Hu Hong's Philosophy

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The philosopher Hu Hong 胡宏 (1105–1161; style Renzhong 仁仲, *hao* Wufeng 五峰), played a major role in the process of the transmission of the teachings of the Cheng brothers, Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), to a group of eminent thinkers living at the end of the twelfth century, namely Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137–1181), and Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180) who substantially influenced the path which Confucianism took in the second millennium AD. Hu Hong was born into a family which at the turn of the twelfth century had emigrated from Northern Fujian to the region of Jingmen 荊門 in today's Hubei. When Hu Hong had just passed the age of twenty the Jurchen inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Song army and conquered the northern part of China. In the aftermath of this event, Jingmen became an inhospitable strip of borderland.[1] The Hu family had to leave their home because of the war and founded a new basis at Mount Heng in Hunan. Although they seem to have lost everything they had Hu Hong's father, Hu Anguo 胡安國 (1074–1138), was able to reestablish the family's fortunes by completing his famous commentary to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in 1137. A year later, Hu Anguo died. According to the account of his life compiled by his adopted son Hu Yin 胡寅 (1098–1156), it was the hardships he underwent when working on the *Annals* that killed him (Hu 1993: 6.149; 25.555, 559).

Hu's commentary became the official interpretation for the *Annals* in the thirteenth century and remained so until the fall of the Ming. The Qing excluded it from the material used in preparing for the civil examinations because Hu Anguo had explained that one of the main aims of the *Annals* was "to expel the

[1] According to Hu Hong, even in 1160, more than 30 years after the war, only 20–30% of the arable land of Jingmen was inhabited (Hu 1987: 117; van Ess 2003a: 281–286).

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barbarians" (*rang yi* 攘夷), a topic which, of course, upset the Manchus.[2] In Southern Song times this topic was received better (van Ess 2006: 85–105). Although for most of his life Hu had refused to serve as an official because of the political circumstances prevailing at court, Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–1162) rewarded him posthumously with a generous donation of land which became the foundation of the new wealth of the Hu family (Li 1936: 119.1927; Hu 1993: 6.150).

Hu Anguo never studied with the Cheng brothers. Nevertheless, he regarded himself to be their student and was similarly regarded by the community of their followers as well. His activities culminated when at the beginning of the third decade of the twelfth century he, together with Yang Shi (1053–1135), started to compile the *Recorded Conversations* (*Yulu* 語錄) of the Cheng brothers, which marked the beginning of the *daoxue* movement of the Southern Song (van Ess 2005). Firsthand material concerning the thought of the Chengs and that of their major disciples seems to have been in existence throughout Hu Hong's life, a fact crucial to our understanding of his thought. Zhu Xi said that Hu was influenced by Cheng Yi's student Xie Liangzuo (1049–1120?), a claim which Hu himself denied. Hu maintained that he had founded a tradition of the transmission of the thought of the Cheng brothers in his own right. As far as Hu Hong and Hu Yin are concerned, it is clear that their central source of inspiration was not the teachings of other students of the Cheng brothers but their father's commentary to the *Annals*. Hu Yin, who had represented the family as an official at court until he left Hangzhou in 1142 in protest against the peace treaty which the Song had signed with the Jurchen, wrote a moral commentary to Sima Guang's *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒) under the title *My Limited Insights into Reading History* (*Dushi guanjian* 讀史管見) which followed the same style and method Hu Anguo had adopted in his own commentary. Zhu Xi drew heavily on this book in his *Outline of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Tongjian gangmu* 通鑒綱目). In 1141 Hu Hong completed his monumental work *The Great Record of Emperors and Kings* (*Huangwang daji* 皇王大紀) in 80 chapters which is an "account of history from its earliest beginnings down to the end of the Zhou, interspersed with Hu's own clearly labeled comments" (Schirokauer 2004: 121).

Hu never served in government. Apart from a short period at the beginning of the thirties when the Jurchen ravaged Hunan when he had to flee to the South, and from some brief excursions after his arrival in 1130, he stayed at Mount Heng and left the business of official representation of his family's interests to Hu Yin. In 1147 he tried to secure an appointment as director of the Yuelu Academy which he planned to re-establish. It seems, however, that the infamous regent Qin Gui 秦檜 (1090–1155), with whom Hu Anguo had

[2] For this reason, all copies of the Hu Anguo commentary contained in the *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku qianshu* 四庫全書) were heavily censored. Elsewhere I have dealt with the issue of censorship concerning the work of Hu Anguo and Hu Hong (van Ess 2002, 2004, 2006). See below for the relevance of this topic to Hu Hong's main philosophical work.

initially been on good terms, did not comply with this wish. We know little about Hu Hong's life after that attempt. The only biographical element which is known to have influenced the course of the history of the *daoxue* movement was that 2 months before Hu Hong's death Zhang Shi came to study with him. Zhang Shi was the son of the famous Zhang Jun 張浚 (1097–1164) who had been one of the leaders of the war-faction at court during the 1130s. He became the transmitter of the thought of Hu Hong and the editor of Hu Hong's main philosophical work *Understanding of Words* (*Zhiyan* 知言), a collection of aphoristic sayings written in the style of a "recorded conversations" (*yulu*) but noted down by Hu Hong himself, over a period of several years.

It seems that the arrangement of the text was also done by Hu Hong himself. In its most widespread edition, which goes back to the Ming scholar Cheng Minzheng 程敏政 (1445–1499), *Understanding of Words* is divided into 15 chapters, each of which has a chapter heading. These headings are crucial for understanding the thought of Hu Hong although they have often been neglected in secondary sources. The first of these chapter headings runs "What Heaven has Conferred" (*tian ming* 天命). Of course, this is a quotation from the opening paragraph of the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), but also has, as is well-known, the political meaning of "heavenly mandate." The last heading is "The Central Plain" (*zhongyuan* 中原). These two titles suggest that the whole text has something to do with the recovery of the central plain, the territory then governed by the Jurchen. Thus, *Understanding of Words* is probably best understood as a manual on the cultivation of the mind as a prerequisite for recovering the heartland of Chinese culture. Ten paragraphs, the contents of which were heatedly discussed by Zhu Xi, Lü Zuqian, and Zhang Shi, have been shifted together with the comments by these three philosophers to an appendix of the original text by Cheng Minzheng. Today, the results of this discussion are to be found in the collected literary works of Zhu Xi under the heading "Misgivings about Master Hu's *Understanding of Words*" ("Huzi *Zhiyan* yiyi" 胡子知言疑義; Zhu 1980: 73; Hu 1987: 328–337).[3] It is these paragraphs which have attracted the most interest from scholars working on Hu Hong in the twentieth century, a fact which may also be a result of the inclusion of "Misgivings about Master Hu's *Understanding of Words*" in *Song-Yuan Case Studies* (*Song-Yuan xue'an* 宋元學案) in which this discussion makes up the bulk of the information on Hu Hong (Huang and Quan

[3] In the *Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu jianming mulu* 四庫全書簡明目錄) edition of the *Zhiyan* the 10 paragraphs appear in their original position within the text. However, this edition does not contain chapter headings. The editors of Hu (1987) published the text in the arrangement of Cheng Minzheng but criticized it at the same time (on page eight of their introduction) relying on a statement in the *Annotated General Catalogue of the* Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries (*Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要) which argues that the chapter headings were added by Ming scholars, probably by Cheng Minzheng himself. Since the *Siku* version deleted the crucial paragraph which provided the heading for the last chapter of the text ("the central plain") their opinion should not be taken too seriously. I have argued for this in more detail in van Ess (2002).

1986: 42.1370–1377).[4] Although the importance of "Misgivings about Master Hu's *Understanding of Words*" should not be underestimated, in this essay I try to do justice to Hu Hong's thought by also taking into account other parts of *Understanding of Words* which have received less attention so far.

Apart from several general introductions into what is generally termed the "school from Huxiang 湖湘" (Zhu 1991; Zhu and Chen 1992) the most important thinker of which is Hu Hong,[5] there are now also several studies on Hu Hong in Chinese (Wang 1978; Lao 1983: 321–328; Chen 1986; Chen 1991; Wang 1996; Xiang 2000) and in Japanese (Okada 1965; Takahata 1996), but virtually nothing has been published on him in any Western language. The few exceptions are Schirokauer (1986, 2003, 2004), Tillman (1992: 29–36), Levey (1994), and van Ess (2002 and 2003b).

The Philosophy of Hu Hong

Main Aims and the Meaning of the Title Understanding of Words

The bulk of the philosophy of Hu Hong is to be found in his main work *Understanding of Words*. In addition, several letters of a philosophical content have been transmitted in Hu Hong's collected work, under the title of "Collection of the [Master] from the Five Summits" (*Wufeng ji*), also edited by Zhang Shi, with the help of Hu Dashi 胡大時, the youngest son of Hu Hong:[6] One letter written to the poet and Buddhist monk Zeng Ji 曾幾 (1084–1166), style Jifu 吉甫, who is called *seng* 僧 (monk) Jifu by Hu Hong, begins with a complaint about the fact that there are so few people with whom one can be humane (*wei ren* 為仁; Hu 1987: 114–117), a topic which is also discussed in a letter with Zhang Shi (Hu 1987: 129) who, as is well-known, himself wrote an explanatory essay about the meaning of humaneness (Tillman 1992: 47–48; see also "Zhang Shi's Philosophical Perspectives on Human Nature, Heart/Mind, Humaneness, and the Supreme Ultimate"). A third important group of philosophical theories is to be found in the letters which Hu Hong sent to a student called Biao Juzheng 彪居正 (Biao Demei 德美, Hu 1987: 134–145). In all these letters Hu Hong stressed the need to apply one's knowledge in practice: "Studying is that whereby one studies to create order" (Hu 1987: 123, letter to Ding Tixing 丁提刑). Also, in his letters to Zhang Shi he says:

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[4] There are very few other entries from *Zhiyan* in *Song-Yuan xue'an* (1367–1369 and 1377–1378). Note that the position of the eminent thinker Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) is built mainly on the passages contained in *Song-Yuan xue'an* (Mou 1968: 3.429–545).

[5] Huxiang is roughly the same as today's Hunan.

[6] The text of the whole collection is incorporated without this title in Hu (1987).

> It was the way of the sage kings to be certain to find a function (*yong* 用) once they had found the underlying structure (*ti* 體). When one has the underlying structure but not the function – what difference is there from "the other end" (*Lunyu* 2.16)? The well-field system, the system of enfeoffments, schools, regulations for the army, all these were among the important things for which the sages exerted their heart/minds to the utmost to think about how to bring about function.

Subjects such as the famous well-field system or the bestowal of fiefs mentioned here figure also very prominently in the later chapters of *Understanding of Words* among the means by which Hu Hong thought the world could be changed.[7] It should therefore be stressed again that this text clearly constitutes a plan for a prince and is not to be understood as purely metaphysical philosophy. Nevertheless, Hu Hong thought that in order to achieve success in government it was first necessary to train one's heart/mind. This is the subject of the first part of *Understanding of Words*.

"Understanding of Words" is a quotation from a famous passage in *Mencius* (2A.2), a fact which Hu Hong himself pointed out in one of his letters to his cousin Hu Xian 胡憲 (Hu 1987: 122) as well as at several places in his treatise itself. Mencius had stressed the importance of knowing or understanding the words of others who held different opinions so as to be able to refute them, and he characterized these words as one-sided, extravagant, depraved, and evasive (Legge 1861-: 2:191). In Hu Hong's letter, understanding the words of others is turned into understanding the wrong words propagated by the Buddhists. This is also emphasized in *Understanding of Words*:

> The Buddhists spy into the heart-organ and say therefore that they are all-encompassing. Yet, they do not know how to stick to their place. Therefore they regard human relationships and norms (*li*) as something external and act carelessly. It is not worth discussing the way of Confucius and Mencius with them. Only after one has understood the norms for the changes and transformations of the creative (*qian*) and the receptive (*kun*) and for the way by which the ten-thousand beings receive their destiny can one start to do good things with those who believe in the teachings of the six ways of transmigration, and who believe in such one-sided, extravagant, depraved, and evasive expressions. (Hu 1987: 22)

Only two sentences later, Hu Hong says: "When someone is able to strengthen himself at the place where he walks with his feet, he certainly will not endanger himself by relying on the extravagant and evasive expressions of the Buddhists." Thus, it is clear that the title "Understanding of Words" has to be understood as a critique of Buddhism. Or, to put it differently, Hu Hong's philosophy is an attempt to challenge the intellectual dominance which Buddhist ideas held at his time.[8] We may thus say that as the ultimate goal of his philosophy it was

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[7] The well field system is mentioned in Chapter 3 (6), 7 (2x in 10 and 12), 8 (29), 10 (19), 13 (6), in 14 (23) and in 15 (9). Fiefs are mentioned in 4 (16), 8 (2), 10 (1), 13 (6), 15 (13, 14 and 15).

[8] One more direct reference to *Mengzi* 2A.2 is made in the second paragraph of Chapter 6 of *Zhiyan*. The reader is here reminded that in 1133/34 Hu Hong's brother, Hu Yin, wrote a strongly anti-Buddhist pamphlet *Revering Correctness* (*Chongzheng pian* 崇正篇) which is contained as part I in Hu Yin (1993) and discussed in van Ess (2003: 172–192).

Hu Hong's aim to challenge Buddhism and to start a process of Confucian self-examination because he thought that this was the first step to a recovery of the central plain. Interestingly, his main references for this agenda were the *Four Books*. Zhu Xi is usually said to have been responsible for the formation of this canon. Yet, it is clear that it is Hu Hong who should actually be given credit for this innovation.

The Heart/Mind and the Nature

Hu Hong was the first scholar of the *daoxue*-movement whose overall stress lay on the importance of the concept of the heart/mind (*xin* 心), a category which, of course, was central to Buddhist philosophy as well. Thus, although this is not mentioned in most histories of Chinese philosophy, it is reasonable to say that he was an immediate predecessor of Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1192) and later, of Wang Yangming (1472–1529). *Understanding of Words* apparently began with a paragraph in which Hu Hong clarified what he meant by "heart/mind" and the "nature" (*xing* 性):

> What is conferred by heaven is called the nature. The nature is the great root of all under heaven. Why was it that among Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, King Wen 文王, and Zhongni 仲尼, those who reigned before [the next sage king] commanded those who came later, using the word "heart/mind" and not the "nature"? My answer is: The heart/mind is the one organ which knows heaven and earth, which directs the ten-thousand things, and which thereby completes the nature. The six superior men were men who exhausted their heart/mind, and thus were able to establish the great root of all under heaven. Until this day, we can rely on that.[9]

Hu Hong is referring here to the opening sentence of the seventh chapter of *Mencius*.[10] Yet, he also alludes to a concept his father Hu Anguo had developed in the preface to his commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. There, Hu Anguo had described that text as "a central statute for the transmission of the heart/mind [of Confucius] whose intention went beyond [mere] history." This again was a formulation which, on the one hand, went back to Buddhist precedents but, on the other, was reformulated in Confucian terms.[11] The

[9] This paragraph was removed from the main text in the block printings going back to Cheng Minzheng as well as in the modern edition because it was the first paragraph which Zhu Xi discussed with Lü Zuqian and Zhang Shi and was thus included separately in the "Misgivings about Master Hu's *Understanding of Words*." The chapter "Tian ming," which also uses the text of the beginning of this paragraph, indicates that the paragraph was indeed the first one of the whole text. Compare Tillman (1992: 30).

[10] *Mencius* 7A.1: "He who has exhausted his hearr/mind knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows heaven."

[11] I have dealt with this subject in van Ess (2003: 204).

heart/mind did not produce illusions: it was the political mind of Confucius and the other sages who had laid the foundations for the well-being of the world.[12] In the last paragraph of the first chapter of *Understanding of Words* Hu Hong said: "What heaven has conferred is the nature. The nature of man is the heart/mind" (Hu 1987: 4). This sentence reduces human nature to the capacities of the heart/mind. Absolutely central to an understanding of Hu Hong is the fact that he thought that consciousness and thinking were those elements which constituted the human condition. In this he greatly differed from Zhu Xi for whom the heart/mind was far less relevant than the nature.

Just as in later times Wang Yangming stressed the unity of knowledge and action, Hu Hong was very much concerned with the two virtues of knowledge (*zhi* 知) and humaneness (*ren* 仁) which, of course, constitute a pair of categories as early as in the *Analects* and which for Hu Hong are the two main capacities of the heart/mind:

> Once there is this heart/mind, then there is knowledge. Without this heart/mind there is no knowledge. Among those men who use clever words and insinuating appearances there has never been one who was able to act humanely once he had lost his heart/mind to superficialities and falsehood. (Hu 1987: 11)[13]

Yet, although Hu Hong said that knowledge is directly related to the heart/mind, he rejected the idea that man is born with knowledge:

> No human being has knowledge when he/she is born. Only after they have been able to become close to a teacher and to make [appropriate] friends do they have knowledge. Thus it is after one knows about crisis that one can plan for stability. It is after one knows destruction that one can plan for preservation. It is after one knows disorder that one can plan for order. . .. How great is knowledge! Of the ten thousand things in the world none has priority over knowledge. Therefore the superior man must first extend his knowledge. (Hu 1987: 43)[14]

Only the sages were exceptions to the rule that men are born without knowledge (Hu 1987: 14). Despite this, Confucius himself had stated he did not belong to those who had knowledge at their birth (*Analects* 7.20 and 16.9), so one had to go back into far antiquity in order to find human beings which were above the average with regard to this matter.

The heart/mind is concerned only with existing things: "What exists is visible because it coalesces. We call it existing because by means of our eyes we know that it exists. Therefore we call non-existing what is dispersed so that it can not be seen. What exists is real and 'can be trampled under the feet' [*Zhongyong*; Legge 1879-: 389]. We call it existing because by means of our heart/mind we know that it exists. Therefore what is irrelevant and cannot be trampled under the feet we call non-existing" (Hu 1987: 12). "What can be trampled under the

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[12] Wang Kaifu (1978: 87) suggests that this is also in accordance with the views of Cheng Hao.

[13] Compare *Analects* 1.3.

[14] Compare the translation in Schirokauer (1986: 485).

feet" is in the *Doctrine of the Mean* opposed to the mean itself and is, thus, of secondary importance. Yet, for Hu Hong it should be the central concern of man. This idea is also reflected in his idea that man should not give external things the power to control him:

> Man has the ten thousand things at his disposal and the worthy are able to incorporate the ten thousand things. Therefore the ten thousand things will operate for him. The things do not have him at their disposal. Therefore the things are not able to incorporate him. What greater lack of wisdom could there be than drudging for the ten thousand things while one should not drudge for them? (Hu 1987: 22)

Again, Hu Hong alludes to *Mencius* who had stated that man has the 10,000 things at his disposal.[15] This topic is mentioned eight times in *Understanding of Words*,[16] especially in a thread of paragraphs in which Hu Hong stresses the difference between man and other beings. It is the heart/mind and its capacity to think which distinguish man from animals and which turn him into the "ultimate [expression of] the nature" (*xing zhi ji* 性之極) (Hu 1987: 14). Although objectively speaking it may seem that knowledge can develop only when affairs come into one's reach, there is also a subjective perspective which is very important to Hu Hong:

> From the perspective of others who look at us, when affairs come, knowledge arises and our humaneness can be seen. As long as affairs do not come knowledge does not arise. Therefore our humaneness cannot be seen. From our own perspective, however, the heart/mind flows together with heaven and earth. What gap should there be between them? (Hu 1987: 12; compare Wang 1978: 48)

This paragraph is interesting in so far as it differentiates between what others who look at our heart/mind and our knowledge think and what we ourselves subjectively perceive to be the function of our heart/mind. For Hu, the heart/mind definitely is more than an organ that thinks. It is transcendent and eternal:

A disciple asked: Is the heart/mind subject to life and death?
Master Hu: No, it is not.
Disciple: In that case, when someone dies where is the heart/mind?
Master Hu: You already know of its death and yet you ask where it is?
Disciple: What do you mean?
Master Hu: It is only because it is not dead that you know it. What is the problem?
Disciple: I don't understand.

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[15] *Mencius* 7A.4: "All things are complete in us. There is no greater delight than to be conscious of sincerity on self-examination. If one acts with a vigorous effort at the law of reciprocity, when he seeks for the realization of perfect virtue, nothing can be closer than his approximation to it" (Legge 1879-: 450).

[16] Once in Chapter 1, three times in Chapter 5, once in Chapter 6, once in Chapter 8 and once in Chapter 14.

> Master Hu (laughing): Your obtuseness really is too much! If you consider the heart/mind not in terms of shape, but in terms of heart/mind, you understand it. (Hu 1987: 333)[17]

One further paragraph adds that the heart/mind is everywhere and that it forms a trinity with heaven and earth and has the 10,000 things at its disposal (Hu 1987: 331). There is thus a superhuman heart/mind working in the world. This heart/mind is able to recognize truth, a truth which is the source of order in the world. Since the superhuman heart/mind, which is always operative in the world, is the heart/mind of heaven and earth it naturally produces the best order possible. The sages were in complete accord with heaven and earth and were thus able to pass this heart/mind to later generations in the form of human thinking and in written texts. Did Zhu Xi miss this point when he criticized Hu Hong saying that his conception of the heart/mind came very close to the "Buddhist theory of transmigration"?

> I have discussed the sentence "the nature is neither good nor bad" in detail before. The sentence "the heart/mind is not subject to life and death" is almost the same as the Buddhist theory of transmigration. When heaven and earth engendered beings, man received their best part and became most intelligent. What is meant by the heart/mind is the nature of being capaciously intelligent and having consciousness. This is nothing other than the ears and eyes having the power to see and hear. Between heaven and earth it penetrates old and new without attaining perfection or decay. In men and other living beings, however, it has a beginning and an end in accordance with the body and with *qi*. Once one has understood that the pattern is the same but that the [two] parts are different, what need is there for a theory that the heart/mind is not subject to life and death—a view which merely serves to startle students? (Hu 1987: 333)

Zhu Xi also recognized a transcendent heart/mind which does not die and which penetrates history. Clearly, there is a religious dimension to the thought of Hu Hong and Zhu Xi. Whereas for Zhu Xi there is no need to see a direct relationship between the eternal heart/mind of heaven and earth and the mortal one of living beings, for Hu Hong the heart/mind seems to have been more. One might think that his answer came quite close to the answers which Chan masters gave when their students asked for help with the solution of a difficult *gong'an* 公案. Yet, one can also understand that he hinted at an immortal soul which was inherent in the mortal aspect of the heart/mind.

Interestingly, the "nature" which Hu Hong declares to be the "great root" (Hu 1987: 41, 328) of the world is not just "human nature" (Hu 1987: 328), as is often assumed because of the Mencian discussions of human nature; it sometimes comes quite close to the overall category of "nature" in European philosophy. Everything which belongs to the common behavior of men belongs to the nature. Even the intercourse between men and women, which was reviled by some because of potential dangers inherent in it, is declared as normal and good by Hu Hong (Hu 1987: 3, 7).

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[17] The translation is by Conrad Schirokauer (1986: 490). I have changed Schirokauer's "mind" to "heart/mind" in my translation of *xin*. Compare Wang Kaifu (1978: 48–49).

> The sage, too, has everything which exists by heavenly ordination and which the average man therefore has. Some people think that the emotions are a burden, yet the sage does not eliminate the emotions. Some people think that talent can do harm, but the sage does not criticize talent. Some people think that desires are not good, but the sage does not cut off the desires. (Hu 1987: 333)

Yet, Hu also says that the "nature establishes everything which exists in the world" (Hu 1987: 21), that the 10,000 things and the 10,000 affairs are the "material of the nature" (*xing zhi zhi* 性之質) (Hu 1987: 14) and also that "the nature is that because of which heaven and earth stand" (Hu 1987: 333). Finally, he says that all "ten thousand patterns are contained in the nature" and that "the ten thousand things are all contained in the nature" (Hu 1987: 28). Thus, it seems that Hu Hong used the word "nature" in most cases for the entirety of naturally existing things. Just as with the heart/mind, in Hu Hong's philosophy, the nature is removed from its exclusive relationship to man. With this approach Hu differs markedly from Zhu Xi who thought that one should concentrate on one's own nature by meditation. Hu Hong believed that the heart/mind—which, somewhat confusingly, he several times gave the same designation as nature, namely the "great root" (Hu 1987: 38, 42)—was the organ which really counted. This is why, much to Zhu Xi's dismay, he said that the nature was not to be described in terms of good or bad:

> "As for the nature, it is the mystery of heaven, earth, demons, and gods. The word 'good' is not adequate to describe it, how much less so the word 'bad'?" Someone asked: "What do you mean by that?" I answered: "I have heard this from my late father: 'The reason Mencius alone stands out from the standard of all other Confucians is that he knew the nature.' I asked him: 'What do you mean by that?' My late father answered: 'When Mencius said that the nature was good he used the word only as an expression of sighing admiration, not with the opposite meaning to "bad" '." (Hu 1987: 333)

Thus, both the heart and nature have to be understood as words for cosmic principles which extend far beyond the human condition.

Nevertheless, the cosmic dimension also had to be projected back into human experience: just as with Mencius (6A.11) Hu Hong explained "humaneness" as the "way of the heart/mind" (Hu 1987: 1). He also said: "Humaneness is the heart/mind of heaven and earth; if the heart/mind is not completely put to work, it can happen that a superior man is not humane" (Hu 1987: 4). For Hu, someone who does not incorporate all things, even though they are at one's disposal, is inhumane (Hu 1987: 4). He adds that the right way consists of structure and function (*ti yong*): "Humaneness is the structure whereas rightness is the function. To be able to put these two virtues together is the way" (Hu 1987: 10).

As with many other Confucian philosophers Hu Hong only rarely gives precise definitions of his philosophical categories. When his student Biao Juzheng asked about humaneness, Hu Hong answered: "If you want to act humanely you first have to understand the structure of humaneness." Asked what this structure was, he said: "The way of humaneness is extremely great and yet deeply pertinent. The one who knows can exhaust its meaning with one

word whereas the one who does not know will not understand it even if he sets up thousands and tens of thousands of words. The one who is able [to be humane] will raise it with one affair whereas the one who is unable will not be able [to act humanely] even if he points to thousands and tens of thousands of affairs." Biao Juzheng apparently thought he understood what his teacher meant and asked: "When the ten thousand things are one with me can I take this as the structure in which humaneness prevails?" Yet Hu Hong answered that the human heart/mind is incapable of mastering such a complex task as becoming one with the 10,000 things. On another occasion, a student who was convinced that the "reason a person is not humane is that he has lost his heart/mind," asked Hu whether one could still look for one's heart/mind after one had already "lost it" (*Mengzi* 6A.11). He answered: "When the King of Qi saw the ox and could not bear for it to be slaughtered, that was the sprout of the originally good heart/mind seen in the midst of desire for profit. Once you see it, hold fast and preserve it, preserve it and nourish it, nourish and fulfill it so that it becomes enlarged. When it is great and cannot be stopped, it will be identical to heaven. This heart/mind is in (all) people, but the beginnings of its expression differ. What matters is to perceive it, that's all" (Hu 1987: 334–335).[18]

The search for the lost heart/mind is one of the major themes in *Understanding of Words* (compare also Hu 1987: 331). Why was this so important to Hu Hong? The reason should be looked for in the paramount importance of the relationship between humans and things. This is the topic which constitutes the center of all his thinking and endeavors.

*To Incorporate Things and Put Them in Order (***ti** 體 *and* **li** 理*)*

What has been translated as "structure" throughout this essay is the word "*ti"* the original meaning of which is "member of a body." This word is often rendered in English language treatments of *daoxue* texts as "substance," a translation which, unfortunately, does not really make sense in Hu Hong's context. He frequently speaks of "*ti"* in a verbal sense. When speaking of the 10,000 things in his first chapter he says that one is not humane, so long as there is still one of them left which has not been made a member, or as long as one has not "incorporated" it (Hu 1987: 4). In a paragraph in his eighth chapter, quoted above, he says that the worthy has to incorporate (*ti*) the 10,000 things and not let himself be incorporated by them. The meaning obviously is that one should not become the object of things but always keep control over them. Here, too, it seems that to "*ti"* someone or something means to make him or it a member of one's own entourage.[19] In the second paragraph of Chapter 6 dealing

[18] Schirokauer (1986: 484). I have changed Schirokauer's "mind" to "heart/mind."

[19] Wang Kaifu understands "*ti"* as "*ticha* 體察": "thoroughly experience and observe" which I do not think is consistent with the other instances in which *ti* is used.

with the very passage from the *Mengzi* text which is the source for the title of *Understanding of Words* Hu Hong says that to exhaust the nature means personally to follow the way, righteously to put things in their place, to let one's *qi* 氣 flow together with the right way and to do all this harmoniously when watching, hearing, speaking, and moving. He adds: "Now, that which in the nature incorporates everything is the heart/mind. Who is able to form a triad with heaven and earth without becoming a thing (*wu* 物)?" (Hu 1987: 16). Here we could also understand *ti* as "to structure a thing," a translation which would also make perfect sense in the 11th chapter, where Hu Hong says with reference to the command of heaven (*tian ming* 天命) that "the sage incorporated—or structured—it without interruption" (Hu 1987: 30). In Chapter 14 he adds that "the sage obeyed the nature of the 10,000 things" and that he "structured" and "enlightened them" so that each of them was put to its appropriate use, "without one single thing being left out" (Hu 1987: 41).

In his tenth chapter Hu Hong tells us that all 10,000 patterns are included in the nature and that the average Confucians understood the nature only with reference to one pattern. None of them was able to see the complete structure (*quan ti* 全體) of what is "commanded by heaven" (Hu 1987: 28). A similar point is made in Chapter 13 (Hu 1987: 39). In Chapter 11 Hu argues that *li* 理, translated here as "norm," is "the grand structure of the world" (天下之大體) (Hu 1987: 29), a combination which also shows up in the twelfth chapter (Hu 1987: 34). In Chapter 2 we read that there is a fixed structure (*ti*) for rightness, which clearly means that there is a fixed set of rules to be adhered to, whereas there is no fixed function of humaneness (Hu 1987: 5). The same chapter tells us that laws and regulations (*fazhi* 法制) are the open side of the way and virtue (*daode* 道德) and that to be without laws and regulations is to be without function (*yong*) whereas to be without the way and virtue is to be without structure (*ti*) (Hu 1987: 6). He declares that the possession of emotions and the lack of emotions are the same structure but different in function (Hu 1987: 9, Tillman 1992: 34), a saying which goes together with another famous one: "Likes and dislikes belong to the nature. The small man likes and dislikes according to himself whereas the superior man likes and dislikes according to the right way. If you look at this then you can understand [the difference between] heavenly norms and human desires" (Hu 1987: 330; compare Tillman 1992: 34).

One should have all of these passages in mind when looking at the last of those paragraphs which Zhu Xi, Lü Zuqian, and Zhang Shi had paid special attention to:

> Heaven and earth are the parents of the sage, and the sage is the son of heaven and earth. Once there are parents then there is a son; once there is a son then there are parents. This is why the ten thousand things become apparent and why the right way has got its name. It is not the sage who was able to name the way, but once there was this way, there was also this name. The sage identified clarity at its structure (*ti*) and called it the "nature," and identified clarity at its function (*yong*) and called it "heart/mind." The nature cannot but move, and once it moves it is the heart/mind. The sages transmitted the heart/mind and taught the world to be humane. (Hu 1987: 336)

For Hu Hong, the "nature" is the structured completeness of all things as well as the whole potential of human nature, and the heart/mind is the governing principle of the nature as well as the thinking force within each human being. Hence, to "incorporate things" (*tiwu* 體物) means to take all things out of the completeness of the nature which is at one's disposal and to make them subject to oneself. Absolutely central to Hu Hong's thinking is the notion that as soon as there are human beings, then their heart/minds become active. The state when feelings are not yet aroused as described in the introductory paragraph of the *Doctrine of the Mean* exists only in theory. Hence, it is not necessary to concentrate on it. Zhu Xi was deeply concerned with this approach and criticized it severely. He suggested that one should change the word "heart/mind" to "feelings" (*qing* 情) in all the paragraphs concerned (Hu 1987: 336) because for him it was vital to preserve a state of heart/mind which was not aroused. Meditation, a mental practice, served to help man to return to the original state of his nature.

"*Li*" meaning "pattern" or also "norm" is a concept frequently mentioned by Hu Hong. In Chapter 2 Hu Hong says that the Buddhists are egoistic because they want to leave the cycle of death and birth. Just as there is a period of rest in the way of heaven, the life of man naturally (*li*) has a beginning and an end (Hu 1987: 4). Chapter 3 states: "It is normal (*li ye*) that things are born and die. When they are born they become visible because they coalesce. Then they constitute existing [things]. When they die they are dispersed and become invisible. Then they constitute non-existing [things]. Now, that which can be seen because of its being existent or non-existent is the form of things. The norm of things has never had an existence or non-existence" (Hu 1987: 8). What Hu Hong wants to say here is that there is an ideal form—a Platonic idea—a norm or a pattern of a thing which cannot be described in terms of "existent" or "non-existent."

The old meaning of *li* was "order," and as such it was opposed to "chaos" (*luan* 亂). However, in works dealing with *daoxue* terminology the word is often translated as "principle" or "pattern." "*Yili* 義理," a combination which forms the title of Chapter 11 of *Understanding of Words* is often rendered as "moral principle" which, unfortunately, does not accord with Hu Hong's usage. The first sentence of Chapter 11, for example, runs: "Rightness (*yi* 義) and *li* are the nature of the manifold living things. Once rightness presides and *li* is clear, then the manifold living things will come and look up [to the one who rules]" (Hu 1987: 29). It seems reasonable to understand "*li*" here as "order" or "norm."

Yet, before proceeding further, again is necessary to look at Hu Hong's use of the word "*li* 理" as a verb which frequently seems to have a meaning very similar to "*ti* 體." This observation may help us to gain a clearer understanding of the concept. In Chapter 1 he writes:

> The Buddhists make their hearts/minds stable but do not put their affairs in order (*li*). Therefore when hearing their words one has the impression that they should penetrate

> [to the truth], but when checking their behavior [we realize that] they are upside down. Confucians keep their affairs in order and have a limit for their heart/minds. Therefore inwardly they do not fail in self-perfection, and outwardly they do not fail in the perfection of things. They can assist in the process of transformation and nourishment and form a trinity with heaven and earth. (Hu 1987: 3)[20]

The same reproach occurs in Chapter 14: "The Buddhists in secret do not know how to serve heaven whereas in public they do not know how to order (*li*) things" (Hu 1987: 41). Then, only three paragraphs later: "To serve heaven and to order things, this is the great enterprise of a Confucian."

Similarly, in Chapter 5 it is said that the sage harmonizes and orders (*li*) the 10,000 things and that this is why men take him as heaven and earth (Hu 1987: 14); then in Chapter 9 "there is nothing which the one who is humane does not love. Therefore he takes 'this erudition' as his task, orders the 10,000 things and forms a trinity with heaven and earth" (Hu 1987: 25). The third paragraph of Chapter 11 states: "If you place them according to the principle of rightness and obtain order (*li*), then the others will not become disorderly. If you treat them respectfully so that love prevails, the objects [of your treatment] will not strive. If you guard this correctly and enact this evenly then the affairs will not take a rebellious course and the world will be in order." Finally in Chapter 14: "There are three great ones in the empire: The great root, the great incipient, and the great law. . . . The great law is the three bonds. . . . When you enact the great law then you can order the world" (Hu 1987: 42).

Emphasis is also given to the world in the last chapter where Hu Hong says that the hierarchy of officials has to be corrected before the world can be put in order (*li*) and where the sage is said to be a person who as a single man can order the virtuous nature of all other men and bring their striving and struggling to an end (Hu 1987: 44). It is thus evident that in Hu Hong's usage, the verbal meaning of "*li*" is "to order." This verbal meaning should also influence our understanding of "*li*" as a noun. Consider his definition of *li* given in Chapter 11: "理也者，天下之大體也." If we were to adopt conventional terminology this might be rendered as "principle is the great substance of the world." Hu Hong, however, wants to say something radically different from this:

> The one who rules the world must necessarily base himself on norms/order and rightness. Norms are the great structure of the empire. Rightness is the great function of the world. Norms have to be clear and rightness has to be refined. Once the norms are clear, bonds and guidelines can be corrected; once rightness is refined, the scales can be balanced. When bonds and guidelines are corrected and the scales balanced then the ten thousand affairs can be governed, the hundred clans submitted and all within the four seas can be unified. Now, the norms are what is decreed by heaven whereas rightness comes from the heart/mind of man. Heaven's decree is most subtle; the heart/mind of man loves activity.[21] Because [heaven's decree] is subtle it is hard to know, and because

[20] Compare *Zhongyong* (Legge 1879-: 416).

[21] Compare the famous passage on the heart/mind of man and the heart/mind of the right way in the *Book of Documents*: "The mind of man is restless, prone to err; its affinity for the right way is small" (Legge 1861-: 3:61).

> [the heart/mind] is active it can easily run into disorder. For those who want to make apparent what is subtle, as well as for those who want to calm activities, nothing is better than to learn. (Hu 1987: 29)

The paragraph shows that for Hu Hong norms was an abstract category. We have seen above that the "nature of man is the heart/mind." Hence, man has to strive to come as close as possible to the example set by heaven, although only the sage will be able to come into complete accord with it. The primary recipient of this text is the ruler. This is the man who is designated as a "sage" in his appellation, who wants to become a real sage and who wants to put the empire in order. This does, of course, not exclude other readers from practicing on a smaller level what Hu Hong recommends, namely to learn how to become a sage. Learning is demanded because this is the means to quell negative activities arising in any human heart/mind, and the heart/mind is the organ which allows man to come closer to the goal of congruency with the norms set by heaven. This is the rationale behind the famous paragraph about heavenly norms and human desires: "Heavenly norms and human desires are structured in the same way but come into function differently. Although one acts the same way, there are different feelings. The superior man who seeks to improve himself should clearly keep these two apart" (Hu 1987: 329). Hu Hong means that there is an ideal form for how human desires—which belong to human nature—should be enjoyed. Yet, since there is always a human component in them it is very difficult to act in accordance with these norms. Thus, for example a man's love for a woman is perfectly in accordance with his heavenly destined nature, but in this love he may well have egoistic feelings which may lead to problems in his household. These feelings should be removed in order to get closer to the ideal of heavenly norms. Yet, since feelings are natural, this attempt is difficult and can be successful only when man works hard to improve himself. The same statement is made in what has been quoted above already: "Likes and dislikes belong to the nature. The small man likes and dislikes according to himself whereas the superior man likes and dislikes according to the right way. If you look at this then you can understand [the difference between] heavenly norms and human desires" (Hu 1987: 330).

Zhu Xi strongly criticized this understanding of both heavenly norms and human desires. For Zhu, heavenly norms are not, as Hu Hong thought, an abstract ideal that is extremely difficult to approach due to one's inborn human desires. On the contrary, heavenly norms belong to man's inborn nature whereas human desires develop only due to the negative effects of inappropriate socialization, bad habituation, or physical problems such as an imbalanced mixture of *qi* (Hu 1987: 329). Therefore, when commenting on Hu Hong's remarks about likes and dislikes belonging to nature, he wrote:

> This paragraph precisely has the meaning that the nature is neither good nor bad. Should that be the case, then the nature would just dispose of likes and dislikes and have no models for good and bad. . .. When Master Yang [Shi] from Turtle-Mountain (Guishan 龜山, Yang Shi's courtesy name) said: "Heaven's decree is the nature, and human desires are not the nature" he pertinently hit upon the meaning of [a line from

> the *Odes*, quoted before, concerning the virtuous nature of human disposition]. Yet, Master Hu refuted it. He was mistaken! (Hu 1987: 330)

There are several more passages in which Hu Hong praises heavenly norms. In Chapter 10, for example, he calls the *Annals* the best source by which to purify human desires and re-establish heavenly norms (Hu 1987: 28). Interestingly, many of the relevant passages are concerned with the political structure of the world such as in Chapter 14 where the absence of heavenly norms is said to provoke the invasion of barbarians (Hu 1987: 42) or in Chapter 15 where the bestowal of fiefs is called the means by which emperors and kings obeyed heavenly norms (Hu 1987: 47). "Heavenly norms" here seems to mean good social practice.

It has already been mentioned that Hu Hong strongly emphasized the ultimate goal of forming a trinity with heaven and earth, to be achieved only when all things are put in order. The superior man is a person who does not himself act but in whose realm all things nevertheless get their appropriate lot (各當其分) (Hu 1987: 3). This is according to Hu Hong's interpretation what was meant by the famous saying 2.4 from the *Analects*. There Confucius is said to have known heavenly destiny at the age of fifty: at this time he was able to "flow together with the 10,000 things and to place them in such a way that each one got its lot" (與萬物同流，處之各得其分也) (Hu 1987: 32). Again, there is a clear connection to politics. In Chapter 3 (Hu 1987: 8) Hu Hong says that a situation in which each man finds his place (各得其所) can be reached only when the well-field system is reenacted. In Chapter 8 he says that when "the sage puts the empire in order his ultimate goal is to let the 10,000 things each find its place; for this, the well-field system and the bestowal of fiefs are the great law" (Hu 1987: 21). Chapter 5 relates the correct use of institutions and punishments as the means by which the sage harmonizes and orders the 10,000 things and lets them each find their place. "This is a situation which men take as their heaven and earth" (Hu 1987: 14). The culmination of this argument is to be found in Chapter 14 of *Understanding of Words*:

> The one who wants to cultivate himself and pacify the empire first has to know heaven. The one who wants to know heaven, first has to recognize the heart/mind. The one who wants to recognize the heart/mind first has to recognize the creative force (*qian* 乾). The creative force is the nature and feeling of heaven. The way of the creative force changes and transforms and has, for each case, the correct nature and decree. This is why the decree never stops, why nature never is one, and why the ten thousand things are different in ten thousand ways. As for the nature of the ten thousand, each has its own lot (各有分) as far as its movement, engendering power, size, or height is concerned. If he follows their nature and does not disturb them with his desires, then there will be not a single thing which does not find its place (不得其所). Who but the one who knows the right way is able to recognize this? Therefore the sage obeys the nature of the ten thousand things, he treats the five social arrangements with generosity, he harmonizes the five ceremonies, he decorates the five uniforms, and he uses the five punishments.[22] There are differences between the worthy and the stupid; there are [different]

[22] *Book of Documents* (Legge 1861-: 3:73–74).

> relationships for those who are close and those who are distant; there is a sequence for the noble and the humble and a hierarchy for high and low; and there is a balance for light and heavy. He incorporates the ten thousand things and enlightens them so that each finds its appropriate function (當其用) and not one single object is left out. We may call the teaching of the sage excellent, indeed! (Hu 1987: 41)

Hu Hong apparently understood the world as a system which had been brought into disorder because of moral failure. His idea was that the old world order could be recovered by introducing conservative reforms. The well-field system and the awarding of fiefs are subjects that frequently show up in his treatise and in his other writings. Most probably the fact that Hu Hong stressed these topics so much was a reaction to the practical problems which Hu Hong and his family had encountered after the turmoil created by the invasion of the Jurchen. The land where the Hu had settled was lost and it seems that the distribution of landed property in the territory near the border with the Jurchen was chaotic.[23]

This may be the practical background for Hu Hong's appeal to order and for his attempt to give a proper place in society to every human being. The order of the world was *li*, and although every single thing in this world had an ideal *li* form it seems that *norms* for Hu Hong were first of all a set of several elements of moral behavior coupled with ancient institutional patterns which, according to Hu Hong, had to be reenacted. Learning from *Understanding of Words* one could ultimately be able to reestablish an ideal form of society the loss of which had taken place much earlier than at the time of the Song.

Conclusion

Maybe it is surprising to find that the treatise *Understanding of Words* is predominantly concerned with order and not with metaphysical principles. However to achieve this order philosophical premises must first be established. Order evolves out of individual human beings who are able to structure and to order their surroundings. To collect things, to incorporate and order them so that each one can find its appropriate place—this is what to be humane means, and this is also what finally constitutes true knowledge. To achieve this goal man has to train his heart by learning. Only then will he be able to form a trinity with heaven and earth. Zhu Xi disapproved of the idea that in order to act humanely one first had to study and to recognize the structure of humaneness (Hu 1987: 335). He thought that humaneness was already an inherent aspect of human nature. Hu Hong, however, was convinced that the central task of man was to use his heart/mind and to learn before he could act in a humane way.

The first and most important addressee of what is outlined in *Understanding of Words* is the ruler. He is the one who is asked to improve his heart/mind. Of course, other men are invited to do the same—and it is clear that Hu Hong must

[23] I have dealt with this problem in van Ess (2003a: 281–286).

have taught ordinary students because he was aware of the fact that the emperor was not within his reach. Yet, it is clear that in order to make Hu Hong's philosophical system work, one at least had to have things, subjects, or simply other people at one's disposal. Thus, his concept of humaneness was particularly suitable to heads of clans, or to those who, as he stressed several times, should be enfeoffed in order to stabilize the territory. The overall concern of *Understanding of Words* was to stabilize a land which was in disarray. The establishment of feudal lords is recommended several times, especially in the latter part of the text. With the help of this group of people Hu Hong wanted his dynasty to strengthen the state and recover the lost homeland of his father and of Chinese civilization.

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