Lü Zuqian's Political Philosophy

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Northern Song thinkers like Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Zhang Zai 張載, and the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤) are often seen as marking a turning point in the long history of Chinese philosophy. Unlike earlier Confucian thinkers, who paid little attention to abstract issues, these thinkers apparently had turned toward "pure thought" and advanced cosmological, even metaphysical explanations of the world. In fact, they seem to be true "philosophers" in the original Greek sense. However, this description misses one crucial point: the followers of the Learning of the Way (*daoxue* 道學) never practiced the "value-free" contemplation of the world *sub specie aeternitatis*: they always maintained that their ideas about the cosmos and moral cultivation would eventually result in the radical transformation of the political, cultural, and social worlds. This notion of profound renewal certainly has less in common with the ideas of a traditional Western philosopher like Plato who retreated from the muddiness of the human world by founding the famous academy and who never thought of society as perfectible (Plato 2000: 312 [592b]). Rather, it more closely resembles the views of modern thinkers like Marx, Heidegger, or Wittgenstein, who called for the abandonment of the philosopher's detached "theoretical stance," arguing instead for a close engagement with the realm of human practice.

The study of one thinker in particular promises to shed light on the "practical political" nature of Learning of the Way thought: Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1181; also known by his literary name Lü Donglai 呂東萊). Alongside his close associate and friend, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), Lü was deeply involved in the factional conflict within the Southern Song bureaucracy. This feud may not have been as violent as the one in the Northern Song, but it was nonetheless a bitter fight for political control (Shen 2005; Levine 2008). In these struggles, the followers of the Learning of the Way movement tried to implement their original vision of

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Confucian culture in the political sphere, both at the court and at the grassroots level of local institutions (Yu 2003). Whereas ZHU Xi was strangely reluctant to engage fully in the political sphere, and preferred to organize this fight for dominance from behind the scenes (Schirokauer 1962), Lü willingly served the emperor in high offices and cooperated with the imperial bureaucracy. Deeply committed to the Cheng brothers' ethical doctrine, he constantly explored how the idea of a comprehensive moral order as embodied in the notion of "the way" (*dao* 道) could effectively become a social and political reality; at the same time, he always emphasized the need for compromise and promoted reconciliation between the younger scholars influenced by the Cheng brothers and more conservative elements at the court. If we want to explore further the relationship between the Learning of the Way movement and politics, there may be no better person than LÜ Zuqian.

But who was LÜ Zuqian? He certainly was one of the most prominent intellectual figures of the second half of the twelfth century, widely renowned as both a political figure and classical scholar. He was part of a new generation of young thinkers who rose to prominence in the 1160s and 1170s, trying to re-articulate the Confucian tradition in line with the heritage of the Cheng brothers. Being close to ZHU Xi, who was already on the way to becoming the leader of the Learning of the Way movement, Lü succeeded in maintaining close friendships with various thinkers who did not necessarily all agree with the Cheng brothers. It is this openness and philosophical curiosity which makes him one of the most interesting thinkers of the Southern Song dynasty. However, this very breadth of philosophical concern makes it difficult to grasp the essence of Lü's thought; indeed, this may be one of the reasons his writings have never received much attention in the Chinese world. (Another reason, of course, is that Zhu's ascendancy to orthodoxy shortly after his death threw LÜ Zuqian into obscurity). Although his contributions to literary criticism (Wong and Lee 1989; De Weerdt 2007; Du 2003a) and historical studies (Liu 1986; Tang 2000: 253–275) have been studied to some extent, his philosophical thought in general has widely been ignored. (The only comprehensive intellectual biography dates from the early 1990s [Pan and Xu 1992].) Finally, although sinologists have demonstrated his importance in the intellectual history of the Southern Song, and in particular his role in the Learning of the Way movement (Tillman 1992; Bol 1998; Ichiki 2002), a comprehensive study of his thought has never been attempted either in Japan or in the West.

Given the scope of the present essay, it would be impossible to present a comprehensive picture of Lü's thought. The discussion here is confined to issues which relate to political and practical philosophy in a wider sense. Nevertheless, I hope I will be able to give the reader an idea of the philosophical richness which we encounter in this thinker who, unfortunately, has been overshadowed by ZHU Xi's posthumous fame. Although on a first reading Lü may seem to be lacking in philosophical acumen—an impression reinforced by subsequent Neo-Confucian hagiography—a second look will reveal that he was actually a highly creative, original thinker who examined some crucial questions. The fact

that Lü is so hard to pin down may have caused scholars to keep their distance over the years, but the time has certainly come for more critical attention.

Before we begin with the analysis, one question remains: In what sense can Lü be considered a "political philosopher"? He certainly never produced anything comparable to the systematic treatises on questions concerning the state, natural law, religious versus secular authority, and so on, which we find in medieval European thought (e.g. Aquinas) or classical Islamic thought (e.g. Al-Farabi). This apparent lack of a systematic doctrine is mainly due to the fact that he, like many other Confucians, understood himself as a "transmitter" of the "way," not as a creator of unified theories about the world: he only wrote commentaries and did not write systematic treatises. Therefore, his statements are often heavily context-bound and allusive rather than explicit, making it difficult to isolate their meaning and place them in the context of his wider thought. However, we never have reason to doubt that Lü thought of his writings as answers to questions which he and his students were asking about the nature of the world and the nature of politics in particular. Thus, there is need for a "work of retrieval," through which Lü's beliefs and philosophical convictions, embedded as they are in many layers of Confucian tradition, may be made accessible to the modern mind (compare Taylor 1991: 23). At the same time, we must always be aware of the political, social, and cultural contexts in which Lü advanced his claims. Hence, in this essay, I seek to re-politicize our way of speaking about Lü, while at the same time taking him seriously as a philosopher and creative thinker. I first provide the reader with a short biographical sketch of Lü Zuqian; I then focus on more specific features of his political thought, in particular: (1) the moral ideal (the quest for sagehood); (2) political institutions and the issue of political reforms; and (3) the relationship between moral and institutional health. It is hoped that this tentative interpretation of Lü's political thought, along with the new edition of his works, may help the reader further explore this unjustly forgotten thinker. In the end, we may be able to understand Lü Zuqian as an important philosopher and political theorist in his own right.

Life and Career

Born in 1137 in the city of Guilin 桂林, Lü Zuqian came from one of the most well-known families in the Northern Song dynasty, a family which had produced countless high officials and scholars (Xu 2005: 3–20; Pan and Xu 1992: 5–17). The Lü family was characterized by its internal diversity and famed for its promotion of ideas of harmony, tolerance, and general openness towards various philosophical traditions. Yet the learning of the Cheng brothers played a particularly important role for many members of this family (Tillman 1992: 83–89). Lü Zuqian was undoubtedly deeply influenced by this family tradition and its liberal leanings. In his early years, teachers like Liu Mianzhi 劉勉之

(d. 1149), LIN Ziqi 林子奇 (1112–1176), and HU Xian 胡憲 (1082–1162) had educated him in the Confucian canon, in particular the contemporary interpretations of ZHANG Zai and the Cheng brothers (Pan and Yu 1992: 18–21; Xu 2005: 27–29; Du 2003a: 32–37).

After the fall of the "infamous" chancellor QIN Gui 秦檜 (1090–1155), Lü began his political career with a minor posting in 1159. In 1163, at the age of 27, he won the title of "advanced scholar" and also successfully passed the extremely difficult Eruditus Literaturus examination (*boxue hongci ke* 博學宏詞科). From that year on, his academic and political career was practically guaranteed. In 1169, he became professor at the Imperial Academy in Yanzhou 嚴州. In the 1160s and 1170s, he frequently served as an official court historian and in various projects for the young Emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (r. 1162–1189). Leaving public office upon the death of his mother in 1166, Lü established a private academy east of Jinhua 金華, at close distance to the temporal capital Hangzhou 杭州 (later called the "Friendship Academy" Lize shuyuan 麗澤書院; for the term *lize* see hexagram Dui 兌). There, he trained students for the national examinations and gained a large following. His scholarly fame and his connections at the court may have ultimately catapulted him to the top of the bureaucracy, the chancellorship. However, a stroke in 1178 forced him to resign from all active posts. Even after his retirement, Lü continued teaching and writing for three more years. He died in 1181 at the age of forty-four.[1]

One is certainly not tempted to romanticize LÜ Zuqian's biography, particularly in contrast to CHEN Liang's rather tempestuous life, which included a series of angry outbursts at court and several prison stints. Lü lived the regular, uneventful life of a loyal Confucian scholar-official, husband, and successful teacher, but there was nevertheless a certain tragic flavor in his life: he outlived his three wives and was sick for most of his later years. Maybe as a result of this, a deep sense of insecurity afflicted him. He certainly was not as brilliant, self-confident, or talented as his friend ZHU Xi, and he often describes himself in relatively modest terms (even though he was a gifted prose writer, as his travel writings prove [Du 2003a: 78–86]). In short, he was much less self-assertive than most of his contemporaries. This also explains why he could be on friendly terms with many extremely divergent thinkers including ZHU Xi, ZHANG Shi 張栻, LU Jiuyuan 陸九淵, CHEN Liang 陳亮, YE Shi 葉適, XUE Jixuan 薛季宣, and CHEN Fuliang 陳傅良.

The body of his works is extremely large. It comprises (1) his "Literary Collections" (*wenji* 文集), namely private and public writings such as his poems, letters, official writings to the court, and other documents; (2) his lectures and commentaries on canonical texts such as the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書), the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), the *Book of Change* (*Yijing* 易經), the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), and the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子); (3) various

[1] For a more detailed account of LÜ Zuqian's life and career, see Tillman (1992: 83–103); Chan (1989: 424–434), Xu (2005), Du (2007), Ichiki (2002: 288–289), Marchal (2006: 60–102).

textbooks and teaching materials which are closely related to the civil service examination and were used at his academy, for example, the *Detailed Explanations of Institutions throughout the Ages* (*Lidai zhidu xiangshuo* 歷代制度詳說) (an annotated collection of source materials on the institutional history of China), the *Extensive Deliberations* (*Zuo shi boyi* 左氏博議) (a collection of model essays on the *Zuo Tradition*, also known as *(Mister) Donglai's Extensive Deliberations* [*Donglai boyi* 東萊博議]; 1168), and the *Key to Ancient Prose* (*Guwen guanjian* 古文關鍵) (an anthology of literary texts); (4) the compilation projects in which he was involved either in his function as a court official (the *Mirror of Song Literature* [*Song wen jian* 宋文鑒], 1179), or scholar (the *Record for Reflection* [*Ji si lu* 近思錄], the famous philosophical anthology, which he compiled together with ZHU Xi in 1175). Unfortunately, this large oeuvre has barely attracted any attention from modern scholars.[2]

Before moving to a more detailed discussion of Lü's thought, there is an important question still to be raised: what exactly was Lü's relationship to the Learning of the Way movement? In his seminal study on ZHU Xi's rise to dominance, Hoyt C. Tillman calls Lü the leading figure of the Learning of the Way movement between 1170 and 1180, before his premature death allowed ZHU Xi to take his place (Tillman 1992). According to Tillman, during the 1160s and 1170s, there was a relatively diverse group of young scholars around ZHU Xi who claimed affiliation to the Learning of the Way movement. Only in later years would the Learning of the Way become the highly exclusive group of followers of ZHU Xi that it is known as today. When we shift our attention to LÜ Zuqian, this shift becomes much clearer: in Lü's time, the fellowship of the "Way" was as much a political grouping of diverse scholars with diverse views as it was an intellectual movement in its own right.

As YU Yingshi has demonstrated by analyzing the correspondence between LÜ Zuqian, ZHU Xi, ZHANG Shi, and LU Jiuyuan, a common "political project" linked these men. Although having different perspectives on how to realize their goals, they were united in seeking to convince the emperor and other high officials of the necessity for moral renewal, large-scale reforms, and a more aggressive stance towards the Jurchen (Yu 2003: 2:25–97; compare Tang 2000: 35–44). All these men believed that these three measures were the preconditions for strengthening the Southern Song state and ensuring the future recovery of

[2] For a more comprehensive assessment see Huang and Wu (2008, 1:28–57); compare also the relevant entries in Balazs and Hervouet (1978). The new edition of the *Complete Works of LÜ Zuqian* includes 27 works in total and provides a detailed discussion of edition, authorship, and dating for all these works (see also Liu 1986: 33–73; De Weerdt 2007: 393–396). It seems indisputable that the main body of these works has its origin in the years between 1168 and 1181; however, as many of these works are based on LÜ Zuqian's lectures and were not printed until after his death, the precise dating is extremely difficult. I tentatively assume that Lü's thought did not undergo a major change, but that all these works reflect a unified viewpoint. All quotations of Lü's writings in this essay refer to HUANG Linggeng's edition. I refer to individual works by an abbreviation (see bibliography), the number of the volume and the page.

Northern China. Lü and Zhu both believed that this profound transformation had to begin at the level of individual morality, only then proceeding to the complete implementation of the comprehensive ethico-political order of the Zhou dynasty. This was the broad vision the two men agreed upon in the *Record for Reflection* in 1175 (Lü actually played a major role in the compilation process [Du 2003b]). In two letters from the early 70s, Lü indirectly identifies the restoration of this order as the main political goal (Lü 2008: WJ 1:404–405).

It could even be argued that it was precisely this sense of a common political mission that let Lü and Zhu forget their intellectual differences. Lü's intellectual style differs remarkably from that of Zhu. Unlike the latter, who advocated the exclusive continuation of the Cheng brothers' heritage, Lü's thought is markedly more open to other traditions and thinkers. Although he was also deeply involved in the process of compilation and printing of the Cheng brothers' works (Du 2007: 82, 125, 126, 133), he showed only limited interest in defining an exclusive core message for the Learning of the Way and never expressed the need for a new classical canon (the Four Books).[3] Furthermore, he never endorsed the kind of analytical interlinear commentary that Zhu Xi practiced. Instead, he stressed the need for a holistic interpretation of central concepts, thereby preserving the integrity of the original (see for example his critique of Zhu's "Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate" ["Taiji tushuo jie" 太極圖說解], [Lü 2008: WJ 1:589, WJ 1:72]; compare Xu 2005: 149–151). This refusal to engage in too much intellectual analysis should not be seen as a sign of shallowness. Actually, it has much in common with Cheng Hao's thought, which also stressed the holistic (or what the modern philosopher Mou Zongsan has called "monistic") dimension of the "way" (Mou 1968/69: 2:1–21).

Lü Zuqian was without doubt the most important protagonist of the *daoxue* "political project," as he was well connected at the court and served in important posts in the imperial bureaucracy. It may be that, with his death in 1181, the political project lost its momentum. Zhu Xi seems to have gradually shifted away from the idea that the Cheng brothers' ethical doctrine could be implemented at the political level as part of a new institutional framework. He focused solely on the goal of moral renewal and the grassroots development of local institutions. According to Hoyt C. Tillman, before his death Lü Zuqian had represented "a more practical, inclusive and cosmopolitan alternative

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[3] In 1170, Lü and his close associate Rui Ye 芮燁 (1114–1172?) were involved in a reform of the curricula standards (Du 2007: 83–84, 87). In his letters to Lü of that year, Zhu Xi insisted on the necessity to counter the influence of "Ancient Prose" and to implement the doctrines of the Chengs. Lü, however, refused to endorse this claim and advocated a combination of existing curricula standards and the teachings of the Cheng brothers (Yan 2004; compare De Weerdt 2007: 301–305). Also, as far as I see, he nowhere declared a belief in the need for a genealogy of true transmission of the "way." Although he participated in the compilation of the *Record for Reflection* which represents an important step in the process of purification of the Learning of the Way tradition, he never seems to have wished that this anthology should entirely replace the traditional canon.

within the *Dao xue* fellowship" (Tillman 2003: 403–404). It may be that in his final years Zhu Xi had to suppress this alternative in order to preserve his idea of single-minded moral commitment, and at the same time prove to his disciples that he had never concentrated his energies on a political scene that had ultimately betrayed him.

The Moral Ideal

In this section I focus on Lü Zuqian's description of the moral ideal as the ultimate goal of self-cultivation. I address the following questions: What moral ideal did Lü envision? How can human beings attain this moral ideal? And, finally, how does this moral ideal relate to the political, natural, and temporal worlds?

Northern Song thinkers like Zhou Dunyi, the Cheng brothers, and Zhang Zai all shared a strong concern for cosmological, even "metaphysical" issues, which had no precedent in earlier Confucianism. At the same time, however, they were united in a new understanding of the introspective element of morality and articulated new modes of self-concern and self-discovery. Not only did they understand human beings as autonomous moral actors, they also insisted that every human being has access, through the process of moral cultivation, to the moral ideal (the idea of sagehood). This new dimension is mainly due to the importance these thinkers attributed to *Mencius*, a text that had come to be seen as a core Confucian text only during the eleventh century. As *Mencius* 7A.1 states: "For a man to give full realization to his heart/mind is for him to understand his own nature, and a man who knows his own nature will know the heavens" (*Mencius* 2003: 145 mod. slightly). This passage highlights the problem which every Neo-Confucian thinker over the following centuries had to face: how are "mind," the "nature," and the "heavens" related to each other? In other words: how can we discover or even actualize the "nature" or the "heavens" in the process of moral self-cultivation? In sum, all these thinkers had to solve the problem of how to ground their account of moral practice in a meaningful description of the order of the cosmos.

When we now turn to Lü Zuqian, we cannot but notice the deep influence Zhou Dunyi, the Cheng brothers, and Zhang Zai exercised on his thought, both in his understanding of moral agency and his usage of cosmological, "metaphysical" terms like pattern (*li* 理), Supreme Ultimate (*taiji* 太極), or the nature (*xing* 性). However, as Lü has not received much scholarly attention until now, his precise understanding of these terms is still unclear. It has sometimes been claimed that Lü's thought represents an attempt to harmonize the two different approaches represented by the Cheng brothers, namely the more "subjective" approach focusing on the "heart/mind" (Cheng Hao) and the more "objective," analytical one focusing on "pattern" (Cheng Yi) (Pan and Xu 1992: 232; Huang and Wu 2008: 1: "Preface" 11–12; compare Huang 1999). It has also been

claimed that he comes close to the philosophy of mind expounded by Lu Jiuyuan (Pan and Xu 1992: 241). Lü Zuqian never published a systematic commentary on texts such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Doctrine of the Mean* or the *Great Learning*, which were soon to become the core of Confucian doctrine; this certainly makes a comprehensive assessment quite difficult (only his lectures which were printed after his death as the *Collected Teachings of the Friendship Academy* allow us some insight into his understanding of these texts [Ichiki 2002: 286–317]). Due to the limited scope of this essay, I only briefly discuss some of the major problems, thereby hopefully casting some light on Lü Zuqian's basic stance.

Lü Zuqian certainly accorded great philosophical significance to the notion of "heart/mind" (*xin* 心). In many of his works (in particular the *Extensive Deliberations* and his writings on the *Zuo Tradition*, but also in his lectures), this term plays a crucial role. His concern for the heart/mind reflects a strong interest in investigating the inner, psychic dimension of human life; in his *Extensive Deliberations*, Lü meticulously analyzes various motives for political acts and finds that numerous traditional views were based on an insufficient understanding of the hidden motives of the actors (the fact that this work still finds readers today proves that Lü succeeded in striking a chord with these colorful case studies [Xu 2005: 85–96]). For Lü, the heart/mind is the true motor of human agency; it is endowed with nearly unlimited powers, as well as certain innate predispositions toward the moral ideal (Pan and Xu 1992: 233–245). The power of the heart/mind is particularly visible in the actions of sages and historical heroes, whereas it is less visible in ordinary people who are not drawn to the moral ideal and exert little or no effort in this direction (see, for example, Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:106–108). In the highest state of cultivation, as Lü claims in his analysis of the various dreams described in the *Zuo Tradition*, the heart/mind actually "encompasses" (*bei* 備) all phenomena in the world (Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:240–241; ZSBY 6:372–374; 6:553–555; LZLSJL 2:49–50; 2:179–180). Following *Mencius* 7A.4, Zhang Zai's belief in the omnipotence of the heart/mind, and Cheng Hao's famous "Letter on the Stabilization of the Nature" ("Dingxing shu" 定性書) (Mou 1968/1969: 2:233–244), Lü Zuqian stated that by suspending the boundary between inner and outer realms (human subjectivity and the cosmos), we will ultimately realize a state of oneness. This certainly does not mean that the existence of the phenomenal world depends on the "mind"; instead, Lü Zuqian regards the heart/mind as the most powerful source of moral energy which can effectively influence the outer world (Xu 2005: 90–92). Unlike Zhu Xi, who regarded Zhang Zai's description of the heart/mind as overly imaginative and corrected him by dampening down his vision of penetration to the mere idea of grasping the patterns (*li*) of things (Tillman 1987: 39–40), Lü Zuqian apparently never confined the heart/mind by subordinating it to pattern; on the contrary, he often directly identifies the heart/mind with pattern (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:196; 2:255; ZSBY 6:240–241; Pan and Xu 1992: 242). Thus, it seems that Lü in fact never decided whether

to follow Cheng Hao (heart/mind) or Cheng Yi (pattern), but, to a certain extent, merged both terms into a single vision.

Lü's reliance on the heritage of Northern Song Neo-Confucians means that he in principle shared the Mencian belief in human goodness, which is associated with the term "the nature" (*xing* 性). However, maybe as a result of his practical orientation, his account remains somehow vague. He endorsed the Cheng brothers' claim that every man is endowed with an individual nature which is perfectly good but which more often than not is obscured by some innate tendencies (the distinction between "original nature" [*benxing* 本性] and "material nature" [*qizhi zhi xing* 氣質之性] [Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:186; 2:244; 2:248]). However, the optimism inherent in the Mencian notion of human goodness, which already had become somehow bleaker in the writings of the Cheng brothers, further darkened with Lü Zuqian. His frequent usage of the terms "evil" (*e* 惡), "sin" (*xie* 邪), and "sinful thoughts" (*xie nian* 邪念) in his exegesis of the *Book of Change* certainly tells us much about his bleak picture of the struggle for moral perfection (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:8; 2:22–23; 2:35; 2:51; passim). Also, Lü occasionally directly challenged the Mencian optimism (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:212), and his realistic descriptions of political power, authority, and military violence certainly reveal the influence of Xunzi 荀子 (Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:129–139; LZLSJL 2:11–13; 2:180–181; ZSBY 6:312–313). In the end, Lü Zuqian did not provide a systematic definition of "the nature" and many questions remain unanswered. For example, he never tells us what place is left in this grim picture for the life of the emotions, and although identifying "the nature" with "feelings" (*qing* 情) on at least one occasion (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:250), we mostly get the impression that he was not willing to give the free flow of the emotional life much moral credit.

Another proof of his indebtedness to the Northern Song Neo-Confucians is his treatment of the notion of vital energy (*qi* 氣). He accepted the role that the *qi* present in one's body plays in the process of self-cultivation by endorsing Mencius's famous statement on the "flood-like breath" *haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣 (*Mencius* 2A.2; Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:243; ZSBY 6:106–108; 6:303). Interestingly, in his analysis of the *Zuo Tradition*, he sometimes refers to *qi* as one important cause of the rise and decline of states (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:136–137); yet, this certainly did not lead him to embrace a "deterministic" view of human history. The ultimate cause always lies in the heart/mind of human beings (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:202; 7:144–145; 7:71–74). Furthermore, while analyzing the hexagram Lü 履, Lü Zuqian endorsed Zhang Zai's vision of the cosmos, claiming that *qi* fills the space between the "heavens" and the "earth," circulating between them (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:15). Again, he did not seem to worry too much about how to connect this notion with the cosmological key-concept he refers to in his interpretation of the first hexagram Qian 乾, namely the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji* 太極) (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:1–2; see also 2:107–108). All this demonstrates that Lü, while accepting the new world-view of the Northern Song Neo-Confucians, did not particularly seek to organize this heritage in a systematic fashion.

This impression is further reinforced by his use of another Neo-Confucian key-concept: "the heavens" (*tian* 天). On this question, his stance is basically skeptical: the influence of the heavens in the human realm is difficult to prove (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:176). Thus, one recurrent theme in his exegesis of the *Zuo Tradition* is the criticism of rulers who claim to act in the name of the heavens: he constantly criticized traditional beliefs in omens as a source of legitimate authority (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:21; ZSBY 6:71–72; 6:287–289). On the rare occasions where he admits the existence of heavenly signs, he makes it clear that their power does not stem from any supra-human force, but manifests the influence of *qi* which has been moved by the power of the human heart/mind (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:22). Similarly, in his interpretation of the *Book of Change*, Lü claims that the auspiciousness of the omen is nothing more than a manifestation of the practitioner's own heart/mind (Tillman 1992: 119–122).

Now, from the above account it could easily seem that LÜ Zuqian radically emphasized human agency or even human moral autonomy, as if he conceived of human life as something self-contained or as something which has nothing outside it, creating value out of itself. This view is, however, undermined by another important term: "heavenly pattern" (*tianli* 天理). This term—which is almost equivalent to, and often interchangeable with, "the heavens," "pattern," and even "heart/mind"—describes nothing less than the timeless order of the human world (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:18; 2:47; Pan and Xu 1992: 219–233; Tillman 1992:122–123). When Lü wanted to describe the whole of human relationships from a normative perspective, he often referred to "heavenly pattern": natural and political relationships have a normative value and circumscribe human actions (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:208). Any attempt to alter or consciously influence "heavenly pattern" will ultimately fail, as the slightest loosening of the bonds of human relationships will certainly lead to anarchy. Whenever this eternal order has been violated, for example by a tyrannical ruler, heavenly pattern will make itself manifest again through the feelings of the population—and not through inauspicious signs (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:135–136; 11:135). LÜ Zuqian ultimately held to the idea of retribution as expressed in the *Zuo Tradition*: good actions will lead to good outcomes, bad actions to bad ones (Zhu 1994: 2952; compare Pines: 62–63). ZHU Xi reproached his friend on this account: for Zhu, the value of an action depends not on future outcomes, but solely on the purity of moral intention (Zhu 1994: 1179, 3009, 2952). Indeed, there is a certain tendency in LÜ Zuqian to blur the distinction between intentions and results in his understanding of moral action; it may be that this distinction was of secondary importance to him or that he consciously tried to overcome this distinction. In sum, heavenly pattern stands for the natural order embodied in human behavior. The notion of order is not imagined as a supernatural or mystical force beyond the human realm, but is to a considerable extent internalized and rationalized in human psychology and behavior. Although the notion of heart/mind seems to represent a new sense of human agency, heavenly pattern stands for the fundamental dependence of human beings on the heavens. Remarkably, LÜ Zuqian never resolved this apparent contradiction.

One last question remains: how can we, according to Lü Zuqian, attain the moral ideal? As is well known, Zhu Xi provided his students with a definite procedure which he elaborated in his interpretation of the *Great Learning* 大學 (Gardner 1986). According to Zhu, the activity of the innate moral mind and the quest for empirical knowledge about the outer world (through the study of classical texts) are equally important for attaining the highest state of self-cultivation (the famous "balanced approach"). In contrast, Lü never proposed a single, universal method that can be relied upon to attain sagehood. His insistence on the heart/mind could easily be interpreted as a "subjectivist" tendency (similar to that of Lu Jiuyuan), focusing on the spontaneous dimension of the innate moral mind and neglecting the slow process of reading and studying. In fact, when Lü describes the moral ideal, he often refers to the idea of "recovery" (*faxian* 發現; 發見) of goodness in the heart/mind (Lü 2008: WJ 1:406–407; LZLSJL 2:42–43; 2:143; 2:182; 2:199; 2:201; ZSBY 6:180). This certainly reminds us of Lu Jiuyuan or Wang Yangming, both of whom insisted on the suddenness of moral enlightenment, and makes us wonder how it could be that Lü Zuqian was interested in historical studies at all. I think we need more detailed studies before a systematic and comprehensive interpretation of Lü's model of self-cultivation can be written. However, it is clear that Lü emphasized both the suddenness of moral enlightenment and the need for broad empirical knowledge. Although his account of knowledge seems to be much more positive, and his attitude to book-learning much more flexible, than that of Zhu Xi (Tillman 2008), he also has much in common with Zhu. Like Zhu, Lü emphasized the notion of "reverential attention" (*jing* 敬) as the beginning of the cultivational process (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:256; 2:265–266) and he occasionally endorsed the famous phrase in the *Great Learning*: "extending knowledge and apprehending the (patterns in) things (*zhizhi gewu* 致知格物)" (Lü 2008: WJ 1:456–457). Actually, it could be that his idea of balancing the two dimensions of self-cultivation decisively influenced Zhu Xi's development (Tillman 1992: 64).

One crucial difference between Lü and Zhu is the fact that the former almost never spoke about the role of meditation in self-cultivation, but rather spoke constantly about the relationship between self-cultivation and political action. Thus, he highly admired "political" sages like the mythical emperors of antiquity Yao and Shun (Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:270), and, unlike most other adherents of the Learning of the Way, seldom mentioned the sage-like student of Confucius, Yan Hui 顏回, who nearly succeeded in attaining the highest moral ideal but never entered public life. In other words, Lü believed, even more than Zhu Xi, that it would be futile for the heart/mind to remain in itself; instead, it must direct itself toward the outer, political world. This stance on self-cultivation in all likelihood stemmed from his experience as a teacher preparing students for civil service examinations and careers in the Song bureaucracy. However, it certainly also reflects a genuine philosophical commitment: he deeply cared about the political or practical meaning of Confucianism and feared that his contemporaries would ultimately embrace an overly introspective version of the moral self.

Institutions and the Issue of Political Reforms

Although he regularly wrote and lectured on issues of moral self-cultivation, there can be no doubt that Lü Zuqian was even more interested in institutions and laws. Hoyt C. Tillman correctly describes Lü's "commitment to nationwide political issues and historical and institutional studies" as one key difference separating Lü from Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi (Tillman 1992: 86). Thus, in the following pages, I will first give a brief overview of Lü's understanding of institutions and political issues in the wider sense, and examine the relationship between this interest in institutions and the concern for moral self-cultivation.

We must not forget that Lü conducted his institutional studies, and his inquiry into political phenomena in the widest sense, in a general climate of suspicion. Two of his closest friends, Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi, frequently criticized him for his failure to concentrate on the essentials of self-cultivation (De Weerdt 2007: 146–147). He himself was well aware of the danger inherent in this kind of study: it could easily lead to missing the proper goal and result in a piecemeal account of morally meaningless data (compare the telling passage in a letter to Zhang Shi [Lü 2008: WJ 1:395]). And yet, he always insisted on institutional studies as a necessary complement to self-cultivation. How, then, do we explain this unique concern? I think the reason lies not only in his divergent views on self-cultivation but also in his comprehensive vision of the Confucian tradition, a vision which differs markedly from that of Zhu Xi or Zhang Shi. Lü always maintained that the Confucian ideal could never be realized in the private sphere of the individual alone or in the mere extension of this private ideal to the whole empire, but must necessarily fall into and prove itself in the political sphere. In other words, while we are searching to attain the moral ideal, he wants us to gaze at a larger whole of which our self is only a part and not merely gaze at our self. This is especially clear in his discussions of the "normative form of governance" (*zhiti* 治體), the "large structure" (*dati* 大體), and "the whole" (*titong* 體統 /*tongti* 統體). With these notions, he constantly tried to direct his students' gaze away from the individual and towards the larger context in which political action necessarily takes place (Lü 2008: WJ 1:561; ZSZS 7:1–4; 7:77–78).

A particularly illuminating example of this belief can be found in Lü's lectures on the *Analects*, where he explained the enigmatic passage *Analects* 13:14. In this passage, Ran Qiu 冉求 is asked by Confucius why he came back from court so late. Ran answers that he was busy with "governmental affairs" (*zheng* 政), to which his master ambiguously replies: "I expect it was administrative business (*shi* 事). If there had been government, though I am not employed, I expect that I would have heard about it" (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:163; Brooks and Brooks 1998: 101, mod. slightly). According to Lü Zuqian, by making this distinction between "governmental affairs" and "business", Confucius wanted to highlight the importance of the former: as he feared that his disciples were unable to understand the real nature of politics, the Master,

in this very erratic passage, tried to transmit to them the most essential features of rulership (*wei guo zhi dagang* 為國之大綱). According to Lü, Confucius' idea of rulership is not about regulating the details of piecemeal political life (which Lü identifies as "administrative business"), but about making bold decisions about the larger structure of the state and its institutions ("governmental affairs"). Only by understanding the Master's idea of rulership, his disciples, once in high office, would be able to preserve the state and ensure the longevity of the polity. Thus, unlike Zhu Xi who read this passage from a purely historical perspective as a critique of the reigning power in the state of Lu 魯 (Zhu 2001: 144–145), Lü found a deeper lesson in Confucius' brief statement: that the core of Confucian teachings is the concern not for self-cultivation, but for the larger institutional framework which corresponds to a comprehensive ethico-political order.

At this point, the reader may easily be reminded of Wang Anshi, the famous reformer of the Northern Song dynasty. During the 1060s and 1070s, his ambition had been to realize a vision of moral and institutional renewal through a large-scale reform of the institutional framework of the Song state (Bol 1993: 160–166). Most recently, Yu Yingshi has claimed that Zhu Xi shared the reformer's broader vision and sought to continue his project (Yu: 1:1–26). It is not the goal of this essay to examine whether Yu Yingshi's claim about Zhu holds true, but we could certainly apply it to Lü Zuqian. Although Lü sometimes criticized the character of the reformer, he was highly sympathetic to his political vision. One of the leitmotifs in his writings is the idea of "putting things in order" (*zhengdun* 整頓): a large-scale remodeling of the institutional framework of the state by an active government which responded to social and political challenges with a comprehensive system of institutional innovations (Lü 2007: ZSZXS 7:1–7; 7:47; ZSZS 7:14; 11:135; LZLSJL 2:27–31). This is precisely the kind of reform Wang Anshi tried to implement.

Lü's concern for institutional change is particularly apparent in his various works on the *Zuo Tradition*. The *Zuo Tradition* records the political history of the Spring and Autumn period (trad. 722–453 bc), which was characterized by the slow dissolution of the Zhou dynasty, the rise of new powers, and the struggle between the ancient aristocratic lineages and the new class of the *shi* 士 (Pines 2002: 1–7). Lü obviously thought that his students could learn important lessons in statecraft by studying the Spring and Autumn period. In his lectures, he meticulously analyzed how strong leaders of that time were able to establish a powerful state through institutional change and achieve international supremacy by repelling foreign tribes. He has much praise for strong "overlords" (*ba* 霸) like Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685–643; Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:14–15; 7:17–18) or Lord Dao of Jin 晉悼公 (r. 572–558; Lü 2008: ZSZS 7: 93). His analysis of Gongsun Qiao 公孫僑 (d. 522 bc; also known as Zichan 子產), a famous administrator of Zheng 鄭, is especially significant. Lü not only meticulously analyzed Gongsun Qiao's reform of the land system (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:104; 7:115–117, 117–118) and the penal code (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:129–130), he also demonstrated that the population was deeply divided about the reforms

(Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:126–127). Although he criticized GONGSUN Qiao to a certain extent, he highly praised his profound understanding of the state (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:115). Obviously, the historical precedent of WANG Anshi's failed reforms colored Lü's memory. Although the notion that the gentry could play a major role at court had suffered a great deal after Wang's failure and the collapse of the Northern Song dynasty, LÜ Zuqian still believed in the gentry's political mission at the court (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:203–204). Unlike other followers of the Cheng brothers such as YANG Shi 楊時 (1053–1035), Lü did not turn away from the idea of institutional change but entered into detailed discussions of the technical problems reformers like GONGSUN Qiao had to face. He apparently believed that these historical case studies in institution-building would help future officials cope with the domestic and external challenges the Song state faced after the loss of Northern China. Consequently, Lü made the historical experience of the Spring and Autumn leaders the standard for successful political action in his own time. For instance, in his memorial to Emperor Xiaozong in 1170, he strongly criticized the appeasement policies of the court and directly recommended following the precedent of King Goujian of Yue 越句踐 (r. 496–465), who had successfully become overlord of the southeastern part of the Zhou world (Lü 2008: WJ 1:55).

Moreover, in his *Detailed Explanations of Institutions throughout the Ages*, Lü directly addresses technical questions of economic growth, monetary policy, state monopolies, and land reform, a clear continuation of WANG Anshi's economic activism. Like Wang, he wanted the state to manage the wealth of society and exploit the rapidly growing commercial economy by imposing state monopolies (see for example his discussion of the salt monopoly [Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:72–75]). Unlike ZHU Xi or the Cheng brothers who criticized the Northern Song reformer for encouraging egoism and utilitarian thought, Lü was not afraid of regarding the "profit of the state" (國家之利) as the highest goal of successful policies (Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:95–96; compare Pan and Xu: 363–369).

We can see that his positive notion of top-down political reform never changed if we examine his final work, the *Chronicle of Major Events* (1180/1181). There, Lü meticulously describes the reforms carried through by SHANG Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BC) in Qin 秦 and thus disputes the account of SIMA Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), who in his *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑) tried to dilute the historical importance of SHANG Yang in an obvious attempt to criticize the idea of "reform" (*bianfa* 變法) per se (Lü 2008: DSJ 8:310–311; 8:322–823; 324–325). Again, we find that LÜ Zuqian—although highly critical of the direction in which SHANG Yang had led his state—has great sympathy for the way Shang was able to realize institutional reforms.

LÜ Zuqian's political activism is ultimately informed by the vision of a comprehensive, hierarchically structured political order described in the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮) and which deeply influenced the Song gentry and animated its historical imagination (Yu 2003: 1:253–270; Lü 2008: WJ 1:731;

LZLSJL 2:136–143). As early as the Northern Song, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhang Zai, despite their divergent opinions about how to restore the Zhou system, agreed in principle that its restoration was both possible and necessary (see, for example, "Debate at Luoyang" ["Luoyang yilun" 洛陽議論] of 1077; Cheng and Cheng 2004: 110–116). In their writings, they repeatedly demanded: the restoration of (1) the descent-line system (*zongzi fa* 宗子法; a system in which the different clans are ordered according to the principle of primogeniture); (2) the original Zhou enfeoffment system (*fengjian* 封建); (3) the well-field system (*jingtian* 井田), which was based on kinship and directly reflected the economic output of peasant households; (4) the Zhou rites (*li* 禮); and (5) the military system where local militia are recruited from the population (see *A Record for Reflections* IX:12, 13, 18; IX:27; IX:26, 27; IX:14, 15, 25; IX:3, 8; compare Ebrey 1991). At first glance, Lü appears more realistic than his Northern Song predecessors: not only was he well aware that the court in Hangzhou was much weaker than the Northern Song court (Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:118), but he also meticulously describes the new economic situation after the original land system of the Zhou had been destroyed in AD 780, when the official Yang Yan 楊炎 liberalized the trade of land and aggressively pushed for a money-based economy (Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:45–46). And yet, Lü believed that human will alone could reverse economic trends. He was optimistic that, one day in the future, the emperor would begin restoring the close-knit social and political order of the Zhou (Pan and Xu 1992: 100–108). This belief is well illustrated by a passage in his *Detailed Explanations of Institutions throughout the Ages*:

> It is certainly difficult immediately to restore the system of chariots and horses [a system to organize the population in small units of the Zhou dynasty] and the well-field system; however, whoever intends to realize active policies can slowly restore an institutional framework in which personal property would be restricted and a system of local militia would be realized. (Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:47)

Lü's optimism was challenged by the endless political struggles of the 1160s and 1170s. Emperor Xiaozong, although at first sympathetic to the young scholars around Zhu Xi and Lü Zuqian, ultimately never fully endorsed their claims. When Lü succeeded in convincing Zhu Xi to accept the post of prefect of Nankang 南康 in 1178, the prospect of reform at the court seems to have become very unlikely. In Lü's *Detailed Explanations of Institutions throughout the Ages* (which most probably date from those years), we find bleak assessments of the fundamental difficulty in implementing political goals (Lü 2008: LDZDXS 9:118–119). And yet, whereas Zhu Xi became more and more pessimistic about the implementation of land reforms in later years (Tillman 1994: 49–54), this never happened to Lü Zuqian. Even shortly before his death, he sought to keep alive the spirit of Wang Anshi's large-scale institutional reforms by studying a collection of memorials from that period (Du 2007: 289–290). Whether this optimism would have faded if he had lived longer will of course never be known.

In sum, we can clearly see that Lü Zuqian was deeply committed to the ideal of profound renewal, which was primarily to be realized by institutional innovations inspired by the ethico-political order of the Zhou. Although he was certainly deeply concerned with the moral self, he never wanted the gentry to retreat from state service and solely focus on the ethical transformation of the family or local society. This emphasis on the state speaks against recruiting him for the now fashionable "localization" camp: while he was involved in local contexts (for example by establishing academies and granaries), as far as I can see, he never saw the need to reflect upon this involvement at a conceptual level. Also, I believe, it is misleading to describe him as being a proponent of compromise (Qian 1977: 200): in his writings he clearly endorsed one of the most radical versions of political idealism we encounter in the Song dynasty. Although Zhu Xi may appear as the most vociferous critic of court policy, Lü Zuqian certainly stood for similarly fundamental changes, but from within the bureaucracy, not from without. Thus, it may even be that Zhu's moral criticism was much easier to mitigate than Lü's institutional idealism that undoubtedly was better grounded in the reality of court politics.

The Relationship between Moral and Institutional Renewal

So far I have been speaking about the two issues of moral self-cultivation and institutional reform as if they were completely unconnected. In fact, by going through Lü's many works, we easily get the impression that he never succeeded in genuinely connecting these two issues and treated both as two entirely different realms. For example, in his *Detailed Explanations of Institutions throughout the Ages* or his last work, the *Chronicle of Major Events*, Lü concentrated on institutional issues such as establishing the prefecture-system, the development of the penal code and the tax system, and so forth, while avoiding the Cheng brothers' terminology of "heart/mind," the "nature," "pattern," etc. (Xin 2006). Thus, some may wonder whether Lü was actually, as Peter Bol has claimed, a "compartmentalizing pedant" (Bol 1998: 92) who always separated the two realms of the moral self and institutional reality and maybe never realized their fundamental incompatibility. However, I believe, this interpretation unjustly distorts Lü's thought, as he in fact cared deeply about how to merge his institutional analysis with his concern for the moral self. It may only be because of his premature death that he failed to articulate a final, unifying vision.

In fact there are many passages in which Lü Zuqian tries to combine these two issues. In his exegesis of the *Zuo Tradition*, for example, he frequently investigates both the sphere of the heart/mind and, simultaneously, the sphere of institutional reality (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:21–22; 7:37; 57–58). Sometimes, he seeks to legitimate this endeavor in more philosophical terms, as when he uses Wang Tong's 王通 (d. 617) distinction between heart/mind and "trace (*ji* 跡)":

since the heart/mind manifests itself in the outer, institutional, and political world, we are right to make the latter the object of our curiosity (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:177–178; Tang 2000: 257). Another way of conceptualizing the relationship between the privacy of the inner world and the turmoil of the political world lies in the notion of "extension" (*tui* 推), which Zhu Xi stressed in the famous eight steps of the *Great Learning* and regarded as the only correct way to connect both realms: we must extend the inner world until it embraces the outer world. Lü Zuqian sometimes endorsed the model of extension, yet never devalued the political and institutional world as Zhu Xi did (2008: ZSZS 7:11; 7:54; 7:79–81; LZLSJL 2:90). At times Lü also suggests that both spheres may interpenetrate each other, thereby making the very notion of "extension" meaningless (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:87). In the end, as far as I can see, Lü never stipulated which of the three models (actualization, extension, or interpenetration) would be the most adequate description, yet endorsed all three models simultaneously (Lü 2008: DLSS 3:374–375). What is indisputably clear is that, for Lü, all these models legitimate detailed studies on institutions, as they are seen as immediately connected to the concerns of the heart/mind.

Lü's conviction that both realms—the inner, private sphere and the public sphere— are ultimately identical is mirrored in his conception of virtue (*de* 德) as an outer condition like political or historical circumstances or power structures (*shi* 勢). For example, in his exegesis of the *Zuo Tradition* he declares:

> How could it be that one's circumstances and one's virtue would be two different things?! One's circumstances are like one's body, and one's virtue is like one's breath. It has never happened that one relied on the full strength of one's breath and still died; as it has never happened that one relied on the flourishing of one's virtue and still destroyed one's own country. (Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:344)

Thus, in his judgments on historical actors of the Spring and Autumn period, he often not only refers to their inner motives, but also reflects on the results of their actions and considers the quality of the means in light of the ends achieved. However, this identification results in some difficulties: how shall we, for example, explain the disturbing fact that historical actions which brought about good results often have origins in bad motives? And what about bad actions which result from good intentions? And, finally, how shall we understand the relationship between human actions and institutions? Lü would probably respond to these and similar questions by insisting that the ultimate source of lasting institutions and truly worthy actions always lies in the goodness of the heart/mind of the human actors involved (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:202; 7:144–145; 7:71–74). This answer may sound hollow to us (who live under the influence of thinkers like Machiavelli and Max Weber), but it does explain certain events in the political history not only of China but also of other cultures. A similar logic seems to be at work in Lü's treatment of the famous distinction between the true king (*wang* 王), who rules by the sole authority of his moral example, and the overlord (*ba* 霸), who rules by force, a distinction prominently advanced by Mencius and the Cheng brothers. As is well known,

this distinction became a cornerstone of Zhu Xi's "philosophy of history" (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:48; 7:139–140; Tang 2000: 270–272). Lü, however, tried to circumvent the clear-cut moral choice inherent in this distinction. For instance, even the rule of King Ling of Chu 楚靈王 (d. 529 BC), one of the harshest rulers of the Spring and Autumn period, had some positive aspects (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:130). As he always insisted on the partial identity of virtue and power, Lü came dangerously close to abandoning entirely the difference between the sphere of facts and the sphere of values: actions are undertaken for their own sake, they are self-sufficient, and there is no need for judging them according to a higher standard at all (see his intriguing analysis of Lord Huan of Qi [Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:246–468]). Nevertheless, Lü certainly did not want this distinction to collapse entirely, as his critique of Chen Liang's position demonstrates (Pan and Xu 1992: 80; Liu 1986: 178–187; Tillman 1982). To sum up briefly: Lü Zuqian stressed the need for a comprehensive assessment of human actions which not only focuses on their dependence on inner motives, but also on their embeddedness in larger contexts, such as institutions, power structures, and the web of human relations. In other words, he regarded human intentions and human actions as necessarily connected.

Viewed from the perspective of Zhu Xi's thinking in his later years, Lü's stance directly endangered the purity of the moral self. Zhu feared that Lü's students, when they entered the Song bureaucracy and became political actors, would care more about the results of their actions than about the purity of their motives. However, although Zhu heavily criticized his friend, both men, during the 1160s and 1170s, were in fact committed to the same goal; namely, the realization of their "political project" at the court. Moreover, we must not forget that, unlike thinkers like Chen Liang or Ye Shi, Lü never openly challenged the ideas of Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, or the Cheng brothers on human morality and its ontological foundation, but seems to have endorsed them more or less completely for most of his life. I believe that the best proof of Lü's indebtedness to the Learning of the Way tradition is that he never abandoned the belief that, first, some higher sphere which is at least partly embodied in the human heart/mind actually transcends political power; and second, that it is the gentry that shall restrain the imperial authority and, thus, actualize the ideal order represented by the "way."

Several issues need to be addressed in this regard. I begin with the idea of "restraining imperial authority." As Yu Yingshi has vividly described in his seminal work on Zhu Xi, Northern Song politics was largely influenced by the idea of shared governance (*gongzhi* 共治). The gentry (the elite of scholar-officials) sought to play an active political role by ruling the empire together with the emperor. The model of a strong chancellorship created by Wang Anshi reflects this claim by the gentry (Yu 2003: 1:287–312; 313–337). This same notion of "shared governance" undeniably influenced Zhang Zai and the Cheng brothers in their way of conceiving politics. For example, Zhang Zai's "Western Inscription" ("Xi ming" 西銘), one of the most influential and controversial texts of the twelfth century, is a powerful vision of an

all-encompassing, hierarchical order, in which the individual is linked to the whole universe in a parental relationship. This new notion of order directly reflects the elevated standing of the gentry (Yu 2003: 1:200–218; De Weerdt 2007: 34–35). In his seminal commentary to the *Book of Change*, Cheng Yi expressed a similar vision of "shared governance" (Yu 2003: 1:218–238; Hon 2005: 110–134). The fall of the Northern Song dynasty threw imperial authority into a deep crisis, to which Emperor Gaozong and in particular his son, Emperor Xiaozong, reacted by resorting to new forms of autocracy and weakening the power of the chancellorship (see Gong 2009). In this new situation, the young scholars around Zhu Xi sought to implement Zhang Zai's and the Cheng brothers' vision of unified hierarchical moral order and heavily criticized Xiaozong's autocracy.

In Lü Zuqian's political career, we find a similar engagement. In a particularly telling letter to Zhou Bida 周必大 (1126–1204), Lü complained about the over-concentration of political authority in the hands of Emperor Xiaozong (Lü 2008: WJ 1:446–447). As mentioned above, it seems that Lü may well have had at least a theoretical chance of becoming chancellor himself, if he had lived longer. Thus, in 1174, when his close associate Zhou Bida was appointed chancellor, his mood became very optimistic (Du 2007: 149). On a philosophical level, Lü undoubtedly endorsed Zhang Zai's and Cheng Yi's vision of order. Although he had some qualms about Zhu Xi's interpretation of Zhang Zai's "Western Inscription" (Lü 2008: WJ 1:407–408), he shared its philosophical vision and apparently agreed to its inclusion in the *Record for Reflection*. More importantly, Lü used similar notions to describe the fundamental oneness of all human beings in the cosmos (Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:268–270; LZLSJL 2:196–197). In his lectures on the *Book of Change* he in general closely followed Cheng Yi's commentary. He not only endorsed Cheng Yi's claim that the gentry has a right to form a power-bloc of like-minded colleagues which thus effectively challenges imperial authority, but he also regarded the 64 hexagrams as one large struggle between great men (*junzi* 君子) and petty people (*xiaoren* 小人). Accordingly he subscribed to the idea that the gentry must play a decisive role in ruling the empire (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2: 75; 2:85; 2:99; passim; Hon 2005: 124–131; Xu 2005: 97–101). Similar ideas permeate his lectures on *Mencius*: once, for example, he demanded that the ruler shall "limit his power" (*liang li* 量力), while the official has to be extremely exacting towards himself and "consider (all governmental affairs) to be his responsibility" (*zi ren* 自任). Lü certainly not only had *Mencius* 5B.1 in mind, but he also directly referred to Fan Zhongyan's 范仲淹 (989–1052) famous words describing the new self-confidence of the gentry: "to regard all under the heavens as one's own responsibility" (以天下為己任) (Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2:53; Yu 2003: 1:30–31).

Furthermore, in one of the most striking passages in the *Extensive Deliberations*, Lü directly links the issue of moral self-cultivation to the need for limiting the ruler's political power. According to the *Zuo Tradition*, the minister Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 bc) convinced Lord Huan of Qi to abandon the unlawful invasion of Zheng 鄭 by warning his ruler that all his acts would be documented

in future history books (Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:238–241). In one of the most dialectical passages of the *Extensive Deliberations*, Lü then rhetorically asks whether GUAN Zhong's remonstrance and his appeal to his ruler's concern for posterity were not in fact an example of "trying to restrict the heart/mind by external means" (以物制心) (namely by highlighting the very real possibility of damage to his posthumous image). Apparently, GUAN Zhong tried to scare the ruler away from the planned invasion not by demonstrating that his intention to invade another state itself was wrong, but by convincing the ruler that the results of his action would be harmful to the ruler's self-esteem. Strictly speaking, GUAN Zhong's remonstrance is not in accordance with the principles of moral inwardness as espoused by the Cheng brothers and others: the minister should have sought to criticize directly the ruler's wrong intentions (what Lü calls "restricting the heart/mind with the help of the heart/mind" [以心制心]). However, Lü then gives the striking answer that recourse to the ruler's posthumous image cannot be considered an "external means"; indeed, nothing can, as there is nothing "external" to the sagely mind:

> There is nothing outside of the highest pattern. It is only due to their egoistic tendencies that (human beings) start conceiving of a distinction between inside and outside. Because they are obstructed by egoistic cleverness, they begin to call their body the inside and discard the rest as outside things. Now, the heart/mind of the sages contains all the ten-thousand things; and as there is no inside, how shall there by any outside? Historical writings are writings about the mind; and documents are documents about the heart/mind. (Lü 2008: ZSBY 6:240–241)

It has been claimed that in this passage Lü, similar to subjective idealists like Johann Gottlieb Fichte in the West, asserts that reality is found entirely in the subject of moral action, in the "spirit", but not in the "matter" (Pan and Xu 1992: 233–234). If we examine the context closely, however, it is not difficult to discern that Lü is less concerned with making a universal statement about the nature of the world, than with analyzing the relationship between moral self-cultivation and political power. In a sudden twist, Lü not only approves of GUAN Zhong's remonstrance, but also, at least in this passage, endorses the claim that the appeal to the language of moral inwardness can efficiently restrict the ruler. Lü's sensitivity to the political use of moral self-cultivation is quite striking (which, obviously, is another argument for regarding him as a genuine "political philosopher").

At this point, we cannot but notice one crucial difference between Lü and ZHU Xi. As is well known, the latter made the moral improvement of the "imperial mind" the core of all his political interventions. In all his audiences with the emperor, quoting the *Great Learning*, Zhu claimed that the starting point (the "first step") for the renewal of the empire is the emperor himself. Only when the emperor "sets straight the seat of his emotive and cognitive faculties and achieves a state of integral wholeness in the inner depths of his consciousness" (正心誠意) could the empire be put in order. The *Great Learning* is the basis of ZHU Xi's political philosophy (Xiao 1982: 511), or, as YU Yingshi writes, the bridge between the inner, private realm and the outer, political world (Yu 2003: 2:48). Remarkably, Lü repeatedly endorsed the eight-step model proposed in

the *Great Learning* (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:11; 7:54; 7:79–81; LZLSJL 2:90). Nevertheless, in his memorials to the throne and other political writings, it is striking that he never mentioned the *Great Learning*. In his first memorial of 1170, Lü in fact calls on the emperor to focus on moral self-cultivation, but refers only to the *Book of History*, not to the *Great Learning* (Lü 2008: WJ 1:54–56; Du 2007: 79–82; Xu 2005: 125–127). In his policy response of 1171, Lü advised the emperor to concentrate on the "heart/mind of the heavens" (*tian xin* 天心), which, to a certain extent, he identifies with the ruler's heart/mind; however, he did not further expand on this issue (Lü 2008: WJ 1:86–93; Du 2007: 97; Xu 2005: 129–131; De Weerdt 2007: 150; Tillman 1992: 122–123). In 1177, he avoided the issue of self-cultivation completely and concentrated on the institutional framework of Xiaozong's rule. Why did he avoid the *Great Learning*?

We could speculate that political astuteness required him to conceal his "true opinion" or made it impossible for him to self-identify as a follower of the Learning of the Way. But this assumption seems less plausible than to regard his decision not to refer to the *Great Learning* at the court as merely a sign that he did not fully embrace its political ideas. As Lü himself writes in his exegesis of the *Zuo Tradition*, when a minister seeks to improve his ruler's heart/mind, he "must pay attention to the general situation" (需看大勢) (Lü 2008: ZSZS 7:78). In his 1177 memorial, he recommended Emperor Xiaozong return to the "the normative form of governance" (治道體統): after having analyzed the numerous disadvantages of the over-concentration of the decision-making process in one person, he asked the emperor to restore the Southern Song system of checks and balances, in which the emperor did not interfere in the regular decision-making process, thereby leaving the chancellor and the various ministries effectively to rule the empire (Lü 2008: WJ 1:56–60; Du 2007: 206–209; Xu 2005: 227–229). Unlike Zhu Xi, Lü did not believe in the transformation of the "imperial mind" alone. Although in principle Lü endorsed the idea that political power could be circumscribed by the discourse of moral self-cultivation, he was well aware that this approach necessarily fails in circumstances which may be beyond the control of the moral self. This view certainly has much to do with Lü's understanding of political power and human agency in general; for although he was influenced by Mencian political idealism, he understood the fragility and complexity of the political realm too well to regard the moral self as the sole source of legitimacy and durability.

In the end, Lü Zuqian appears as a highly complex thinker. His awareness of the relative autonomy of the political realm did not lessen his belief in the ability of the moral mind to transcend political power. And yet, he actively searched for alternatives to the discourse on the moral self. According to scholars like Yu Yingshi, the Cheng brothers' notion of the moral self stands for an idea of spiritual liberation which at the same time implies the idea of political emancipation of the gentry. Although we find traces of both ideas in Lü Zuqian's thought, we have reason to believe he had realized a fundamental truth about moral selfhood. The emphasis on the inwardness of morality eventually led the

followers of the Learning of the Way to project this notion of moral selfhood onto the emperor himself, thus creating the paradoxical result that the idea to influence or restrict the emperor's behavior by external force appeared philosophically illegitimate. It was only conceivable to "move" the emperor by appealing to his innate heart/mind. Thus, the concern for moral autonomy almost imperceptibly turned into the unconditional acceptance of imperial authority. Lü seems to have realized the political consequences of this "internalization" of morality earlier than other thinkers, and tried to reach back to a more comprehensive view of the political sphere. When he criticized the emperor in 1177, his primary goal may have been to protect the interests of the gentry, yet he never abandoned the idea of the moral self and thus ultimately failed to find a solution for the profound dilemma in which he and his peers were trapped (see, for example, his annotation to the second line of hexagram Gu 蠱 [Lü 2008: LZLSJL 2: 30]).

Conclusion

In Lü Zuqian's writings, we observe strong contrasts and conflicting positions which were never successfully reconciled: on the one hand, the conflict between a model of self-concern and self-actualization, and, on the other, the idea of an unchangeable natural and social order beyond human control. Then there is Lü's view of the heart/mind as an independent, omnipotent agent simultaneously embedded in political and historical contexts. He had an optimistic view of the gentry as representing the hope of moral and political renewal, but also a fear of decay and chaos which only the most intransigent version of the Confucian social order would eventually overcome. Many important questions remain unanswered, but this may be the privilege, or even the definition, of an important thinker, the very feature that attracts the interest of future generations of scholars. For the very ambivalence and breadth of his thought, Lü certainly merits our attention.

In the twentieth century, thinkers like Mou Zongsan have tried to combine the Neo-Confucian language of the moral self with Immanuel Kant's idea of self-legislating reason in order to secure the foundations for a modern democratic and pluralistic state in China (Mou 2003). Whether this attempt to coordinate the essential features of Western modernity and traditional Chinese philosophy has been successful still remains contested. Nonetheless, it seems safe to say that this model has tended to overlook the intricacy of political practice and the fragmented nature of the modern self. In contrast, Lü Zuqian was well aware that any meaningful political order must recognize both the importance of self-cultivation and the moral muddiness of political rule. With this in mind, he refused to withdraw to some "higher" ground, but rather directly addressed the political sphere. With Lü in mind, it might be interesting to rethink the role of moral agency in Neo-Confucian thought: could it be that, with his emphasis on the moral self in action, Lü provides us with an alternative

framework, one which would give more space than that of either Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming to explore the interaction between the isolated nature of the moral self and the necessarily pluralistic character of political action? Could it be that his belief both in strong institutions and a broad consensus on spiritual values may become important again for Chinese (and global) political theory in the twenty-first century?

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WJ – containing the *Literary Collections* 文集, *Further Collections* 別集, and *Outer Collections* 外集, edited by Lü Zujian 呂祖儉 and Lü Qiaonian 呂喬年 (1204).

LZLSJL – *Collected Teachings of the Friendship Academy* 麗澤論說集錄. (Contains Lü's lectures on classical texts like the *Book of Change*, the *Analects*, and *Mencius*, but also his remarks on other topics).

ZSBY – *Extensive Deliberations on Master Zuo* 左氏博議. (Lü's collection of model essays on the *Zuo Tradition*; 1168).

ZSZS – *Explanations of Master Zuo's Tradition* 左氏傳說. (Lü's collected annotations to the *Zuo Tradition*, presumably dating from the early 1170s).

ZSZXS – *Further Explanations of Master Zuo's Tradition* 左氏傳續說. (Sequel to *Explanations of Master Zuo's Tradition*, providing supplementary information; presumably dating from the late 1170s).

DLSS – *Explanation of the Book of Documents* 東萊書說. (Lü's collected annotations to the *Book of Documents*, presumably mostly based on lectures he gave in the winter 1179/80).

DSJ – *Chronicle of Major Events* 大事記. (Lü's critical, yet incomplete redaction of Sima Guang's *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* 資治通鑒, compiled in 1180/1181).

LDZDXS – *Detailed Explanations of Institutions throughout the Ages* 歷代制度詳說. (Based on the lectures Lü gave on various institutional and historical issues).

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