. For him the major reason one's conscience is covered is because one's intentions are not sincere. In other words, one's actions and behaviors do not comply with one's conscience. He once explained to his students that "the foundation of
sincere intentions lies in the actualization of one’s knowledge\(^81\) (CXL, JT, 2012, p.418, my translation). What others do not know but known to only oneself is “the original knowledge (ben-yuan-zhi-shi, 本源知識) of one’s heart/mind” (Geng, 2014, p. 231).

Knowing good, but does not put it into actions according to this original knowledge; and knowing evil, but does not stop or rid it of according to this original knowledge is what Wang Yang-ming’s belief of conscience being covered and concealed. Once conscience is covered and concealed, it is not possible to bring the original knowledge into reality. If one cannot bring one’s conscience into full display, meaning its utmost limit, then even if one knows it is good, one cannot generate a true liking towards good; and even if one knows it is evil, one cannot, at the same token, generate a true disgust towards evil. Henceforth, to reach the limit means to listen to one’s conscience at all time and put it into actions.

Listening to one’s conscience suggests Wang Yang-ming’s method of self-cultivation, a quote from Ching (1976) reads as follows:

“Yang-ming’s method of self-cultivation lies in the rectification of intention, that is to say, a process in which knowledge and action are one, in which truth or wisdom is discovered by action. For Yang-ming, action contains knowledge.” (Ching, 1976, p.130)

Extending our innate knowing of the good copes with the methodological issues of moral practice. As long as we follow our innate knowing of the good and extend it to all affairs and things no matter where and when in order to consolidate this spiritual practice, we can eventually reach the state of becoming a virtuous person. What Wang Yang-ming meant by extending is also that authentic investigation of things (ge-wu, 格物) happens only after self-examination, self-introspection and self-reflection, and realizing what is true

\(^81\) Original text: “然誠意之本，又在於致知也。”《傳習錄》卷下，頁 418.
and real, we have to fully activate our innate knowing of the good in dealing with our life experiences and human affairs. Once we are able to do so, we will become a moral person leading a good moral life and we will naturally be happy, which is the attainment of well-being. This is in also Confucianism, an actualization of an ideal moral character a sage or worthy possess. In one passage of Wang Yang-ming’s, it reads:

“All you need to is not to deceive your innate knowing, but faithfully obey. To keep and nurture the good, but remove the evil. How sound and happy one can be!" (CXLJT, 2012, p.320, my translation)

Almost everyone has the verbal ability, if well trained, to explain or speak about what the sages in the past taught; however, the key is to observe if or not one follows what he/she preaches. Actions speak louder than words. A person is not to be judged by his/her words, but by his/her attitudes or inner motivations behind each act. The reason for this is that when the motivations or intentions are sincere, the heart/mind is rectified; and when the heart/mind is rectified, the personal life is truly cultivated. This is the spiritual effort directed at the integral development of the character of the whole man. It is to cultivate one’s personality at the level of heart/mind, which can be considered as his/her deepest recesses.

4.4.2 To be Cautious and Apprehensive (Jie-Shen-Kong-Ju, 戒慎恐懼)

Secondly, by extension it is meant to actualize the sense of right and wrong. As it is discussed previously, this innate knowing of the good is the sense of right and wrong which is common to all. Even though it can be shrouded by seven emotions that have been

82 Original text: “眾只不要欺他，實實落落依著他做去，善便存，惡便去，他這裡何等感倉快樂！” 《傳習錄》卷下，頁 320.
deliberated in Chapter III, this innate knowing of the good can still be aware and perceptual and consequently readjust and regulate on its own.

Wang Yang-ming usually used a clear and “bright mirror” (ming-jing, 明鏡) as the metaphor to describe the function of heart/mind. Since his system of thoughts is also under the influence of Zen Buddhism, he applied a different term “zhao-xin” (照心) to explain the same notion in order to distinguish himself from Zen Buddhism. In a letter replying to the inquiry made by Lu Yuan-jing on why innate knowing of the good is “zhao-xin”, Wang Yang-Ming wrote:

“Yesterday Master took innate knowing of the good as zhao-xin. But I personally think innate knowing of the good is the heart/mind at its original state, whereas zhao-xin is the effort people make. It is the heart/mind of caution and apprehension which resembles thinking. Why does Master take the heart/mind of caution and apprehension as innate knowing of the good? Wang replied ‘enabling people to be cautious and apprehensive this is innate knowing of the good’ (CXL, UT, 2012, p.238, my translation).

Although Wang Yang-ming failed to provide a direct answer to this question, in consonance with Geng’s view (2014) that “being cautious and apprehensive does not refer to behaviors in need of finding the correct ethical and moral solutions for external problems. Rather it is in connection with what others do not see and hear but is known to one’s heart/mind” (Geng, 2014, p. 237). What is known to one’s heart/mind is to see clearly the original knowledge. To be able to see clearly, one’s conscience, i.e. innate knowing of the good, has to have clarity and perspicuity. Thus, to be cautious and apprehensive is this

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83 隆明靜, one of Wang Yang-ming’s known students.
84 Original text: “夫子昨以良知為照心。謂謂良知，心之本體也；照心，人所用功，乃戒慎恐懼之心也。猶思也。而遂以戒慎恐懼為良知，何哉？（答云）能戒慎恐懼者，是良知也。” 《傳習錄》卷中，頁 238.
innate knowing of the good. For him, innate knowing of the good is not only the heart/mind at its original state, but can also empower people to be cautious and apprehensive. It is "the self-realizing ability to bring the sense of right and wrong into reality" (Deng, 2012, p. 97).

This self-realizing ability is self-cultivation which manifests in the moral notion that being as a human; virtue cannot be separated from life and action. Heart/mind and virtue are inseparable. The center of moral activity is not to divorce between virtue and life, let alone leading to the abstraction of the concept of virtue itself.

Self-cultivation, according to Chen (2016), man's spiritual life can be divided into three states or stages: the state in which any thoughts/emotions has yet to arise—"wei-fa (未發)"; the state in which thoughts/emotions have arisen—"yi-fa (已發)"; and the intermediate state between wei-fa and yi-fa, i.e. the critical moment corresponding to the incipient activating of thoughts/emotions, which is normally called "ji (幾)" in the context of Neo-Confucianism. And it is this moment with reference to "ji" that falls into the category of the objects of "knowing by oneself alone" as mentioned above.

As a result, the practice of self-cultivation consists of two different types: one refers to the effort in maintaining the state of heart/mind which is termed as being cautious and apprehensive in Confucian tradition; and the other is related to the exercise in keeping a state of heart/mind that is being constantly "watchful over and attentive to oneself when being alone" (shen-du, 慎獨). This is the vocabulary derived from the Doctrine of the

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Mean, it is the same as “being constantly alert when alone, practicing vigilance without being seen, and apprehension without being heard”\(^{86}\) (Du, 2008, p.3).

Innate knowing of the good has self-knowing ability that deals particularly with the intermediate state. It requires one to watch on his/her incipient activating of thoughts and intentions. If it is fully utilized, it assists one to distinguish the good from evil so as to put good intentions into practice and actions, as well as nipping any evil in the bud.

When one is able to utilize innate knowing of the good effortlessly and spontaneously, one is able to control the heart/mind exercising over its acts and operations, which means, over its intentions. According to Ching (1976), by this control, “the heart/mind assures the sincerity of its intentions, which in turn, assures the sincerity and rectitude of the heart/mind itself and of the whole person” (Ching, 1976, p.124). This is the same as investigating human nature itself, i.e. Principle.

4.5 Criticisms of the Application of Innate Knowing of the Good

“The extension of the innate knowing of the good” is Wang Yang-ming’s greatest contribution to Chinese philosophy and also the core idea of his thoughts even though the term innate knowing of the good was hardly used and talked about by the Confucian scholars before him. Nonetheless, the view of which is actually derived from Mencius’ propositions of “the innate moral ability” and “the innate knowing ability of the good” which holds the premise that all humans bear the nature to incline to be good. Nonetheless, the philosophical criticism of the innate knowing of the good does exist and is mainly manifested in two aspects deliberating below.

\(^{86}\) Original text: “是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹，恐惧乎其所不聞。”《中庸—洞見》第一章文本，頁3.
4.5.1 Voiding the Universality

Zhan Ruoshui (1466–1560) was a Chinese philosopher, educator and a Confucian scholar in the Ming Dynasty. He pointed out the limitations of the innate knowing of the good. The quote from him reads as follows:

"Everyone is born with the innate knowing of the good to know right from wrong. If it is right, one must do everything to put it into actions; if it is wrong, one must do everything to rid it off. Isn’t it harm to the Way to say this ability is also possessed by every child we encounter on the road? My students, be careful of this concept!" (my translation)

If the innate knowing of the good is inborn in all humans, no matter it being the a priori or a posteriori, the main question is whether the innate knowing of the good alone is sufficient enough to determine the moral law.

According to Wang Yang-ming’s thoughts, innate knowing of the good is just the heart/mind of knowing right from wrong, knowing right from wrong is just likes and dislikes. Likes and dislikes are subject to individuals, for this reason can be blind and lack the valid objectivity. In other words, as Chen (1991) stated that “whenever the prerequisite is not based on the obligatory motive of rationally obeying the moral law, but relying on the likes and dislikes of heart/mind towards goodness as the motive, then it is blind” (Chen, 1991, p.191). It is the same as claiming that we have to take rationality as the motive, instead of heart/mind.

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Confucianism agrees that on one hand, all humans bear the nature to incline to be good; and on the other hand, attaining individual excellence to become a sage through self-cultivation is a very long process. It is true that if the notion of this inclination to be good is rejected, then the basis of arguing all humans have the possibility to become a sage disappears, and the effort of bringing individual initiative into full play would be in vain. However, we cannot neglect the possibility that if the notion of innate knowing of the good being ready-made in all humans is over stressed, it may also lead to moral fanaticism and further undermining the sanctity of moral law.

In addition, from the perspective of Confucian ethics and morality, the innate knowing of the good is not the only principle. It needs to be complemented with other principles, such as the way of “Zhong” (忠) and “Shu” (恕) \(^8^9\); otherwise, innate knowing of the good alone does not suffice itself to be the condition of producing complete, excellent and full people. Nevertheless, it is completely understandable why Wang Yang-ming put forward his theory on innate knowing of the good judging from the time and the corruptive society he came from.

The innate knowing of the good incorporates the emotional power, i.e. likes and dislikes towards good and vice, it is inevitably infiltrated by emotion as such anybody can act recklessly by simply following one’s heart/mind and seek legitimacy in the name of the innate knowing of the good resulting in the loss of the authenticity of the innate knowing of the good. But as Chen (1991) stated that if moral subjectivity is “purely practical reason”

\(^8^9\) The Way of Zhong and Shu (忠恕之道). Zhong is the positive aspect of the practice of “Ren” which resonates the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would like others do unto you”; Shu on the other hand is the negative aspect of the practice of “Ren” which requires one to be constantly conscious of what he detests and disapproves, as well as what others might detest and disapprove. It echoes again the Golden Rule, “Do not do unto others what you do not want others do unto you.”
(Chen, 1991, p.192), then it loses naturalness and spontaneity. From an ethical and moral point of view, questions like these are still worthy of further study.

It is believed by the author that social guidance and social ethics are made by people in power and with position. Those people are individuals. If those individuals are good and virtuous, the society and people they lead would not stray too much away from the right path. As the saying goes, “When a fish stinks, it stinks from its head.” Hence, for this world to become a better place we have to start from the individuals.

4.5.2 Providing no Guidance on How to Resolve Ethical Dilemmas

In the contemporary sense of ethical and moral learning and teaching, especially when one is confronted with dilemmas in life, the discussions on what the resolutions are should be made clearly and explicitly. That is to say the notion of innate knowing of the good, i.e. conscience, should be able to not only be explained, but also to be analyzed and reasoned. Precisely at this point, innate knowing of the good traditionally in Chinese philosophy has long been having the limitation of being difficult to disclose clearly.

The previous chapters have illustrated the notion of Wang Yang-ming equating heart/mind to principle and innate knowing of the good to heart/mind. It can be concluded that, from his equation, innate knowing of the good is identical to principle. However, according to Cai (2015), “Wang Yang-ming does not have a standard or scope to provide an explicit explanation; therefore, in some contexts of discussion, even though his theory on heart/mind and principle has its own value, it nonetheless helps people get no closer to virtue” (Cai, 2015, p.250).
As lofty the concept of innate knowing of the good is, if it is difficult to be disclosed clearly, then a question needs to be put forward concerning whether or not it can be the cornerstone to directly support the social ethics and morality so as to help individuals attain well-being. To ask individuals to try to figure it out, comprehend and experience without specific and clear explanations and guidance could be a tall order.

We are in the era of people pursuing values in diverse ways, the innate knowing of the good cannot yet become a dominant value system because it is unable to answer whether or not individuals’ behaviors when dealing with daily affairs are in line with morality, as well as a series of relevant issues, let alone to respond to whether or not the social system is in line with justice.

Lacking clear explanations and guidance, the problem encountered is having no direction. Most people need something to serve as a criterion. This to Pojman and Fieser (2012) is “the problem of virtue relativism: what counts as a virtue changes over time and place” (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, p.158).

It is true that most people need something to serve as a criterion; nonetheless, we have already had a lot of guidance, rules, the dos and don’ts. What we do not have yet is someone who can serve as an example for the general public to look up to and refer to. Wang Yang-ming’s notion of extending the innate knowing of the good deals with individual cultivation directly which leads one to attain higher moral excellence and become virtuous. A role model is needed by the mass, and this role model is sought only in a virtuous person with higher moral excellence.
4.6 Summary of this Chapter

To extend one’s innate knowing is a return to Wang Yang-ming’s earlier teaching of the “unity of knowledge and action”. Knowledge and action necessarily penetrate each other, and that there is no true moral knowledge outside of action. To extend is the key, as Ching (1976) proclaimed:

“A moral doctrine is always ordained to practice. If it is impracticable, it can hardly be called moral. To extend one’s innate knowing is simply the great principle; to do always in one’s life what one’s heart/mind says is right and good.” (Ching, 1976, p.172)

In answering Xu Ai’s question on the relationship between the heart/mind and words, affairs and things, Wang Yang-Ming answered:

“The master of the body is the mind. What emanates from the mind is the will. The original substance of the will is knowledge, and wherever the will is directed is a thing or affair. For example, when the will is directed toward serving one’s parents, then serving one’s parents is a ‘thing’ or ‘affair’. When the will is directed toward serving one’s ruler, then serving one’s ruler is a ‘thing’ or ‘affair’. Therefore, I say that there are neither principles nor things outside the mind. The teaching in the Doctrine of the Mean that ‘without sincerity there would be nothing, and the effort to manifest one’s clear character described in the Great Learning mean nothing more than the effort to make the will sincere...’” (Chan, 1969, p.673)

So if we ever hope to find our inherent nature and extend its innate knowing of the good, we must first start by clearing and cleansing the human heart/mind. But we can only do that by making our intention sincere. Here, the researcher deems the word “intention” closer to Wang’s idea than the word “will” used by Chan. In order to make our intention

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90 徐艾, one of Wang Yang-ming’s known students.
91 Original text: “身之主宰便是心，心之所發便是意，意之本體便是知，意之所在便是物。如意在於事親，即事親便是物；意在於事君，即事君便是物……所以某設無心外之理，無心外之物。《中庸》云‘不誠無物’，《大學》‘明明德’之功，只是個誠意…”《傳信錄》卷上，頁31.
sincere, we need to rid us of our sensorial dependencies and overcoming our selfish desires. Clearing the heart/mind is like removing residue from water. When the heart/mind has desire, it is like water mixed with mud and dirt.

Knowing how to control our craving, which we do by controlling the senses; and the foundation of our heart/mind will be stable. When the foundation is stable, the heart/mind will be still. When the heart/mind is still, our inherent nature can return. This happens when we clear the heart/mind and there is neither a thought nor a desire in the heart/mind.

When the heart/mind is pure, no craving arises in the eyes, nose, ears, tongue, heart/mind and body. When the senses are not over-stimulated by desire and the human heart/mind is still, we find nourishment and the original nature will start to return. But this does not only happen by reducing one’s desires; we also must have knowledge and to accumulate virtuous deeds to regain that original nature. For virtue is the fuel and nourishment of the inherent nature. This coincides with Wang Yang-ming’s entire attitude toward the role of “intellectual inquiry in the quest for wisdom and sagehood” (Ching, 1976, p.121). Even though some might consider this quest for wisdom and sagehood total internal, it is, nevertheless, relying very much on personal insight acquired through the practice of virtue that can further leads to complete self-elevation. Self, heart/mind, intention, knowledge, actions and even affairs are all one and the same, which are just different manifestations of the same reality—both internal and external.

Even though there are criticisms, as discussed earlier, the author still believes that Wang Yang-ming’s theory on extending one’s innate knowing of the good can enhance the ethical and moral middle ground: the domain of obedience to the unenforceable because it
is a path to sagehood. It is a stage once one arrives at can act well out of spontaneous goodness and serve as examples to inspire others.

A sage is a person with wisdom who has the ability to deal with different circumstances. It is heart/mind without set judgments and ready answers; it is heart/mind which looks for the answers in the circumstances themselves. When one is on this path, one would naturally direct him/herself to see the right and wrong of a situation in his/her own heart/mind and with his/her own judgment. And when this is applied, the only person enforcing one to obey the unenforceable would be exclusively oneself. Through this application, virtue and vice are discerned by the judgment and sealed by action.
Chapter V: Conclusion

5.1 Retrospection of the Research

Man is a unity, and the work of acquiring wisdom is a unique endeavor. It is a work which takes up the whole of man, the whole of his/her time. It can neither be broken into fragments, nor organized into a system in terms of steps.

If one wanted to live in a state of well-being, one would first have to start living, and then investigate the meaning of life, since that was the medium by which one could attain well-being, not by pursuing well-being or happiness in itself, but by pursuing something else, i.e., wisdom. As Hu Yeping (2012) states as follows,

“...The mind and the heart must work together in the formation of wisdom and to apply true knowledge and the good will in creative human action in the world. The importance of the heart is its ability to have a special kind of thought that makes sense of purpose in life and the ultimate end for human destiny.” (Hu, 2012, p.125)

Thus, the pursuit of wisdom, a good life, a life of reflection and contemplation, was, by definition, a lived life and a state of well-being. This fits a “virtue-based concept of teleology is the goal of life: living well and achieving moral excellence” (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, p.147). The meaning of life and the attainment of a good and happy life was the central quest for humans. Indeed, the attainment and the meaning were one and the same, in that the pursuit of one meant the realization of the other—and that could only be achieved by integrating one with the other.
One could not just pursue knowledge without living a state of well-being and one could not live a state of well-being without pursuing knowledge; the key was to integrate wisdom with knowledge, which meant integrating the examined life with the lived life. Thus, knowledge of how things were, the way they were, would lead to wisdom and the conduct of one’s life. And the conduct of one’s life would lead to the examined life in order to make sure one is always living the good and virtuous life. In this way, a state of well-being comes about as a result of integrating one with the other, and leading a life with such unity and purpose.

Different from what contemporary people do and believe which is to focus primarily on the acquisition of external knowledge, and which has resulted in man separating mind from body, not to mention eliminating any spiritual considerations from our lives, and the root cause behind many of society’s problems today, Wang Yang-ming did not think this was either advisable or possible. For him, the pursuit of life should focus on a state of unity between theory and practice, the material and the spiritual, and in harmonizing this knowledge with action.

Ching (1976) has provided supplementary confirmation by her disclosure below.

“For Wang, the quest for sage hood is purely moral and mystical. In his view, the unity of knowledge and action implies that moral knowledge and moral action are almost indistinguishable, that the former lies in the latter. His overwhelming emphasis was therefore upon moral and spiritual access, through the individual’s continual responses to the movements of his own heart/mind and to the events of life which act upon the heart/mind.”(Ching, 1976, p.132)

For Wang Yang-ming, the pursuit of knowledge has to be inclusive, not exclusive. It is about uniting the internal with the external, heaven with earth, not being outside or separate from them. It is not gained by only gathering external materialistic information
with our intellects in the abstract; it is also obtained by knowing our pure nature and then putting that knowledge into practice. If we are not learning our spiritual nature as well and acting purely, meaning virtuously, then our knowledge has no value at all.

Basically, the final destination of knowledge for Wang Yang-ming is in actualizing the innate knowing of the good, which is one and the same as knowing the soul and self-realization. This notion of innate knowing of the good "has undergone a hypostasis; it has been upgraded from attribute to substance, and to the supreme substance" (Betty, 1980, p.117). If one can succeed in knowing his/her soul, then he/she can succeed in knowing everything concerning ethical and moral values and go on to act in concert and harmony in thought and action. Seen in this light, knowledge for him/her is a process of self-realization.

Self-Realization is not achieved by gaining more and more information; it is achieved by knowing who you are and acting in accordance with that reality. It is about integration and integrity. For only by integrating our internal world with the external world can we obtain true knowledge and be an integral whole person. As inside, so outside; as above, so below; as in Heaven, so on Earth.

In the process of self-realization, we subtract our desires, we do not compound them. This, in turn, calms the heart/mind and saves the spirit, or soul, or our original nature. Those who are unable to save the soul are those for whom the physical mind is forever adding, thereby weakening the spiritual part of the soul and making it unclear. When the spiritual part of the soul is unclear, it does not possess a clear understanding of who it is, where it is going and where it belongs and how to act in a virtuous way.

As a result, the "innate knowing of the good", or the spiritual part of the heart/mind, no longer acts as a guide and director of the heart/mind, but instead the physical mind takes
over and directs the heart/mind to realize its ambitions here on earth. Thus, the heart/mind becomes a slave to the senses and their emotions and guides the human heart/mind and body towards their fulfillment and gratification, and man loses his/her way.

The only way of finding one’s way is by getting away from this vicious cycle of thought-emotion-desire-gratification and getting control over one’s thoughts and motives. And the only way of doing that, according to Wang Yang-ming, is by sincerely listening to one’s innate knowing of the good, i.e., conscience, and by getting control over the human heart/mind; and the only way of doing that is by strengthening the spirit and getting it to control and influence the physical mind. This has always been the core practice in Neo-Confucianism: “to keep intact the principle of Heaven and eliminate selfish desires” (cun-tian-li, mie-ren-yu, 存天理，滅人欲). Betty (1980) further corroborates this point by stating “liang-chih has evolved from a merely immanent mental or spiritual trait of a person for Mencius to the sovereign basis of unity between heaven, earth and man for Wang Yang-ming” (Betty, 1980, p. 117).

When talking about the stages of character development of an individual, or the evolution of a sage, according to the translation of Eno’s (2015) Confucius said,

“At fifteen my heart was set on learning; at thirty I stood firm; at forty I had no more doubts; at fifty I knew the will of heaven; at sixty my ear was obedient; at seventy I could follow my heart’s desire without overstepping the boundaries of what was right.” (Eno, 2015, p.20)

To reach the stage of, “having my ear to be obedient at sixty,” one has to go through the stage of knowing the will of heaven at fifty. Having his ear obedient means listening to the dictates of his inner voice, or real self, his soul; it also connotes the meaning of the
virtue of listening, which indicates that at this stage one has reached a level of development to listen to a variety of voices and opinions without imposing a subjective judgment, which already shows a very high level of personal cultivation, in that one no longer feels the need to prove how much he/she knows.

At the age of seventy, one reaches the stage of acting according to one’s heart without “overstepping the boundaries of what is right”, or not overstepping the bounds of propriety. At this level, and which is the highest, man is able to fully integrate his/her natural feeling with the utmost ethical and moral decreed, without thought; they are one. He/She is able to synthesize knowledge and action, and there is no separation, no thought, because what one is doing is in accord with the Tao, or the highest level of spiritual cultivation. In this state, he/she is a sage, meaning, word and deed have become one.

For Wang Yang-ming, to extend innate knowing of the good in this state is that knowing and acting have become one and the same, just like milk and water have completely merged into one another; no one is able to tell the difference between the two. Knowledge is not pursued for the sake of the human heart/mind and its egoistic desires anymore. Indeed, nothing is sought anymore, for desire has ceased, and in this state there is only selflessness. We observe the mandate of innate knowing of the good, which is an all-pervasive absolute. We know and do what is right; they are one and the same and there is no other way to act—but the right way. We no longer confuse the mundane body with the body of the Tao, or the human heart/mind with the heart/mind of the Tao. Beyond the body is the real body, spontaneously springing up from within.

Getting to this state is real knowledge, because we know who and what we really are, and why we are here, and we act accordingly. Realizing that knowledge is our purpose, and
realizing our purpose is self-realization. Thus, self-realization is our mission, our aim, and the only knowledge that matters, for we know our soul—and are one with it in word and deed.

5.2 The Relevance of this Research

The fundamental imperative of utilitarianism is to always act in the way that will produce the greatest overall amount of good in the world. Producing the greatest overall amount of good does not mean, however, that one's actions must be good. In other words, it is not imperative to be good since one might have to do something bad in order to produce the greatest amount of good. Like using drones to kill terrorists, but killing innocent civilians in the process. Collateral damage is justified as long as it produces the greatest overall amount of good.

In principle, it is bad to kill the innocent civilians but since the bombing produces the greatest amount of good as defined by those who launched the drones it is justified. The emphasis is clearly on consequences not on principles.

The technocrat pulling the trigger on the drone is asked to set aside his/her own moral principles as he/she distances himself/herself from the minimum utility, i.e. the few or many civilian casualties to maximize the utility, meaning the greater good of the nation. What's best for the country trumps one's own personal convictions.

Practically anything can be justified along utilitarian grounds. As man distances himself/herself more and more from nature, and as he/she comes more and more to analyze everything in utilitarian terms, he/she also comes to distance himself/herself from taking any personal responsibility for his/her actions. Thus, he/she will eventually consign the
moral and ethical issues to the religious leaders and social experts, like the priests, politicians, bureaucrats, policy makers and technocrats.

However, what about conscience? Without virtue and an intrinsically good nature, man cannot have a conscience. Virtues according to Pojman and Fieser's (2012) definition are “the special moral qualities which can enable individuals to internalize their moral convictions and do the right thing spontaneously without having to reflect on and struggle over the situation” (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, p.146). He/She can have feelings; he/she can even have feelings of guilt. For example, he/she can feel guilty about doing something right and good for himself/herself, like buying himself/herself something he/she really wants, but does not need.

But a conscience is traditionally used not in terms of feelings of guilt but of feelings about knowing the truth. Conscience is what one refers to before doing something; guilt is what one feels after doing it because one feels that one has done something that one should not have done.

Conscience resides within the intrinsic nature, or the soul. Without a soul, man cannot know the highest standard by which to measure and compare. The soul and its expression, conscience, give man a way of measuring his/her conduct and comparing it with the best and highest standard of goodness and propriety in the universe.

Conscience is an in-built capacity that allows humans to sense, feel and know the accurate thing to avoid doing. It is an inner guide that all humans have, or should have. Conscience turns up in almost all religious philosophies, wisdom paths and spiritual teachings.
It is generally recognized to be that aspect of our intrinsic nature, i.e. soul/spirit that is our source of goodness, our virtuous intentions, and our inner voice. It keeps us on the straight and accurate path, known as being true to your Self, otherwise known as the spiritual Self.

This is not truth in an objective, narrow and absolutist sense, but it is a truth in a subjective sense, where we are living our life moment by moment from a solemn awareness of our self as spirit, not form. When guided by our conscience, we are aligned with our truth, which really means our true nature, our trueness. This, to Wang Yang-ming is the purpose of human life, and it is the only way to attain well-being.

We all have this innate knowing of the good, all we need to do is to function as a midwife, like what Plato called, to help deliver it. The process of awakening it can serve as a higher way of life that is available to each of us. We cannot be merely satisfied with our moral mediocrity. We need to challenge ourselves to aspire to moral heights. Society, and the future of man depend on it.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

For further research, it is recommended to incorporate Wang Yang-ming’s two other major works, Complete Works of Wang Yang-ming 《陽明全書》(yang-ming-quan-shu) and Inquiry into the Great Learning 《大學問》(da-xue-wen), to shift the main focus to the discussion on the applicability of his thoughts since the central theme is for individuals to attain sagehood, which after all, is the transformation of the inner man. The transformation takes place through practice. It cannot happen merely by the intellect.
It is also advisable to do more study on how extending the innate knowing of the good is inseparable from social responsibility as one of the criticisms raised earlier is that the innate knowing of the good fails to provide clear and explicit guidance; therefore, cannot be the cornerstone to directly support the social ethics. It is believed by the author that social guidance and social ethics are made by people in power and with position. Those people are individuals. If those individuals are good and virtuous, the society and people they lead would not stray too much away from the right path. As the saying goes, “When a fish stinks, it stinks from its head.” Hence, for this world to become a better place we have to start from the individuals.

Furthermore, we have already had a lot of guidance, rules, the dos and don’ts. What we do not have yet is someone who can serve as an example for the general public to look up to and refer to. Wang Yang-ming’s notion of extending the innate knowing of the good deals with individual cultivation directly which leads one to attain higher moral excellence and become virtuous. Therefore, it is worth a more in-depth study to depict how one’s social responsibility can be strengthened by extending the innate knowing of the good.
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