

## 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.