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Buddhism and Zhu Xi's Epistemology

Stephen C. Angle, *Wesleyan University*



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Buddhism and Zhu Xi's Epistemology of Discernment¹

Stephen C. Angle, Wesleyan University

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1. Introduction

There are at least superficial reasons for thinking that Zhu Xi's epistemology² is significantly influenced by Chinese Buddhism. For one thing, in his youth Zhu studied with Kaishan Daoqian 開善道謙 (d. 1150?), a leading disciple of the most influential Chan teacher of the era, Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163).³ For another, his discussions of epistemology lean heavily on terms like “genuine knowing 真知” that also figure significantly in Buddhist discussions. As is well known, subsequent critics of the Daoxue

¹ The meetings and intensive discussions made possible by the “Buddhist Roots of Neo-Confucianism” project have been examples of collaborative scholarship at its best. I have learned a great deal, and trust that the essay is much better than it would have been without the sustained input of all participants. I must single out John Makeham for having the inspiration and leadership skills that made it happen. In addition, our work on the “Buddhist Roots” project has overlapped with the period that Justin Tiwald and I co-wrote *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction*, and so everything that I say here is doubly indebted to work with Justin; indeed, much of Section 4 on Zhu Xi derives directly from an understanding of Zhu Xi that we worked out together.

² Although borrowing the term “epistemology” from the history of Western philosophy, I use it simply to mean “theories related to knowing,” where “knowing” is intended very broadly. As we will see, Zhu Xi's theories of knowing (*zhi* 知) emphasize the cultivation of a kind of discernment-in-action rather than the status of cognitive beliefs (as is more common in many strands of the Western tradition).

³ See, for example, Zhu's “*Ji Kaishan Qian Chanshi Wen* 祭開善謙禪師文 [Sacrificial Essay for Chan Master Kaishan Qian]” in *Zhu Xi Ji* 朱熹集 [Collected Works of Zhu Xi] (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), v.9, 5698. I owe this reference, and much that I have learned about Zhu's relations with his contemporary Buddhists, to the published work, unpublished conference presentations, and generosity in correspondence of Ari Borrell.

movement⁴ with which Zhu was centrally associated regularly accused it of being strongly colored by Buddhism. Finally, modern scholars have also drawn similar connections, whether of a general nature or more focused on Zhu Xi and epistemology.⁵ The present essay explores the relation between Buddhism and Zhu's epistemology in three steps. First, I will spell out the four layers of Buddhist–Confucian interactions that collectively shape the ways in which Zhu was influenced by and reacted to Buddhism. Second, I will summarize distinct Chinese Buddhist approaches to the question of “knowing 知” and look in particular at the roles played in these different approaches by epistemic terms and categories that will eventually be important to Zhu Xi. Finally, I will spell out the rough parameters of what I call Zhu's epistemology of discernment so that we can look for specific ways in which Zhu is appropriating and, more explicitly, rejecting particular aspects of Buddhist epistemic thinking. My conclusion is that despite the many layers of Buddhist influence on both Daoxue in general and Zhu Xi in particular, Zhu correctly understood his epistemology to be a rejection of Dahui's radical Chan approach. More generally, Zhu Xi's epistemology does not coopt the Buddhist structure seen, for example, in the Buddhist Zongmi, but is importantly different, responding to a distinct discourse

⁴ The breadth and definition of the “Daoxue” (literally, Learning of the Way) movement changes over time. Initially a loose fellowship that was often at odds with the court in the Northern and Southern Song, by the Yuan and Ming dynasties it was used in official discourse to designate Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. Many scholars equate one or another meaning of Daoxue with “Neo-Confucianism,” though I prefer to reserve this latter term for a broader group, including critics of Daoxue. For discussion, see Stephen C. Angle and Justin Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity, 2017), chapter 1.

⁵ See Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 2002); and Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-Mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

context which, while getting some of its underlying shape from the shared discourse, has quite distinct concerns and goals.⁶

2. Four Layers

As has already been explained in the Introduction to this volume, scholars have long debated the relationship between Sinitic Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, with positions ranging from those minimizing or even denying significant influence of Buddhism on Neo-Confucianism, to those viewing both Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism as emerging from shared problematemes, to those emphasizing the creativity of Buddhism and the appropriation of these frameworks by Neo-Confucianism. The argument of the present essay is that such generalizations are over-simplified in two different ways. First, as I will argue in the balance of this section, the interactions among various forms of Sinitic Buddhism and various forms of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism need to be analytically distinguished into (at least) four layers; once we make these distinctions, we can begin to identify the kernels of truth in most of the above generalizations. Second, even with these four layers in mind, it is still not the case that Buddhism ever influences Neo-Confucianism—or even a given Neo-Confucian thinker, such as Zhu Xi—*en bloc*. Rather, we

⁶ I thus believe that John Jorgenson overstates what his evidence shows when he concludes, in his essay in this volume, that “Daoxue, especially that of Zhu Xi, was a kind of Confucian ‘Northern Chan.’” For a stance that bears some similarities to mine, see Broughton’s dissent from the significance of structural parallels between Zongmi and Zhu Xi, in Jeffrey Lyle Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). Douglas Berger’s recent *Encounters of Mind: Luminosity and Personhood in Indian and Chinese Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015) emphasizes many continuities between Sinitic Buddhist views of the “luminous mind” and those of Neo-Confucians like Zhu Xi, but he specifically notes a crucial way that Zhu Xi’s epistemology differs from the Buddhists: “Neo-Confucian philosophers remain faithful to the roots of their tradition in an important way, for awareness [*zhi* 知] can really only be found in physical bodies and its qualities depend on the specific circumstances of those bodies.” See Berger, *Encounters of Mind*, 159.

must attend to more specific questions and contexts. I take this latter point to be one of the central contributions of the present volume, the chapters of which argue for somewhat different conclusions with regard to different sets of issues. This is not to say that we are all, in the end, entirely in agreement about the complex relations between Buddhism and Zhu Xi's thought, but there is more agreement than may be obvious at first, because Zhu makes different use of Buddhist terms, models, and arguments in different areas of his philosophizing. I argue here that the resemblances between his epistemic thinking and that of relevant Sinitic Buddhists is more superficial than real, but this conclusion is not meant to apply (at least, without detailed analysis and argument) to other areas.

Let us now take a brief journey through the four layers of Buddhist-Confucian relations. The growth and change of Buddhism in China includes many aspects, from initial efforts at translation and explication, to the maturation of translations and sophisticated scholastic engagement with the translated texts, to the composition of apocryphal sutras and the eventual emergence of Sinitic schools of Buddhist thought and practice. For present purposes, all of this diversity and change counts as a single layer of Buddhist-Confucian interaction. This first layer focuses on what happened within the texts and traditions of Buddhism in China. I have in mind major trends like the emerging centrality of "Buddha nature," the role given to a metaphysical "heartmind," and the attention paid to holism and intersubjectivity. There are of course detailed histories associated with each of these developments, and none of them can be seen simply or primarily as the influence of Confucianism on Buddhism; among other things, it is often other aspects of Chinese

intellectual traditions that are playing more of a formative role.⁷ But my focus with this first, capacious layer—an analytical rather than purely chronological concept—is on developments within Buddhism in response to its new environment. For our purposes, the main significance of this layer is that these developments within Buddhism set the stage for more fluid engagement between the Sinified strands of Buddhism and native Chinese traditions.

The second layer is the gradual articulation of a shared Confucian-Buddhist-Daoist intellectual discourse in the Tang dynasty. What I mean is that a range of key terms, phrases, and texts become common property of Tang dynasty thinkers with many different formal or informal affiliations. Both monks and lay Buddhists contribute to this process, as do literati with varying degrees of identification with the Confucian tradition, not to mention scholars and practitioners explicitly associated with Daoism. A key dimension to the emergence of this shared discourse is the engagement of Buddhists and Daoists with texts like the *Yi Jing* 易經 and *Zhong Yong* 中庸, and even with still-more-explicitly Confucian texts like *Mengzi* 孟子. It is also fascinating to see the ways in which loaded phrases like “fully explore Pattern and fully realize nature 窮理盡性”—originally from the *Shuo Gua* 說卦 commentary to the *Yi Jing*—come to be deployed in many different ways.⁸ There is some debate over how we should characterize this discourse. Some call it “syncretistic,”⁹ but David Tien draws on recent scholarship in religious studies to argue that it is better to speak of repertoires and resources rather than (essentialized) religions

⁷ For example, Ziporyn convincingly portrays Huayan and Tiantai Buddhism as partly shaped by their engagement with the lengthy Chinese concern with “coherence” in both ironic and non-ironic varieties. See Brook Ziporyn, *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents* (Albany: SUNY, 2013).

⁸ Charles Hartman, *Han Yu and the Tang Search for Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 192.

⁹ T. H. Barrett, *Li Ao: Buddhist, Taoist, Or Neo-Confucian?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 136-7.

that are combined in a syncretism.¹⁰ Uniquely situated individuals build and wield their own repertoires from shared resources. Seunghak Koh offers a window on the process, analyzing the ways that lay Buddhist Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635-730) shaped the Huayan tradition in the direction of taking seriously native texts.¹¹ Barrett's study of Li Ao 李翱 (772-841) is another nice illustration of this process, this time from a more Confucian perspective. Barrett emphasizes Li's situatedness and need to communicate with particular audiences, writing that for the decade and a half prior to composing his most famous work, Li was "dominated by a search for patronage in a dangerous world amongst men whose intellectual interests were colored much more by Buddhism and Daoism than by a concern for the type of Confucianism espoused by Li himself."¹² At the same time, Li also hoped to combat some features of what I am calling the "shared discourse," by reversing the existing polysemy and establishing true (original, supposedly) meanings.¹³

The dynamic shaping of a shared discourse does not end with the Tang; consider, for example, the commentaries on the *Zhong Yong* by Song dynasty Tiantai monk Gushan Zhiyuan 孤山智圓 (976-1022) and the Chan monk Mingjiao Qisong 明教契嵩 (1007-72).¹⁴ But as we turn to the Northern Song, a distinctive third layer needs to be added to the

¹⁰ David W. Tien, "Discursive Resources and Collapsing Polarities: The Religious Thought of Tang Dynasty Scholar-Officials" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009). Tien's sources include Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Robert F. Campany, "On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," *History of Religions* 42, no. 4 (2003): 287-319.

¹¹ Seunghak Koh, "Li Tongxuan's (635-730) Thought and His Place in the Huayan Tradition of Chinese Buddhism" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2011).

¹² Barrett, *Li Ao*, 82.

¹³ Barrett, *Li Ao*, 136.

¹⁴ For the important role of Zhiyuan, see Appendix Two in John Makeham's contribution to this volume, as well as the references cited therein. For Qisong, some sources include: Shiling Xiang, "Between Mind and Trace—A Research into the Theories on Xin 心 (Mind) of Early Song Confucianism and Buddhism," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 6 (2011): 173-92; Elizabeth Morrison, *Power of Patriarchs: Qisong and Lineage in Chinese Buddhism* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

picture: namely, the explicit engagement with Buddhism by early advocates of Daoxue, especially the Cheng brothers and their students. This layer of Buddhist-Confucian encounter would not have been possible without the prior two layers. When we observe that early Daoxue figures both appropriate key ideas, terms, and interpretations from Buddhism, and yet simultaneously criticize Buddhism, I propose that we see this as early Daoxue Confucianism, itself having been shaped by layers one and two, now simultaneously (in layer three) engaging in self-conscious reflection on the varying commitments, both theoretical and practical, of diverse approaches to Confucianism and Buddhism. The results of these reflections are themselves varied. We need to keep clearly in mind that neither “Confucianism” (or “Daoxue Confucianism”) nor “Buddhism” represent single, well-defined bodies of theory. Depending on the topic and on whether the focus is on Buddhist practice, scripture, or treatise, a given Daoxue thinker might criticize, endorse, or silently (and often unconsciously, thanks to the pre-existing shared discourse) adopt a Buddhist position.

Layer three is multi-faceted, but of particular importance for our purposes are two strands: the ambiguous role of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107)—one of the main founders of Daoxue—and the more unambiguously positive *rapprochement* with Buddhism in Cheng’s students Ye Shi 葉適(1150-1223) and Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 (1092 – 1159). Looking first at Cheng Yi, one key issue concerns the degree to which knowing can be an exclusively internal process. Cheng Yi was explicit that there is a difference between Confucian and Buddhist views. For example, he said that Confucian “sages base themselves on the cosmos,

while the Buddhists base themselves on the heartmind 聖人本天，釋氏本心。¹⁵ But just how external or objective does knowing have to be? In the terms popular at the time, must it involve “sensory knowing (*wenjian zhi zhi* 聞見之知),” or can it be entirely “virtuous nature knowing (*dexing zhi zhi* 德性之知)?¹⁶ Cheng Yi famously emphasized the role in human moral development of the “investigation of things (*gewu* 格物).” In one passage, the examples of *gewu* that he lists—reflecting on book learning, handling things and affairs, and so on—all sound like external matters that would have been categorized as sensory knowing. That is, the activity that Cheng is calling for would seem to rely on a discrimination between external object and a knowing, reflecting subject.

And yet if we look further at what Cheng Yi and his brother Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085) say, we will see that things are not so straightforward, in two distinct ways.¹⁷ First, the Chengs sometimes assert that one must investigate multiple instances of Pattern, and sometimes say that the Pattern of one single thing or event will suffice.¹⁸ Second and even more consequentially, it is ambiguous whether the investigation of things is primarily

¹⁵ Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, *Henan Chengshi Yishu* 《河南程氏遺書》 (*The Extant Works of the Chengs of Henan*). I cite this text as follows: “YS” plus the *juan* number / page number from Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, *Er Cheng Ji* 《二程集》 [*Collected Works of the Cheng Brothers*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981). YS 21b/274.

¹⁶ For more context of this debate, see Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism*, chapter 5.

¹⁷ I draw here on the insightful analysis of Ari Borrell, “*Ko-Wu Or Kung-an? Practice, Realization, and Teaching in the Thought of Chang Chiu-Ch’eng*,” in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, and Daniel A. Getz Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 62-108.

¹⁸ Here are two contrasting statements by Cheng Yi: “Even Yan Hui would not have been able to investigate only a single thing and thoroughly grasp the myriad Patterns. One must investigate one item today and another tomorrow. When one has practiced this extensively, there will naturally occur a thorough understanding like a sudden release. 若只格一物便通眾理，雖顏子亦不敢如此道。須是今日格一件，明日又格一件，積習既多，然後脫然自有貫通處。” (YS 18/189; translation from Borrell, “*Ko-Wu*,” 66, modified); and “To investigate things in order to exhaustively attain Pattern does not mean that it is necessary to investigate all things in the world. One has only to fully investigate the Pattern in one thing or one event, and the Pattern in other things and events can be then be inferred.... Pattern can be exhaustively attained [in this way] because all things share the same Pattern. 格物窮理，非是要盡窮天下之物，但於一事上窮盡，其他可以類推。。。。所以能窮者，只為萬物皆是一理。” (YS 15/156; trans from Borrell, “*Ko-Wu*,” 67, modified).

focused on “things” that are external to or internal to the self. At one point, one of the Chengs¹⁹ is asked, “Does the investigation of things refer to external things or to distinct things in the nature?” He replies: “It makes no difference. Whatever is before the eye is a thing, and all things have Pattern. For example, that by which fire is hot, that by which water is cold, and even including the relations between ruler and minister or between father and so: all are Pattern. 問：「格物是外物，是性分中物？」曰：「不拘。凡眼前無非是物，物物皆有理。如火之所以熱，水之所以寒，至於君臣父子間皆是理。」”²⁰

Although the examples here look like external things or affairs, we now see that the Chengs allow for a very different kind of inward-oriented practice, either focused on the one single Pattern that is our nature, or even focused on distinct things and Patterns within the nature, as suggested in the most recent passage we examined.²¹

If the Chengs are ambiguous about whether external, sensory knowing must be part of the investigation of things, several of their most influential followers are not. For Yang Shi 楊時 (1053-1135) and Zhang Jiucheng, the only kind of knowing that really matters is strictly internal. Yang particularly emphasized the role of “quiet sitting” in helping one to “embody with the heartmind [the state] before the feelings...are aroused; then the meaning of equilibrium will appear of itself.”²² Zhang Jiucheng, who was Yang’s student and also a close correspondent and political ally of Dahui (the leading Chan Buddhist teacher of the

¹⁹ In the Cheng brothers’ recorded sayings, some passages or whole chapters are identified with one or another brother, but in other sections, which brother is the speaker is left unclear.

²⁰ YS 2A/247; translation from A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers* (La Salle: Open Court, 1992), 75, slightly modified.

²¹ To forestall the possibility that readers will take the inner-oriented kind of investigation of things to be solely associated with Cheng Hao, here is a passage unambiguously identified with Cheng Yi: “To learn them from what is outside, and grasp them within, is called “understanding.” To grasp them from what is within, and connect them with outside things, is called “sincerity.” Sincerity and understanding are one. 自其外者學之，而得於內者，謂之明。自其內者得之，而兼於外者，謂之誠。誠與明一也。” YS 25/317; translation from Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, 75, slightly modified.

²² Quoted in Borrell, “*Ko-Wu*,” 68.

era), adjusted Yang's teachings by removing the emphasis on "quiet sitting," but the internal focus of knowing is equally explicit.²³ For Zhang, the key is to be ever vigilant and watchful over one's "unseen and unheard" inner nature; he repeatedly uses the classical phrase "cautious and apprehensive" to express this idea. For example:

If a gentleman wishes to seek the essence of the *Zhong Yong*, he must get the taste of it through being cautious over what is unseen and apprehensive over what is unheard. This is the basis for knowing equilibrium. If one cannot hold to this method...it is as if one were to eat and drink all day yet never know the taste. To know the taste of it you will have to become thoroughly immersed and drenched in what is unseen and unheard.²⁴

君子欲求中庸，要當於戒慎不睹恐懼不聞中。得味則識中之本矣。若夫不能守此法而用意過當與夫一去一入而欲求中，是猶終日飲食而不知味也。味乎當優游涵游於不睹不聞時可也。

Elsewhere he says that the important types of knowing all come down to "being cautious over what is unseen and apprehensive over what is unheard. If one does not practice this, it will be like duckweed adrift on the water, drifting with the wind to the north or south; where will one anchor oneself? 戒慎不睹恐懼不聞。 。 。 。 學者不於此入，則泛然如萍之在水，逢風南北，有何所寄泊乎"²⁵ Junghwan Lee nicely sums up Zhang's exclusive focus on inner "nature knowing": "Within Zhang's framework, neither moral judgments nor practical knowledge belong to the realm of ordinary human knowledge, but must arise as

²³ Borrell suggests a parallel to Dahui's resistance to silent illumination Chan. See Borrell, "Ko-Wu," 7.

²⁴ Zhang, *Zhongyong Shuo* 1:6b-7a. Translation from Borrell, "Ko-Wu," 70, modified.

²⁵ Zhang, *Zhongyong Shuo* 3:11a-b. Translation based on Junghwan Lee, "A Groundwork for Normative Unity: Zhu Xi's Reformulation of the 'Learning of the Way' Tradition" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008), 105, modified.

the spontaneous manifestation of one's nature."²⁶ Zhang was well aware of certain similarities between his views and those of his contemporary Buddhists (like Dahui), writing at one point that "Buddhists are suspiciously near to [getting things right] 释氏疑近之矣." However, this insight ends up leading the Buddhists astray because they take the wrong view of in what the inner nature consists, such that they "lack the great functions to flourish 無數榮之大用."²⁷ By this, he means that Buddhists take the moral vitality of the inner nature to be a delusion, and therefore suppress its inherent tendency to manifest itself through moral action.²⁸

In short, layer three is a complex and contested mix of positions, as Daoxue thinkers work to make explicit the relation of their teachings to what they understand as Buddhism. Layer four, finally, is Zhu Xi's own experience with Buddhism. As I noted at the outset, he studied with the Chan monk Daoqian and corresponded with Daoqian's teacher Dahui. Through these connections Zhu had at least indirect access, and often direct access, to key Buddhist texts and ideas. A review of Zhu's language in his *Classified Conversations* shows many instances of Zhu quoting or simply employing Buddhist terms, similes, or examples.²⁹ However, one of main contentions in this essay is that it is wrong to think that Zhu's own extended encounter with Buddhism is what makes his thought look so Buddhist—whether superficially so, as I will argue in the case of his epistemic thought, and perhaps more deeply so in other areas. His own experiences play a minor role: the main action is in the

²⁶ Lee, "A Groundwork for Normative Unity," 104.

²⁷ Quoted in Lee, "A Groundwork for Normative Unity," 125-6.

²⁸ Given that Zhang found Dahui to be an activist-oriented political ally, it is likely that he saw Dahui's version of Buddhism as less prone to this failing than more traditional forms of Buddhism.

²⁹ For some details, see John Jorgenson's paper in this volume.

previous three layers.³⁰ Finally, it has been plausibly argued that Zhu Xi was concerned that, as John Jorgenson puts it in this volume, “Dahui was undermining support among the educated gentry for Daoxue or more broadly for Confucianism.” I agree that this provides Zhu with a motive to criticize Buddhism. I want to insist, though, that we also pay attention to the details of Zhu’s philosophical reasoning. As I show in this essay, an important reason that Zhu is concerned about Buddhist influence is that he has principled, philosophical reasons to believe that key aspects of Buddhist teachings are wrong and indeed pernicious. He is not simply defending his turf: he takes himself to be defending the moral and psychological health of his compatriots and his society.

Before moving on I should make clear that these layers are not meant always to be chronologically distinct, and sometimes the same rhetorical action may be interpretable in more than one way. Also, the specific way that I have formulated the layers is aimed at understanding Zhu Xi: with another target, the layers would be somewhat different. Still, I claim that the general distinction into four layers is both true to our evidence and analytically useful when it comes to understanding Zhu Xi’s epistemology of discernment.

3. Chinese Buddhist Approaches to Knowing

The central goal of all forms of Buddhism is soteriological, not epistemic. That is, rather than learning something or knowing something, what we need is to awaken, be

³⁰ In conversation, Dan Lusthaus dissented from this stance, arguing instead that Zhu’s personal commitment to Buddhism ran deeper than I acknowledge, and that once Zhu officially abandoned Buddhism, he suffered from a kind of “convert’s guilt” that colors his writing and thought, and largely explains his many criticisms of Buddhism (even while he retains essentially Buddhist views in many areas). I believe that the whole body of evidence is better explained along the lines I offer in the present essay; and see also Justin Tiwald’s essay in this volume, which unpacks the philosophical motivations behind Zhu’s many criticisms of Buddhism.

enlightened, transform. Nonetheless, Buddhist schools engage in extensive discussion of knowing, understanding, perception, and the like. It is helpful to think about these uses of epistemic language as falling into three types: the problematic, the useful, and the genuine. I will begin by sketching these three categories before looking in more depth at three examples of Chinese Buddhist epistemology in which we can see these various ideas of knowing in context.

Regular, empirical, conceptually-articulated perceiving is often seen as a problem. To rely on it is to assume a mistaken view of our reality that must be overcome for enlightenment to be possible. For example, the hugely influential *Awakening of Faith* treatise reads as follows:

In cultivating calming, reside in a quiet place and sit erect; correctly focus your intentions; do not dwell on the breath; ...do not dwell on visual or auditory perceptions (*juezhi* 覺知). Remove all thoughts as they arise in conceptualization...

若修止者，住於靜處端坐正意，不依氣息。。。，乃至不依見聞覺知。一切諸想隨念皆除。。。³¹

Second, we also see the view that conceptually articulated knowing is a useful part of the process of awakening. For Indian and early Chinese Yogācāra philosophers, in particular, sophisticated logical and epistemic theories were seen as instrumental to ultimate enlightenment.³² The idea that various kinds of knowing or understanding can be useful—can serve as *upāya*, expedient means—is quite common. For example, the *Awakening of Faith* makes the point that knowing one's capacity for enlightenment is like knowing the

³¹ T32.1666.0582a06.

³² Lin Chen-kuo, "Truth and Method in the Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37, no. 2 (2010): 261-75.

capacity of wood to burn. “If someone fails to recognize (*zhi*) [the inherent combustibility of wood] and fails to employ the necessary means, then it will be impossible for that person to burn the wood 若無人知，不假方便能自燒木，無有是處。”³³

Finally, many theorists use one or more terms to express ideas of genuine, unproblematic knowing. In *Awakening of Faith* this is sometimes indicated simply with *zhi* 知, as in “the Tathāgatas alone are aware of (*zhi*) all about this 唯如來能知故。”³⁴ We also find special terms used to mark genuine knowing, such as “truly know *shizhi* 實知” in *Awakening of Faith* and “genuine knowing *zhenzhi* 真知” in other texts.³⁵ For example, in the *Platform Sutra* we are told that when there are “no objects that one knows [conceptually, as distinct from one another], that is called ‘genuine knowing’ 無一物可知，是名真知。”³⁶ The use of “genuine knowing” in this regard is a nice example of the first layer discussed above, since this term comes from the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* 莊子.³⁷ It will also be relevant to our later discussion of Zhu Xi to keep in mind that the term “*jue* 覺” is often used by Chinese Buddhists in the sense of “awakened,” and thus as a synonym for “enlightened *wu* 悟,” as when the *Awakening of Faith* asserts that we are all “inherently awake *benjue* 本覺,”³⁸ but it is also frequently used to mean “sense” or “perceive,” in which case it is more likely to be problematic or at most useful.

³³ T32.1666.0578b30. I appreciate John Makeham’s assistance with this passage.

³⁴ T32.1666.0578b30.

³⁵ T32.1666.0579b13. “Why? It means that this is because they know that, according to the way things truly are, all sentient beings, and they themselves, are true suchness, equal and without differences. 此以何義？謂如實知一切眾生及與己身真如平等無別異故。” John Makeham suggested this translation.

³⁶ T48.n2008.0356b23.

³⁷ See *Zhuangzi* 6.

³⁸ T32.1666.0576a24.

With these three ways of thinking about “knowing” in mind, let us turn now to more detailed examination of their uses in specific contexts. The *Buddha Nature Treatise* is an interesting example of relying on the idea of *upaya* or expedient means, according to which many teachings can be seen as not wholly or absolutely true, but soteriologically useful.³⁹ As Sallie King stresses, the *Buddha Nature Treatise* opens with the words, “Why did the Buddha speak of Buddha nature? 佛何因緣說於佛性.”⁴⁰ Employing semantic ascent allows the text’s author to bracket questions of the ontology of Buddha nature and to focus instead on the positive effects that the idea can have on us. And when the author turns to a more careful consideration of what Buddha nature “is,” it turns out to be more accurately described as something we “do”: a potential that all people have that can be realized only via soteriological action.⁴¹ King writes that the reality of our Buddha nature “is known by its functions: purification of the [deluded] nature, liberation, and the cultivation of all virtues.”⁴² She expresses a similar idea thus:

The identity between person and Buddha is constituted by their shared Buddha nature; this identity serves to encourage practice by virtue of its optimism. The difference between person and Buddha also is constituted by Buddha nature—the

³⁹ There is considerable scholarly debate over how central the *Buddha Nature Treatise* is to the discourse over Buddha nature in China. I use the text here as a way of introducing one of the distinctive Buddhist approaches to knowing, which I think it does quite nicely, whether or not this formulation of that view was historically influential.

⁴⁰ T31.1610.787a; cp. Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 29.

⁴¹ In conversation, Brook Ziporyn has emphasized the philosophical significance of the idea of potential. “Potential” as neither being nor nonbeing is an important feature of Aristotle’s philosophy, whereas Nagarjuna’s influential dialectic depends on there being no third possibility beyond being and nonbeing, and “potential” as a third option seems not to have been conceptualized in China prior to Sinitic Buddhism’s elaboration of the Buddha nature idea.

⁴² King, *Buddha Nature*, 48.

degree to which each *makes real* in practice his or her own Buddha nature.... You are Buddha, but you are not Buddha unless you practice.⁴³

The text makes clear that Buddha nature neither “exists (*you*)” nor “nonexists (*wu*).” King argues, therefore, that when the text says that “Buddha nature most assuredly inherently exists (*ben you* 本有),” the author is seeking a way of signaling the conceptual insufficiency of both existence and nonexistence to capture the status of Buddha nature.⁴⁴ Unlike trees or stones, “Buddha nature is not a thing in the world. Rather, as a term, it serves to affirm the potential of all sentient being to realize Buddhahood.”⁴⁵

We might wonder what our basis is for such an affirmation—a kind of knowing—of Buddha nature. Where does this optimism come from? And what, after all, does it mean to know and realize Buddhahood? By analyzing the text’s use of positive terms like *nirvāna* and *dharmakāya* (which refers here to the fruition of Buddha nature⁴⁶), King argues that the text’s stance is “pragmatic”: we know that Buddha nature “inherently exists” and thus we should be optimistic about our prospects for spiritual progress *because it works*. The text says:

If the *dharmakāya* were nonexistent, then all correct practices should be in vain. Taking right views as the foremost practice, and including in addition such good things as morality, concentration, and wisdom, the correct practices that one cultivates are not empty or fruitless. Because these correct practices do yield fruit, we know (*zhi*) that *dharmakāya* is not nonexistent.⁴⁷

⁴³ King, *Buddha Nature*, 82.

⁴⁴ King translates *ben you* as “aboriginally exists”; I have modified this to “inherently exists.”

⁴⁵ King, *Buddha Nature*, 34.

⁴⁶ King, *Buddha Nature*, 61.

⁴⁷ T31.1610.804a; King, *Buddha Nature*, 66.

若法身無者。則諸正行皆應空失。以正見為先行。攝戒定慧等善法故。所修正行不空無果。由此正行能得果故。故知法身非無。

The pragmatic approach is connected to the idea that one's actual, conditioned "faithful joy" in engaging in Buddhist practice is a crucial cause of one's attaining Buddhahood; as King says, one "intentionally engag[es] in specific acts chosen because they promise to lead one to the desired goal, acts tested by tradition and found to be effective to that end."⁴⁸ This does not mean that we have to accept that Buddha nature is only a "metaphor for the validity of the Buddha Way"; as King also emphasizes, Buddha nature is simultaneously seen as the fully "unconditioned," and thus the "true cause nature" that is "completed" by practice.⁴⁹ Still, the text resists reifying this "nature" in an ontological fashion. King convincingly shows that we are given neither a monism nor a dualism, but a "nondualism" that denies that things are separate, and also refuses to reduce them to any single principle. In the end, then, we know Buddha nature through implementing the practice that Buddhist tradition has "promised" will be effective.

Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780-841) also avoids reifying the nature as a distinct, self-existing entity, and of course he, too, accepts the idea that Buddhist teachings make important use of the idea of *upaya*. But he differs from the *Buddha Nature Treatise* in endeavoring to provide a more substantive account of fundamental knowing. In Zongmi's day there was a wide range of approaches to both Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist practice. Zongmi saw himself as both developing the Huayan doctrinal tradition and intervening in Chan theory and practice. He was worried about some of the more radical developments

⁴⁸ King, *Buddha Nature*, 127.

⁴⁹ King, *Buddha Nature*, 67 and 127.

within Chan which, it seemed to him, erased the distinction between the essence or ground of the nature and its myriad manifestations. As a result, according to such views, there is only one kind of functioning; “greed, anger, and folly, the performance of good and bad actions and the experiencing of their pleasurable and painful consequences, are all, in their entirety, Buddha nature.”⁵⁰ (We will look at an example of such “radical” Chan approaches to knowing a little later.) To the contrary, Zongmi holds that while the inherent reality and manifest function (*ti* 體 and *yong* 用)⁵¹ of Buddha nature are “different aspects of the same reality, they are nevertheless different,” and this difference “is important, because the essence...is the basis on which the experience of enlightenment is to be validated.”⁵² In keeping with the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition, Zongmi believes that the nature itself can be characterized as having various positive qualities (such as “permanence,” “steadfastness,” “bliss,” and “purity”);⁵³ apprehending this nature is thus crucial for genuine enlightenment, whereas the radicals risk mistaking their arbitrary, conditioned feelings for actual enlightenment.

What, then, can we say about the nature and on what basis can we ascribe to it positive qualities? The key idea is *zhi* 知, a term I have generally translated as “know” or “understand,” but which in this context I will follow Gregory in translating as “awareness.”⁵⁴ Zongmi writes that the most profound teaching:

⁵⁰ Quoted in Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 237.

⁵¹ I follow John Makeham in taking *ti* 體 here to be short for *benti* 本體, and translate it as “inherent reality.” For extensive discussion of the Buddhist background to this the important pair of concepts *ti* and *yong*, see Makeham’s chapter in this volume.

⁵² Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 237.

⁵³ Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 219-20.

⁵⁴ In addition to Gregory’s astute analysis, I have also benefitted from Araki Kengo 荒木見悟, 《佛教與儒教》 [*Buddhism and Confucianism*], trans. Liao Zhaocheng 廖肇亨 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 2008), especially Section 2.3, which also contains considerable discussion of the earlier sources for Zongmi’s idea of awareness in the Heze Chan tradition.

... propounds that all sentient beings without exception have the empty, tranquil, true mind. From time without beginning it is the intrinsically pure, effulgent, unobscured, clear, and bright ever-present awareness. It abides forever and will never perish, on into the infinite future. It is termed the Buddha nature; it is also termed *tathāgatagarbha* and mind ground (*xindi*).⁵⁵

此教說一切眾生皆有空寂真心。無始本來性自清淨明明不昧了了常知。盡未來際常住不滅。名為佛性。亦名如來藏。亦名心地。

This “awareness” is not any specific wisdom, nor one’s awareness or knowledge of anything in particular, but rather the “underlying ground of consciousness that is always present in all sentient life...; the noetic ground of both delusion and enlightenment.”⁵⁶ In keeping with the general positive orientation of Chinese Buddhism, awareness is not merely empty but also suffused with excellences: pure, unobscured, ever-present, and so on. Not only that, but nature-as-awareness can also be seen as the ground or source (though not physical cause) of all things. Phenomenal appearances are interdependent, conditioned by all other appearances, but underlying all these appearances is awareness itself.⁵⁷ There is actually an additional level of complexity: Zongmi says that the inherent reality (*ti*) of the true mind has, in turn, both inherent reality (tranquility) and function (awareness). Awareness, though, is simultaneously the inherent reality that corresponds to the “functioning-inaccord-with-conditions” that is our actual psycho-physical functioning.⁵⁸ So awareness is to be contrasted with the sudden experience of

⁵⁵ Quoted in Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 217; (T48.2015.1.404b27-c3)

⁵⁶ Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 218.

⁵⁷ Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 242.

⁵⁸ Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 239-40. This structure bears a close resemblance to the *Awakening of Faith*’s model of suchness adapting to phenomenal conditions; see John Makeham’s paper in this volume.

enlightenment (which Zongmi calls “*zhi* 智,” among other things), since awareness, as inherent reality, is always present.⁵⁹ Zongmi therefore speaks of this inherent reality as “inherently awakened genuine knowing 本覺真知” in some places.⁶⁰ The sudden experience of enlightenment, in contrast, is an explicit experience of this awareness.

Let me explain. The excellent, ever-present awareness—that is, the *tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha nature—is typically hidden, because as actually instantiated in humans, “it appears covered over by their defilements.”⁶¹ “Defilement” refers to all our delusions, biases, and attachments; once we are rid of them then we see that Buddha nature was here with us all along. Note that both awareness and delusion are processes rather than things: we should not imagine one thing covered up by another, but one, subtle process that is obscured by another, more “noisy” one. Zongmi therefore believes that it is possible to directly perceive the Buddha nature when one is in a condition of “no thought 無念,” which means not a mindless somnambulism but rather a moment of non-conceptual, holistic experience. Here it is important to remember the two-tiered structure of inherent reality-manifest function pairs that I introduced in the previous paragraph. The deepest inherent reality, referred to above as tranquility, is an eternal state (not a process). Its functioning is awareness. But awareness itself can be thought of as the inherent reality corresponding to our everyday, conditioned functioning. The frequently employed metaphor of wetness (inherent reality) and waves (function) can help us here. Relative to our everyday experience (i.e., waves), awareness is an eternal state (i.e., wetness itself). But the sudden

⁵⁹ Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 135.

⁶⁰ Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 134 and 140.

⁶¹ Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 309.

enlightenment experience is an experience of awareness as the function corresponding to tranquility itself: directly perceiving Buddha nature is like experiencing wetness.

According to Zongmi, the sudden insight or enlightenment that one gains through such perception then further ramifies throughout one's psychology in the subsequent process of cultivation. In this way we can understand how Zongmi takes the distinction between nature/inherent reality/awareness, on the one hand, and actual feelings, on the other, to enable him to speak of enlightenment experiences being validated or grounded, unlike the radical Chanists who conflate nature and feelings. Zongmi's idea is that the initial ("sudden") enlightenment experience allows one to see the truth and thus to guide subsequent ("gradual") practice, which is also needed because sudden insight does not automatically transform one's dispositions and actualized feelings.⁶²

Zongmi clearly puts forward a view on which awareness, a very particular kind of knowing that at least on the surface has very little in common with everyday, empirical knowing, is to be sought, and is critically important to our ultimate awakening. Awareness is not a mere means, but is instead constitutive of Buddha nature and Buddhahood. As Araki emphasizes, many were critical of Zongmi's view, to the extent that an eleventh-century monk parodied Zongmi's view by saying, "the single word 'zhi 知' is the source of myriad misfortunes."⁶³ One example of this criticism comes from the Tiantai thinker Siming Zhili 四明知禮 (960-1028), who charged that Zongmi's "awareness" is somehow supposed

⁶² A central question for many Chinese Buddhists was whether enlightenment was a "sudden" or "gradual" affair; Zongmi's influential view was that it required sudden insight followed by gradual—quite traditional—cultivation thereafter. One explanation for this was that the sudden enlightenment enabled one to stop creating new karmic seeds in the *alayavijñāna*, but one still needed to gradually remove all the seeds that were already present at the moment of enlightenment. Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 193-5.

⁶³ Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 152.

to indicate “pure suchness” and has no connection to any action.⁶⁴ Zhu Xi’s contemporary Dahui also expresses some skepticism about Zongmi’s view of knowing, though defenders of Zongmi will be quick to point out that there are important ways in which these critics have misunderstood him.⁶⁵ Be this as it may, neither the *Buddha Nature Treatise’s* approach nor Zongmi’s proved to be most influential. Instead, it is precisely the “radical Chan” view that Zongmi criticized that won the day, a version of which we can see in Dahui. I therefore turn now to our final case study of Chinese Buddhist epistemology, the influential teaching of Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709-788) and Hongzhou 洪州 Chan.

Mazu Daoyi is a good example of Chan Buddhism developing in precisely the direction of which Zongmi was critical. There is nothing special that one needs to come to perceive or know; Mazu announces that “If you want to know the Way directly, then the ordinary mind is the way.... Now all these are just the Way: walking, abiding, sitting, lying, responding to situations, and dealing with things 若欲直會其道，平常心是道。 。 。 。 只如今行住坐卧，應機接物，盡是道。”⁶⁶ Recall that the *Awakening of Faith* speaks of a state in which one ceases to dwell on (empirical, conceptually articulated) perception. In apparent contrast, Mazu says:

Now seeing, hearing, listening, and sensing are fundamentally your inherent nature, which is also called inherent heartmind. It is not that there is a Buddha [Nature] other than this heartmind. This heartmind always already exists and exists right now, without depending on intentional creation and action; it is always already pure

⁶⁴ Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 151.

⁶⁵ Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 155-7.

⁶⁶ Mazu Daoyi, “Appendix: Annotated Translation of Mazu Daoyi’s Discourses,” translated by Jinhua Jia, in Jinhua Jia, *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- Through Tenth-Century China*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2006, 123.

and is pure right now, without waiting for cleaning and wiping. 今見聞覺知，元是汝本性，亦名本心。更不離此心別有佛，此心本有今有，不假造作；本淨今淨，不待瑩拭。⁶⁷

Mazu does not use the term “inherently awakened (*benjue*),” but he is clearly in this tradition. The crucial thing for him is simply recognizing one’s enlightenment: since we have all along been awakened, there is nothing new that we need to learn or see in order to leave delusion behind.

A common Chan trope can help us understand what is going on.⁶⁸ Our eyes can see, but they cannot see themselves. To see, one “just does it”: one does not first examine one’s eyes and figure out how to see. Indeed, such an examination is impossible. In the same way, enlightenment has been with us all along, inherent to our nature/heartmind, built-in to the way we are. So we cannot get outside of ourselves and come to “know” what we are; all we can do is be ourselves. A similar train of thought leads Mazu to reject cultivation of the Way:

“The Way does not belong to cultivation. If you speak of any attainment through cultivation, whatever is accomplished through cultivation will again decay, just the same as the Śrāvaka (Hearer). If you speak of no-cultivation, then you will be the same as an ordinary man.” [Someone] asked, “What kind of knowledge should one have in order to understand the Way?” The Master replied, “Self-nature is always already perfectly complete. So long as one is not hindered by either good or evil things, he is called a man who cultivates the Way. Grasping good and rejecting evil, contemplating emptiness and entering concentration—all these belong to

⁶⁷ Mazu, “Annotated Translation,” 122; translation modified.

⁶⁸ Thanks to Brook Ziporyn for pointing out this connection.

intentional creation and action. “道不屬修，即言修得，修成還壞，即同聲聞。若言不修，即同凡夫。”云：“作何見解，即得達道？”師云：“自性本來具足，但於善惡事上不滯，喚作修道人，取善捨惡，觀空入定，即屬造作。”⁶⁹

Having rejected traditional modes of cultivation, Mazu helps to develop the practice of “encounter dialogue” as a means to inspire students to change their perspective and realize that they are already enlightened.⁷⁰

In one way, Mazu and Zongmi are not so different: both accept the idea of inherent or original awakening, as explicated in the *Awakening of Faith*. As the contemporary scholar Jia Jianhua emphasizes, we should also not exaggerate the iconoclasm of Mazu: he did read and write texts, and he gave sermons that are full of scriptural references.⁷¹ However, whereas Zongmi recognized the traditional three criteria for truth—scriptural precedent, rational defense, and personal realization—Mazu only claimed to heed the third of these, as we have seen. For Mazu, there is no special kind of knowing that one can seek or attain: one’s “ordinary mind” is perfect in its original state, and all one has to do is to shift perspectives so that one realizes this. Despite his fairly conventional practice, therefore, Mazu’s teachings can easily be seen as opening the door to an iconoclastic or even antinomian practice of precisely the kind that worried Zongmi.

To sum up this section, we have seen three different attitudes toward “knowing”: a primarily pragmatic approach, an approach emphasizing a deep and genuine knowing (albeit seemingly disconnected from everyday knowing), and an approach that validates everyday perceptual experience. Zhu Xi is undoubtedly aware of much of this; not only did

⁶⁹ Mazu, “Annotated Translation,” 126.

⁷⁰ Jinhua Jia, *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- Through Tenth-Century China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 79-82.

⁷¹ Jia, *The Hongzhou School*, 79.

he personally study a version of the radical Mazu approach (with Daoqian), but he also subsequently critical of radical Chan in terms that at least resonate with Zongmi's views.⁷² Nonetheless, as we now turn to Zhu's epistemic views themselves, I will argue that such similarities mask important differences.

4. Zhu Xi's Epistemology of Discernment

By the mid-twelfth century when Zhu Xi was coming of age, the mainstream view within *Daoxue* was that learning was primarily an inward affair aimed at virtuous-nature knowing (though the term "virtuous-nature knowing" was not always used explicitly). Zhu initially shared this view, but came to see it as philosophically problematic and rejected the possibility of directly accessing the nature.⁷³ As a result, he rejected the distinction between sensory knowing and nature knowing. Asked whether there is such a thing as sensory knowing, Zhu is unambiguous:

There is only one kind of knowing! The only issue is whether it is genuine (*zhen*) or not. This is the only difference at issue. It is definitely not the case that [after we have sensory knowing] we later have another kind of knowing.⁷⁴

⁷² See the discussion, in Justin Tiwald's chapter in this volume, of Chan conflation of everyday functioning with "nature," near the end of Tiwald's Section 5.

⁷³ For extensive discussion on what is often called Zhu's "New Doctrine of Centrality and Harmony 中和新說," see Chen Lai 陈来, 《朱熹哲学研究》 [*Research Into Zhu Xi's Philosophy*] (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daoxue Chubanshe, 2000), 157-63; Qian Mu 錢穆, 《朱子新學案》 [*Master Zhu: New Studies*], 3rd ed. (Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1989), vol. 2, 123-182; and Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1992), 59-64.

⁷⁴ Zhu Xi 朱熹, Zhuzi Yulei 《朱子語類》 [*Classified Conversations of Master Zhu*]. Cited as: juan number / page number from Zhu Xi 朱熹. 《朱子全書》 [*Complete Works of Master Zhu*] (Shanghai and Hefei: Shanghai Guji chubanshe and Anhui Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002). YL 34/1255, translation from Ying-shih Yu, "Morality and Knowledge in Chu Hsi's Philosophical System," in *Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism*, ed. Wing-tsit Chan (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 242, slightly modified.

知，只是一樣知，但有真不真，爭這些子，不是後來又別有一項知。

Discussing Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1077)’s assertion that we must avoid allowing sensory knowing to “handcuff” our heartminds, Zhu argues:

In order to be able to learn, we must possess senses of seeing and hearing. How can we possibly do without them? We work hard with our senses until we achieve a wide and far-reaching penetration. Ordinarily, when we study something by relying on senses, a single affair only leads us to know a single principle.⁷⁵ However, when we reach the stage of a general penetration, all Pattern becomes one.⁷⁶

如今人理會學，須是有見聞，豈能舍此？先是於見聞上做工夫到，然後脫然貫通。

蓋尋常見聞，一事只知得一箇道理，若到貫通，便都是一理。

Even though Zhu Xi only mentions Zhang Zai here by name, he was well aware that Cheng Yi had insisted on, if anything, a stronger distinction between these two purported types of knowing; Zhu does not criticize Cheng explicitly out of respect.⁷⁷ He shows no such restraint for those of the Chengs’ students who pursued a single-minded focus on nature knowing even further, writing of Zhang Jiucheng that his writings are “outwardly Confucian but secretly Buddhist;...his purpose is to confuse the world and lull men to sleep so that they enter the Buddhist school and cannot extricate themselves for it even if they want to.”⁷⁸

Zhu’s picture of knowing—that it was a continuous process, reliant on the senses, that could eventually lead to a kind of breakthrough and consequently to “genuine”

⁷⁵ “Principle” here is *daoli* 道理; in this context, Zhu is referring to a single, codifiable rule or principle. In terms of the distinctions I develop later in the chapter, this is “Type One” knowing.

⁷⁶ YL 98/3311, translation from Yu, “Morality and Knowledge,” 242, significantly modified.

⁷⁷ Yu, “Morality and Knowledge,” 243.

⁷⁸ Cited in Borrell, “*Ko-Wu*,” 62.

knowing—is of course quite consistent with some of what the Chengs said, and indeed bears resemblances to some aspects of other Northern Song Neo-Confucians. Still, Zhu’s mature picture has a systematicity and sophistication that is lacking in his forbearers. We can see this most clearly by focusing on the three different types of knowing that Zhu Xi identifies. In so doing, I also bring into the discussion two other important epistemic terms, both with significant roots in Chinese Buddhism: *jue* (awakening to) and *zhijue* (discernment). Because the terminology and details can get confusing, let me begin with a schematic overview of Zhu’s understanding of knowing. To be clear, Zhu never makes it explicit that there are three types of knowing; these are analytical categories developed by Justin Tiwald and myself. According to this analysis, though, we can see in Zhu’s many discussions three distinct types of knowing:

Type One: One knows a rule to which things should conform.

Type Two: One sees an isolated instance of how things should be and cannot help but follow it.

Type Three: One awakens to the underlying reason or basis why things are as they are, and responds aptly to whatever situation one encounters.

Knowing of any of these types may be sufficient, in a given case, to lead one to act well, but with Types Two or Three, one’s apt responses become more automatic and their scope increasingly broad. Fully knowing in the Type-Three sense—which Zhu describes in a variety of ways, as we will see—is a central characteristic of a sage. As I explain below, knowing does not necessarily develop in a Type One → Type Two → Type Three succession; in different ways, both Types One and Two can be useful in the process of developing Type Three.

The most basic and shallow kind of knowing is to know a rule for a given type of circumstance. Knowing that one should be filial to one's parents, or that one should not eat an extra piece of chocolate cake, are possible examples of such rules. Knowing the rule means that one can say it and knows at least generally how to apply it. Zhu Xi calls such rules "the rule to which [a thing or affair] should conform 其所當然之則." This type of knowing is common but also problematic, because all too often one "knows" a rule in this sense but fails to follow it. In a well-known passage, Zhu talks about the ways in which merely "knowing an affair" to be right or wrong is unreliable; one can know it to be wrong (知此事不是), and yet suddenly start thinking about doing it, or even do it without really being aware (不知不覺) of doing so.⁷⁹ To be sure, someone who knows the rule can sometimes get him or herself to follow it, but Zhu agrees with earlier *Daoxue* thinkers that this kind of merely conscientious behavior is worrisome.

Type Two is typically expressed as "seeing an instance of how things should be and being unable not to do it 見其所當然而不容已." This seems not to depend on antecedent understanding of any rules; it is rather an instance of brute clarity, whereby one sees-and-responds to a particular situation. Zhu says:

People today who have not "seen how things should be and been unable not to do it," just judge what to do based on their own preferences of the moment. [In contrast,] when someone genuinely sees that it is something that "I ought to do," then there will naturally be that which he or she cannot stop doing. For example, a minister

⁷⁹ YL 13/394; translated in Zhu Xi, *Learning to be a Sage*, trans. Daniel K. Gardner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 184.

must be loyal: so long as one sees this and is not just mouthing the words, then in acting as a minister one cannot avoid being loyal.⁸⁰

今人未嘗看見「當然而不容已」者，只是就上較量一箇好惡爾。如真見得這底是我合當為，則自有所不可已者矣。如為臣而必忠，非是謾說如此，蓋為臣不可以不忠。

Lacking Type-Two knowing, Zhu is saying, there is no objectivity or reliability to one's judgments. Sometimes, though, one sees a situation in such a way that the reaction is automatic, which he calls "genuinely (*zhen*)" seeing it. What is happening in such a case? Consider this exchange:

Someone asked: "How is it that Pattern is 'unable to stop'?" Master Zhu replied: "Pattern's normativity naturally is unable to stop. Mencius understood this most clearly, and thus said, 'Among babes in arms, there are none that do not know to love their parents. When they grow older, there are none that do not know to revere their elder brothers.' Naturally these are places at which one cannot stop."⁸¹

或問：「理之不容已者如何？」曰：「理之所當為者，自不容已。孟子最發明此處。如曰：『孩提之童，無不知愛其親；及其長也，無不知敬其兄。』自是有住不得處。」

"Pattern's normativity is naturally unable to stop": the idea is that there is a deep, structured dynamism to the cosmos that generates all life in unending fashion.⁸² Type Two knowing takes place when we are able to get a glimpse of this, but it falls short of Type

⁸⁰ YL 18/625. Thanks to Chi-keung Chan for help understanding Zhu's point here.

⁸¹ YL 18/625; Zhu is quoting *Mencius* 7A:15; translation of *Mencius* from Mengzi, *Mengzi: With Selections From Traditional Commentaries*, translated by Bryan Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 175.

⁸² Here is another passage, also from YL 18/625, in which the connection of "unable to stop" to the whole functioning of the cosmos is made: "問：「或問云：『天地鬼神之變，鳥獸草木之宜，莫不有以見其所當然而不容已。』所謂『不容已』，是如何？」曰：「春生了便秋殺，他住不得。陰極了，陽便生。如人在背後，只管來相趨，如何住得！」淳。寓錄云：「春生秋殺，陽開陰閉，趨來趨去，自住不得。」"

Three knowing because it does not flow from a broadly inclusive grasp of Pattern's interconnections. Certain situations are ripe for these brief and bounded, but still "genuine" experiences of Pattern; Zhu insists that they are open to anyone, at any level of cultivation. In addition to the few we have already cited, a final passage that often comes up is Mencius's famous claim that anyone, upon suddenly seeing a baby about to fall into a well, would respond with alarm and compassion. I speculate—although Zhu does not make this clear—that the situations in which Type Two knowing happens most readily are those in which distracting, potentially biasing factors are simply not present. After all, the Pattern is always there to be seen and to motivate response, so what is at issue here is under what circumstances—short of the full, sagely sensitivity that characterizes Type Three—one is able to fluidly see-and-respond.⁸³

There are two strands within Zhu Xi's writings that lead to the conclusion that in addition to "knowing" of types one and two, there is also a third, most valuable type. The first revolves around the verb *jue*, which means "awaken to" or "be sensitive to." As we

⁸³ As noted at the outset of this section, Zhu does not explicitly distinguish the three levels from one another, and there are occasional moments in which it is not clear which type of knowing Zhu is best interpreted as talking about—or even whether we might need to add a further category. For example, Confucius's famous spiritual autobiography in *Analects* 2:4 says, "At forty, he was not confused 四十而不惑," while "At fifty, he knew the cosmic decree 五十知天命." Being "not confused" seems relevant to knowing, and "knowing the cosmic decree" is obviously relevant. But how do these fit into my schema? In Zhu's commentary, he says that being "not confused" means that one understands affairs without hesitation—like the unstoppable way in which bamboo welcomes a sharp knife—but this still is only at the level of "seeing affairs 見事" (YL 23/????). Actually "knowing" the cosmic mandate, on the other hand, is to "see Pattern 見理." "Knowing the cosmic decree," in other words, is Type Three knowing. But what about being "not confused"? In its connection to "affairs" it sounds like Type One, and indeed, Zhu Xi goes on to invoke Cheng Yi's distinction between "knowing this affair 知此事" and "awakening to this Pattern 覺此理." But his emphasis on the unstoppable way in which such knowing proceeds resonates strongly with Type Two. I am tempted by Justin Tiwald's suggestion, in conversation, that being "not confused" falls somewhere between Type Two and Type Three: Confucius at this age is beginning to generalize and has a certain degree of confidence because his generalizations are based on those specific moments of Type Two clarity, but he still hasn't grasped the whole in its entirety. Still, it is hard to be confident. Perhaps the best conclusion is to recognize that as Zhu Xi strives to interpret a vast array of disparate classical statements using the categories of his own philosophical understanding, sometimes the fit is imperfect.

have seen, for Chinese Buddhists *jue* is an important term that often refers to the awakening that the Buddha experienced and which Buddhists seek for all sentient beings. Early *Daoxue* Confucians like the Cheng brothers use *jue* repeatedly to mean “awaken,” both when speaking critically of Buddhist ideas of “awakening,” and to refer to a Confucian kind of “awakening.” As they note, there is a passage in *Mencius* that speaks of awakening; the Chengs are insistent, therefore, that “awakening” is a legitimate Confucian notion and refers to something different than the Buddhist idea.⁸⁴ Cheng Yi also explains the difference between “knowing” and “awakening” as follows: “Knowing is to know this affair; awakening is to awaken to this Pattern 知者知此事也。覺者覺此理也。”⁸⁵ Cheng Yi himself does not offer more explanation of the difference, but Zhu Xi approvingly invokes the further gloss of one of Cheng Yi’s students. According to this explanation, when one knows the respect of a minister or the filiality of a son, then this is “knowing this affair.” When one knows *that by which* ministers are respectful or sons filial, though, that is “awakening to this Pattern.”⁸⁶ In a related context, Zhu himself says that “at first one is simply loyal or filial, and then later one comes to know *that by which* one is filial and *that by which* one is loyal, and one cannot be budged 初時也只忠孝，後來便知所以孝，所以忠，移動不得。”⁸⁷ It is an interesting question whether merely “knowing this affair” refers to Type One or

⁸⁴ *Jue* does not feature very significantly in classical Confucian epistemic discourse, but there is *Mencius* 5A:7: “Heaven, in giving birth to the people, directs those who first become wise (*zhi*) to awaken (*jue*) those who will later become wise. 天之生此民也，使先知覺後知，使先覺覺後覺也” (translation from Mengzi, *Mengzi*, 127). In more than one place, the Chengs make explicit this Confucian pedigree for *jue*. Here is Cheng Yi: “或問釋氏有言下覺何如子？曰何必浮屠氏？孟子言之矣。” (二程粹言卷上), and here is Cheng Hao, commenting on the idea of “awakening” in *Mencius* 5A:7: “釋氏之云覺，甚底是覺斯道？甚底是覺斯民？” (YS 14/142).

⁸⁵ Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, *Henan Chengshi Yishu* 二程粹言 (*The Pure Words of the Two Chengs*). Cited as *juan* / page number from Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤, 《二程集》 [*Collected Works of the Cheng Brothers*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981): A / 1180.

⁸⁶ YL 17/586.

⁸⁷ YL 23/813.

Type Two knowing. On one hand, the use of “this,” connecting it to a particular situation, suggests that it is Type Two; on the other hand, the statement that only when one has moved to the “awakening” level is one invulnerable to being “budded” suggests that the contrast is with the unreliable Type One. In either case, “awakening to this Pattern” offers a different and deeper kind of understanding.

Both of the last passages connect awakening to the rather cryptic idea of grasping “that by which [one is filial, loyal, and so on].” Pursuing this second strand of evidence will help us better understand how Type Three knowing works. In what is probably his best-known statement on the meaning of Pattern, Zhu says, “As far as things in the cosmos go, we can be certain that each has a reason by which it is as it is, and a rule to which it should conform. This is what is meant by Pattern. 至於天下之物、則必各有所以然之故、與其所當然之則。所謂理也”⁸⁸ We have already seen that when one only knows the relevant rule, this is mere Type One knowing. As Zhu develops the idea of understanding the “reason by which it is as it is”—which is the same as the “that by which” mentioned above—we will see that it is significantly more important. In a key passage, Zhu explains as follows:

[Compared with the rule to which it should confirm,] the “reason by which it is as it is” takes it up one level. For example, that by which a lord is humane: the lord is the ruler while the people and territory are his concern. He naturally employs humane love. If we think about this relationship without humane love, it just does not work. This is not to say that a lord cannot help but use humane love; it’s rather that to do so matches with Pattern.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Daxue Huowen* 15a:3; translation from Zhu Xi, *Learning*, 90, slightly modified.

⁸⁹ YL 17/585.

所以然之故，即是更上面一層。如君之所以仁，蓋君是箇主腦，人民土地皆屬它管，它自是用仁愛。試不仁愛看，便行不得。非是說為君了，不得已用仁愛，自是理合如此。

There are bad rulers who are governed by their selfish desires and fail to employ humane love, but Zhu is saying that reflection on the organic, structural relationship between a ruler and his people reveals that the relationship works only when the ruler is motivated by humane love. Zhu adds several more examples in the passage, all of which make the point that no matter whether one is talking about human relations or patterns in nature, it is the affirmation of birth and life that leads to things fitting together in meaningful fashion, each aspect playing its role. When Zhu talks of going up a level, he is saying that one needs to put a given matter into the special context provided by Pattern. When one learns to do that—to view each individual thing as fitting together thanks to the value we accord to life—then one has the flexible Type Three knowing that can make sense of any stimulus. This is to grasp the “reason by which” things are as they are.⁹⁰

In light of this understanding of the three types of knowing, it makes sense that Zhu repurposes the Buddhist term “*zhijue*”—a compound of “know” and “awaken” that often means perceptual awareness in a Buddhist context—as a general term for the various kinds of knowing activity of our heartmind.⁹¹ Just as “know (*zhi*)” itself can refer to any of

⁹⁰ Zhu uses a variety of terms to refer to this type of knowing, including “genuine knowing 真知”; the “discernment 知覺 of the Way heartmind 道心”; “eventual awakening 久而後有覺”; and “knowing the cosmic mandate 知天命,” among others.

⁹¹ Among Zhu’s key predecessors, the Cheng brothers do not use *zhijue* in Zhu’s capacious way, but instead only in the earlier Buddhist sense (see, for example, Cheng Yi’s use of the term in YS 18/201), but in a much-quoted passage, Zhang Zai anticipates Zhu quite closely: “To the combination of nature and *zhijue*, we give the name ‘heartmind’ 合性與知覺，有心之名.” Zhang Zai 張載, *Zheng Meng* 《正蒙》 [Correcting the Unenlightened]. Cited as: ZM *juan* number / page number from Zhang Zai 張載, *Zhang Zai Ji* 《張載集》 [Collected Works of Zhang Zai] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1978). ZM 1/9. As for Zhu Xi himself, he says things

the three types, so can *zhijue*.⁹² The English verb “discern” does a good job of capturing the meaning of *zhijue* because of the way that “discern” foregrounds the process of making distinctions and connections among things. This is important because Zhu Xi insists that humaneness is not simply something one “feels (*jue*).” Zhu criticizes the views of the Cheng brothers’ student Xie Liangzuo 謝良佐 (1050-1120)—which Araki calls a type of “perceptionism”—for conflating *jue* and humaneness: “The problem with Xie Liangzuo lies in his taking feeling (*jue*) to be humaneness. If one does this, then even pricking one’s skin with a needle, and finding it painful, would also be called ‘humaneness.’ This is greatly mistaken! 上蔡之病，患在以覺為仁。但以覺為仁，只將針來刺股上，才覺得痛，亦可謂之仁矣。此大不然也！”⁹³ Zhu does associate certain feelings with humaneness, but he insists that there is a particular structure and normativity to humaneness, not just a brute reaction to pain.⁹⁴ Neither is discernment (知覺) as a whole equivalent to humaneness. In response to the question, “Is discernment the same as humaneness?”, Zhu replies: “There is humaneness and after that there is discernment 問：「知覺是仁否？」曰：「仁然後有知覺。」”⁹⁵ I take this to mean that humaneness, as one way to refer to the whole of Pattern, is conceptually prior to any specific instance of discernment, even though—as we will see

like “That which has *zhijue* we call the heartmind 有知覺謂之心” (YL 140/4340), and “Our heartmind is our *zhijue*, that which is the master of our body and which responds to things and affairs 心者人之知覺，主於身而應事物者也。” Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhu Wengong Wenji* 朱文公文集 (*Collected Writings of Zhu Xi*). Cited as: WJ *juan* number / page number from Zhu Xi 朱熹. 《朱子全書》 [*Complete Works of Master Zhu*] (Shanghai and Hefei: Shanghai Guji chubanshe and Anhui Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002). WJ 65/3180.

⁹² For example: “The Way heartmind is when one discerns the Pattern of the Way; the human heartmind is when one discerns sound, sight, odor, and flavor. 道心是知覺得道理底，人心是知覺得聲色臭味底” (YL 78/????).

⁹³ YL 20/?????. For a defense of Xie’s understanding of *ren* in terms of *jue* (translated as “sensitivity”), see Thomas W. Selover, *Hsieh Liang-Tso and the Analects of Confucius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹⁴ For more on the feelings associated with humaneness, see YL 6/???? and the discussion of “warm and harmonious intentions 溫和底意思,” feelings of love and sympathy, and so on.

⁹⁵ YL 20/????.

in a moment—specific moments of discernment are that whereby specific aspects of Pattern are made live to us.⁹⁶

For Zhu Xi, knowing and discerning are active processes. He says that “knowing something is our heartmind being stimulated 知之者，心之感也。”⁹⁷ In a crucial passage, Zhu tells us it is through the actual process of discerning that we come to possess Pattern in its local specificity and activate our specific emotions: “The heartmind’s discerning is that whereby we possess this Pattern and activate this emotion 心之知覺，即所以具此理而行此情者也。”⁹⁸ In other words, the world becomes intelligible, normative, and motivational for us precisely through our discerning of it. Zhu makes the same point in more concrete fashion when commenting on *Mencius* 1A:7. In this passage, we read that upon seeing an ox being led to a ritual sacrifice, King Xuan felt pity for it, ordered that it be spared, and that a sheep be found and sacrificed in the ox’s place. Mencius’s conversation with the king about what this incident reveals is complex, but for our purposes the key has to do with why the king was able to bear sending some unseen sheep to be sacrificed, when he could not bear to have the ox sacrificed. Zhu Xi says: “Having seen the ox, this heartmind was already manifest and could not be suppressed, while not yet having seen the sheep, its Pattern had not yet taken form and there were no [emotions] to hinder him 然見牛則此心已發而不可遏，未見羊則其理未形而無所妨。”⁹⁹ Since Pattern never actually “takes form,” what this must mean is that specific configurations of Pattern are “possessed (*ju* 具)” or become live

⁹⁶ For some related analysis, see Brook Ziporyn’s essay in this volume.

⁹⁷ WJ 67/3263; quoted in Fuji Michiaki 藤井倫明, 《朱熹思想結構探索》 [*Research on the Structure of Zhu Xi’s Thought*] (Taipei: Taida chuban zhongxin, 2011), 168.

⁹⁸ WJ 55/2590, quoted in Fuji Michiaki, *Research*, 172.

⁹⁹ MZJZ [孟子集注] 1A.7/254.

to us only as our heartminds actually respond to a stimulus and produce emotions in reaction.

Nature is a kind of metaphysical structuring that is with us, and indeed present in every aspect of the universe, at all times. Because it is metaphysical and only implicitly or potentially sensible, Zhu Xi says that the heartmind can metaphorically be thought of as have empty space within it. However, we should not take the metaphor of “space” too literally.¹⁰⁰ After all, Zhu is quite explicitly metaphorical in passages like this: “Nature is like the heartmind’s field, filling all the emptiness, all is simply Pattern 性如心之田地，充此中虛，莫非是理而已。” The nature is a metaphorical field, poised to blossom with sprouts of emotion when the time is right. I have elsewhere endorsed the idea that the heartmind is really a process whereby nature and emotion are unified, which fits well with the present idea that actual discerning is what leads to the most full-blooded “possession” of specific Pattern.¹⁰¹

So far, I have argued that Zhu Xi recognizes three distinct types of knowing, and that knowing is a kind of active discernment whereby the Pattern with which all things are implicitly equipped comes to be specifically present to us and motivating. It remains now to say something about how we cultivate the deeper types of knowing, and to emphasize that even as one moves toward the holistic state that Zhu Xi characterizes as “genuine knowing,” distinctions and structure remain vital to this best kind of discernment.

¹⁰⁰ Although I am drawing here in Curie Virág, “Emotions and Human Agency in the Thought of Zhu Xi,” *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 37 (2007): esp. 80, I believe that she may be taking the special metaphor somewhat too literally.

¹⁰¹ See the discussion of Zhu’s appropriation of Zhang Zai’s phrase “the heartmind unites nature and emotion 心統性情,” in Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction*, Ch. 4.

As already emphasized at the outset of this section, Zhu Xi sees the various types of knowing and discernment as continuous with one another. His basic picture is that beginning with whatever Type One knowing of rules one has acquired, as well as with the Type Two moments of brute clarity that one has experienced, one then engages in a process of learning that systematically relates these dimensions of knowing to classic texts, exemplary models, and other dimensions of one's experience. Zhu Xi refers to this process, which depends on both distinguishing between things and between self and other, as well as on coming to see connection among things and thus softening the self-other boundary, by various classically derived terms like "investigation of things (*gewu* 格物)" and "reaching knowing (*zhi zhi* 致知)." He also uses more specific technical terms like "inferring via analogy (*tui* 推)"—as in "analogically extend to that by which [something is as it is] 推其所以然處" and the similar "推原其所以然," recalling that "that by which" refers to Type Three knowing—and "explicating (*lun* 論)," as in "explicate that by which [it is as it is] 論其所以然矣."¹⁰²

A particularly telling example comes in one of Zhu's many discussions of the baby-well thought experiment from *Mencius* 2A:6. He writes: "As for a baby falling into a well, this is something that all people can perceive; when one is able to analogically extend to clarity this 'beginning' that has manifested to one, then that is [genuine] clarity 蓋赤子入井，人所共見，能於此發端處推明，便是明."¹⁰³ In other words, employing techniques like analogical extension on raw materials like the Type Two knowing experienced upon seeing

¹⁰² See YL 23/811, YL 32/1152, and YL 18/625, respectively.

¹⁰³ YL 14/436.

a baby about to fall into a well, we can hope to reach full-blown Type Three knowing. Here is one more passage in which Zhu offers a powerful metaphor for this extended work:

For cosmic Pattern is never in all the ages extinguished in any human being; no matter how it is covered over or confined, cosmic Pattern is always constantly there just as ever, emerging from within self-centered desire at every moment without cease—it is just that human beings are not aware of it. It is exactly like a bright pearl or a large shell partly covered in turbid sand and gravel, successively flashing forth here and there. Just recognize and gather these successive flashes of the Way and its principles (*daoli*) right where they appear, joining them together until they gradually become an integral whole.

蓋天理在人，恆萬古而不泯；任其如何蔽錮，而天理常自若，無時不自私意中發出，但人不自覺。正如明珠大貝，混雜沙礫中，零零星星逐時出來。但只於這箇道理發見處，當下認取，簇合零星，漸成片段。到得自家好底意思日長月益，則天理自然純固；向之所謂私欲者，自然消磨退散，久之不復萌動矣。¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the most important thing to note here is that Type Three is not just a generalization of the brute experiences of Type Two. Type Three is not having Type Two experiences all the time, but is the distinctive, holistic result of patient, connective work.

We have already seen two important terms that Zhu Xi uses to describe Type Three knowing, namely “awakening (*jue*)” and “genuine knowing (*zhen zhi*).” With a third term for the same state, he makes more explicit the holistic interconnection that characterizes

¹⁰⁴ YL 117/3677. As Dan Lusthaus has emphasized to me in conversation, this image resonates in several ways with common Buddhist tropes, though we have not been able to find an exact source for it. Most likely this represents the kind of cultural common property that emerges in the second layer of Confucian-Daoist-Buddhist interactions, as discussed in Section 2.

this type of knowing: “unimpeded interconnection (*huoran guantong* 豁然貫通).” Zhu associates these various categories in passages like this one:

The ‘awaken’ in ‘The first awakened awaken the later awakened’ is the awakening of self-enlightenment, much like when the *Great Learning* speaks of the ‘investigation of things and extension of knowing [leading to] unimpeded interpenetration’

「先覺後覺」之「覺」，是自悟之覺，似大學說格物、致知豁然貫通處。¹⁰⁵

At the same time, in another passage he suggests that the categories of “genuine knowing” and “awaken” may not completely overlap:

[A questioner] asked: “Are the ‘knowing’ of ‘genuine knowing’ and the ‘awakening’ of ‘after a long time he awakened’ the same?” [Zhu] replied: “In general they are similar; it is just that each refers to something different. Genuine knowing is genuinely being thus-and-so; it is not merely hearing someone say it and having that count as knowing. As for awakening, that is one’s heartmind suddenly being enlightened and knowing that Pattern of the Way is thus-and-so. 又問：「『真知』之『知』與『久而後有覺』之『覺』字，同否？」曰：「大略也相似，只是各自所指不同。真知是知得真箇如此，不只是聽得人說，便喚做知。覺，則是忽然心中自有所覺悟，曉得道理是如此。

In the terms I have been using, Zhu is saying that “genuine knowing” can apply to Type Two knowing as well as Type Three—it is personal and gets things right—but “awakening” must be related to Type Three, because it is explicitly about seeing interconnections.

¹⁰⁵ YL 58/1859.

In any event, the key point about these holistic states of awakening and unimpeded interconnection, which distinguishes Zhu from virtually all Buddhist descriptions of holistic states of enlightenment, is that for the Neo-Confucians, “unimpeded interconnection” is still structured or centered in ways that we can at least partly articulate. This is what Zhu emphasizes when he talks about having a good nature as being akin to being in the center of a room, oriented toward the possible exits.¹⁰⁶ Knowing as unimpeded interconnection means that one is not stuck to a single principle—which Zhu analogizes to being stuck in one corner of a room—but instead, having “seen that the myriad Patterns come together, one can choose and follow that which is perfectly apt 觀眾理之會，而擇其通者而行。”¹⁰⁷

5. Conclusion

The goal of this essay has been to explore the relations between Zhu Xi’s theories of knowing and Chinese Buddhism. That there are many sorts of relations is obvious. Zhu had significant interactions with Buddhists of his day. His epistemic theorizing is replete with terms and phrases that are strongly associated with, and in some cases originate from, Buddhist writings. And there are respects in which his theories appear to be structurally parallel with Buddhist theories. Be all this as it may, my thesis is that at least in the area of epistemology, the theoretical differences between Zhu and various Buddhist positions are real, deep, and were well understood by Zhu himself. His criticisms of others for Buddhist leanings—again, limiting my scope to epistemic issues—are to a significant degree

¹⁰⁶ For extensive discussion of this idea and references, see Angle and Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction*, Ch. 3.

¹⁰⁷ YL 75/2544. For the reference to being stuck in a corner, see YL 25/1292.

substantive, based on an accurate appreciation of real differences, rather than merely rhetorical. (Which is not to deny that such statements often did also have rhetorical dimensions.) To be sure, Neo-Confucian ideas, terminology, practice, and genres of expression were all significantly influenced by Buddhism, as Section 2 has sketched, and as other chapters in this volume further substantiate. But when we attend carefully to the philosophical issues at the heart of Zhu's writings, we can see that at least in some cases such as epistemology, similarities of terminology or structure mask deep differences.

In this concluding section of the essay, my aim is to draw together the evidence for my thesis that has been presented in the previous sections, focusing especially on the relations between Zhu's approach to knowing, on the one hand, and the three Buddhist approaches sketched in Section 3. I examine five issues: the structured nature of our deepest knowing; the necessity of cultivation; the continuity between empirical and genuine knowing; the role of inherence; and the role of commitment or faith.

My discussion of Zhu's Type Three knowing emphasized its reliance on structured interconnections. Buddhists, too, make much of the interconnection among seemingly distinct things in the world: this is their central teaching of dependent co-arising, on which basis all the Buddhists examined here conclude that things are "empty" of own-nature. The result is a version of what Ziporyn terms "ironic coherence": a uniting that is made possible by through its very unintelligibility. Recall that "awareness" for Zongmi is not awareness (or knowing) of anything in particular; it is unconditioned, unconnected from the coming and going of particular thoughts or events. The central metaphysical category of *li* 理 is thus well-translated for Huayan or Chan Buddhists as "Absolute": it countenances no

distinctions, parts, or structure.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, for Zhu Xi, Type Three knowing is precisely an all-encompassing knowing of the ways that things best fit together—that is, discerning the dynamic structuring of the cosmos.

The difference between the views of Mazu and Zhu Xi on the necessity of systematic cultivation in order to achieve the proper type of knowing is easy to see. Zhu stresses the need for extensive “investigation of things,” “inferring by analogy,” and so on; Mazu says (as quoted above), “The Way does not belong to cultivation. If you speak of any attainment through cultivation, whatever is accomplished through cultivation will again decay.” As the contemporary scholar Ari Borrell has emphasized, this difference was very salient to the mature Zhu Xi as well, subsequent to his interactions with Daoqian and based on his knowledge of Dahui’s teachings. For example, Borrell contrasts the messages that Zhu and Dahui conveyed to Wang Yingchen 汪應辰 (1118-1176), a cousin of Zhu’s and a leading disciple of the Daoxue thinker Zhang Jiucheng. Dahui tells Wang that awakening is instantaneous, without intermediate steps. In Zhu’s letter to Wang, he criticizes those who advocate jumping quickly to the end of the process, as well as the related idea that broad learning is something distinct from and unrelated to higher learning. Zhu asserts that there is no precipitous point of sudden, complete enlightenment, and worries that scholars waiting for such a single moment of validation will linger forever in doubt. Instead, they

¹⁰⁸ See Brook Ziporyn, *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and Its Antecedents* (Albany: SUNY, 2013), pp. 259 and 268; and Gregory, *Tsung-Mi*, 6n8. Araki Kengo also argues that “emptiness” is crucial even to the less-radical “Northern Chan” of Shen Xiu, and that this idea finds no parallel in Zhu Xi. Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 372.

must patiently work at finding connections, within and without the self, which will lead to Type Three knowing.¹⁰⁹

It might seem, in contrast, that while Zhu's views are clearly different from those in the Mazu tradition, he more closely resembles Zongmi. As we saw earlier, Zongmi believes that cultivation is necessary, albeit of principal importance only after one has achieved a sudden burst of genuine "awareness." As Araki Kengo has shown, though, Zhu took on this view explicitly, arguing that the "enlightenment" in Zongmi's scheme is problematically disconnected from the gradual cultivation of discernment of real value in the world. Zhu writes, "The way the ancients engaged in learning was solely rising up from below, one firm step at a time, gradually removing [self-centeredness], until human desire naturally was gone and cosmic Pattern naturally was clear. They had nothing like this contrived practiced according to which one first needs [to experience] unimpeded enlightenment, and after that [engage in] gradual cultivation. 然觀古人為學，只是升高自下，步步踏實，漸次解剝，人欲自去，天理自明。無似此一般作捺紐捏底功夫，必要豁然頓悟，然後漸次修行也。"¹¹⁰

Is there a continuity between empirical and genuine knowing? While Mazu clearly differs from Zhu by rejecting cultivation, he seems more similar to Zhu on the issue of continuity. After all, as quoted above, Mazu says that the "ordinary heartmind is the way.... Now all these are just the Way: walking, abiding, sitting, lying, responding to situations, and dealing with things." This looks at least a bit like Zhu's own stress on finding value in everyday situations. But for Zhu, Type Three discernment (or genuine knowing) is

¹⁰⁹ Many thanks to Ari Borrell for sharing with me his analysis of these letters. For Dahui's letters to Wang, see T47.n1998a.0930a09. For Zhu's letter, see WJ 30/1268-1270 (in 朱熹集).

¹¹⁰ WJ 55/????; cp. Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 373.

something we achieve, not something that we simply have to realize that we already have. A key difference between Zhu and both Mazu and Zongmi, despite the differences between the two Buddhists, lies in the issue of what can be said to be inherent in us. Zongmi, recall, writes that “all sentient beings without exception have the empty, tranquil, true heartmind. From time without beginning it is the intrinsically pure, effulgent, unobscured, clear, and bright ever-present awareness.” This awareness (*zhi* 知) is inherent present. In his own way, Mazu implies the same thing: “Now seeing, hearing, listening, and sensing are fundamentally your inherent nature, which is also called inherent heartmind. It is not that there is a Buddha Nature other than this heartmind. This heartmind inherently exists and exists at present, without depending on intentional creation and action; it is inherently pure and is pure at present, without waiting for cleaning and wiping.” Present day, actual, everyday perceptual activity is one’s inherent heartmind. Mazu does not use the term “inherent knowing (*benzhi* 本知),” but it is widely used within Chan Buddhism.

In striking contrast, Zhu Xi does not use the term “inherent knowing” even once.¹¹¹ Indeed, I have not found it in any Neo-Confucian text prior to the late-Ming writings of Wang Longxi 王龍谿 (1498-1583)—a philosopher and an era in which a new level of inter-relations among Confucian, Buddhist, and other discourses had been attained. Of course, Zhu Xi is happy to talk about the “inherent heartmind,” and here he might sound like Mazu. However, he has no choice but to use the term “inherent heartmind,” because it appears in *Mencius*.¹¹² The question is, what does he mean by it? The evidence shows that Zhu takes it to be equivalent to “nature.” Consider the following passage discussing the “human

¹¹¹ At least, it does not appear in the *Yulei* or the *Wenji*, nor anywhere else that I have been able to discover.

¹¹² See the reference in *Mencius* 6A:10 to “losing one’s original heartmind 失其本心.”

heartmind (*renxin* 人心)” and the “Way heartmind (*daoxin* 道心),” and consider the distinction that appears between the *daoxin* and the *benxin* (inherent heartmind):

No one is without physical form, and thus even the most wise cannot be without a human heartmind (*renxin*). Similarly, no one is without a nature (*xing*), and thus even the most foolish cannot be without a Way heartmind (*daoxin*). The two are mixed together in the few square inches [of one’s physical heart] and if one does not know how to rule them, then [the heartmind’s] precariousness will be ever greater, its elusive subtlety ever more elusive, and the impartiality of cosmic Pattern will lack the ability to defeat the self-centeredness of human desire. If one carefully discriminates then one can distinguish between the two so that they are not mixed, and if one is undivided, then one can preserve the correctness of the inherent heartmind (*benxin*) without wavering. Pursuing matters thusly without the slightest interruption, one necessarily ensures that the Way heartmind is always the ruler of the self and the human heartmind always obeys. 人莫不有是形，故雖上智不能無人心；亦莫不有是性，故雖下愚不能無道心。二者雜於方寸之間而不知所以治之，則危者愈危、微者愈微，而天理之公卒無以勝夫人欲之私矣。精則察夫二者之間而不雜也，一則守其本心之正而不離也，從事於斯無少間斷，必使道心常為一身之主，而人心每聽命焉。¹¹³

¹¹³ This is from the Preface to Zhu’s commentary on the *Zhong Yong*; WJ XX/???? [[中庸章句序]]; cp. Ian Johnston and Wang Ping, trans., *Daxue & Zhongyong: Bilingual Edition* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), p. 401. Throughout the passage Zhu is alluding to a famous passage from the *Book of History*: “The human heartmind is precarious; the Way heartmind is subtle. Be discriminating; be undivided; that you may sincerely hold fast to the center 人心惟危。道心惟微。惟精惟一。允執厥中。” Translation adapted from James Legge, *The Shoo King*. Vol. 3, *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985), 61-2.

On my reading of this passage, *daoxin* and *benxin* are ontologically quite different. Despite the fact that “even the most foolish cannot be without a Way heartmind (*daoxin*)” and the link between this and our nature, still, *daoxin* is when we perfectly follow the “the correctness of the inherent heartmind (*benxin*)” (i.e., nature), and even the most foolish have flashes of this—for example, when seeing a baby about to fall into a well. Even the most foolish, that is, can have moments of Type Two brute clarity. Only when the *daoxin* is the master of the self, though, have we achieved Type Three knowing. In short, *daoxin* represents an actual, experiential state of self, whereas *benxin* is simply another name for the nature.

Up to this point I have said nothing about the *Buddha Nature Treatise* and the role of faith, commitment, or confidence that we find there. Does this find any resonance in Zhu Xi? In fact, a central theme of Araki Kengo’s interpretation of Zhu is emphasizing the role of some kind of confidence or faith. Araki says that Zhu posits a kind of confidence in the “onward flow of the cosmos, the production and reproduction of things, the development of history, and the continuing roles of cultural forms.”¹¹⁴ I think that this is quite perceptive, so long as we understand the modality of “faith” properly, and it might not be all that different from what King finds at the heart of the *Buddha Nature Treatise*. For Araki’s Zhu, at least, a key is that we have empirical feedback that reinforces our confidence; this is not a Kierkegaardian leap. In short, it is here that I tentatively see more overlap, rather than in the other more apparent parallels.

Returning for a final time to my main argument, we have seen good reason to conclude that Zhu Xi’s epistemology is importantly different from the Buddhism that he

¹¹⁴ Araki, *Buddhism and Confucianism*, 279.

studied as a youth. Once we look carefully at the details of Zhu's position, we are able to see the differences with influential Buddhist theorists like Zongmi and Mazu. To some degree, this conclusion may give comfort to those scholars who minimize the significance of Buddhism to the development of Neo-Confucianism. For two reasons, though, I caution against leaping to any such general lessons. First, the influence of the four layers of Buddhist-Confucian interactions upon Zhu—even on his epistemology—is apparent in many of his words and metaphors, even if in the particular area I have studied, it does not determine the philosophy that he articulates with these words and metaphors. Second, it is crucial to my method here that we examine the concepts and arguments of particular areas of philosophy in detail. I believe that this method can be generalized and applied in other areas, but my substantive conclusion concerning epistemology cannot. Each of the other chapters in this volume—as well as future scholarship on the Buddhist roots of Neo-Confucianism—needs to be judged on a case-by-case basis. The ultimate picture will surely be one in which Zhu has strong, substantive connections to Buddhist teachings in some areas and not in others, all of this built on a foundation of deep, layered interactions over many centuries.