

## Ch'en Ch'üeh Finds Himself

Ch'en Ch'üeh 陳確 (1604-1677) was an early-Ch'ing figure who represents the lingering presence of late-Ming intellectual concerns. Largely neglected during the Ch'ing period after his death, Ch'en's extant writings were mostly discovered and reappraised in the twentieth century. He has been rehabilitated to become an early-Ch'ing philosopher not to be overlooked. At the time, he was at best a locally prominent, critical proponent of the ideas of Wang Yang-ming 王陽明 (1472-1529) and Liu Tsung-chou 劉宗周 (1578-1645).

In summary, Ch'en's life is rather bland, especially when considered against the background of the great upheavals at the middle of the seventeenth century. He achieved a local reputation in Hai-ning 海寧, northeast of Hang-chou 杭州, Chekiang, as a talented, morally scrupulous young man, but he never qualified for the provincial-level examination. Ch'en's unfocused style of life started to change in the autumn of 1643, when in his fortieth year he went to Shan-yin 山陰 (an old name for Shao-hsing 紹興) in Chekiang to call on the famous Liu Tsung-chou. Ch'en was with a friend he had met a few years earlier, Chu Yuan 祝淵 (1611-1645), who was one of Liu's leading followers. Meeting the renowned old teacher, hearing and reading more about his ideas, Ch'en was stimulated by the gathering of Liu's many students for "discourses on learning" (*chiang hsüeh* 講學).<sup>1</sup> Recognizing Liu Tsung-chou as his teacher, Ch'en returned to Shan-yin in the first month of 1644 and again the next year.<sup>2</sup> A few months later Liu Tsung-chou starved himself to death rather than live under a new regime. Chu Yuan as a devoted disciple also killed himself when the order for males to cut their hair according to the Manchu style reached Hai-ning.<sup>3</sup> Chu

<sup>1</sup> Wang Jui-ch'ang 王瑞昌, *Ch'en Ch'üeh p'ing-chuan* 陳確評傳 (Nanking: Nan-ching ta-hsüeh, 2002), pp. 48-53, and Wu Ch'ien 吳騫, "Ch'en Ch'ien-ch'ü hsiên-sheng nien-p'u" 陳乾初先生年譜, in Ch'en Ch'üeh, *Ch'en Ch'üeh chi* 陳確集 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1979; hereafter, *Ch'en*), pp. 828-32.

<sup>2</sup> Wang, *Ch'en Ch'üeh p'ing-chuan*, pp. 54-55, and Wu, "Ch'en nien-p'u," p. 639.

<sup>3</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 239.

Yuan's rationale was that just as Yen Yuan 顏淵, the disciple of K'ung Tzu 孔子, said he could not die while K'ung Tzu was alive, Chu felt that as Liu's disciple he could not live when Liu was dead.<sup>4</sup> Chu was dying for the sake of Liu Tsung-chou, not the Ming dynasty.

Ch'en Ch'üeh recriminated with himself for not doing enough to serve his new-found teacher in his lifetime, but he did not choose to die.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Chu Yuan, Ch'en Ch'üeh lived on after the end of the Ming regime. He returned to Hai-ning and lived a quiet, uneventful life, the last decade or so as an invalid. In 1647 he symbolically changed his names, to Ch'üeh 確 and Ch'ien-ch'u 乾初,<sup>6</sup> to mark a new phase in his life, almost a conversion. After his death Ch'en Ch'üeh was called a non-collaborator (*i-min* 遺民),<sup>7</sup> although he had never served the Ming dynasty. Ch'en Ch'üeh's involvement with the emphasis on learning based on the primacy of *hsin* (heart, mind) should be regarded as an early Ch'ing phenomenon, but not obviously related to his choosing to live without collaborating with the new Ch'ing regime. Rather, by the act of taking Liu Tsung-chou as his teacher, Ch'en Ch'üeh found his calling in life.

In his 1659 preface for a printing of a selection of his friend Chu Yuan's writings, Ch'en Ch'üeh gave his own retrospective, more nuanced version of where he was before he began to try to clarify the teachings of their master, Liu Tsung-chou. Ch'en confessed that he had been uninterested in the issues involving *li* 理 (coherence, principles) and had not been concerned with assessing them, but in 1643 he began to learn more on a boat trip with Chu Yuan, who was deeply involved in those issues. Chu declared that his learning was rooted in the teachings of Wang Yang-ming and explained his critical assessment of Ch'eng-Chu 程朱 theories. Ch'en was not convinced, and when Chu Yuan adduced Liu Tsung-chou's explanations, Ch'en still was not convinced. At that time he had accepted the conventional criticism that the interpretations built on Wang Yang-ming's notion of "innate knowledge" (*liang chih* 良知) were too close to Ch'an Buddhism, and that Ch'eng-Chu had long been respected by Confucians (*ju* 儒), which was reason enough not to challenge them. Even after Ch'en met Liu Tsung-chou and listened to Chu Yuan's further explanations, although he was in-

<sup>4</sup> *Analects* XI/23. Chu Yuan had adopted Yen Yuan's name.

<sup>5</sup> *Ch'en*, pp. 308-9.

<sup>6</sup> Wang, *Ch'en Ch'üeh p'ing-chuan*, pp. 108-9. Ch'en wrote a poem to commemorate his name change; *Ch'en*, p. 639.

<sup>7</sup> Huang Tsung-hsi 黃宗羲, "Ch'en Ch'ien-ch'u mu-chih-ming" 陳乾初墓誌銘, in *Ch'en*, *shou-chüan*, p. 4.

terested, his understanding still was superficial, according to his own account.<sup>8</sup> Exactly when Ch'en Ch'üeh changed his mind is left unclear, but after the suicides of Liu and then Chu in 1645, and the death of Ch'en's wife in 1650, Ch'en Ch'üeh devoted the remainder of his life, three decades, including the last fifteen years while he suffered from a debilitating illness, to reading, thinking, talking, and writing about the ideas he had previously disdained.<sup>9</sup>

#### CH'EN CH'ÜEH FINDS HIS OWN INTERPRETATIONS

In the mid 1650s Ch'en Ch'üeh wrote a personal parable that suggests one of the central ideas he went on to pursue in his more philosophical writings: morality fundamentally requires one individually to engage in action based in one's own knowledge. The piece, entitled "A Record of My Bamboo Hats," begins by recounting Ch'en's acquisition of some sections of bamboo while on a trip in the eighth month of 1652 to the Yellow Mountains, a famous tourist destination in southern Anhui. He fashioned a hat out of flattened, split pieces, with a convex piece attached to the front and a concave one in back for shade. Later he cut lattice-like openings in front and back to circulate air. "Because the front was light (*ch'ien* 乾) and the back was shady (*k'un* 坤), I called it a Ming hat (*Ming kuan* 明冠)."<sup>10</sup> Ch'en was playing with *ch'ien* and *k'un* as references to yang and yin and also to sun and moon; as sun and moon together are *ming* 明, Ch'en could imply his physically *ming* hat (light and shady) was a Ming (dynasty) hat without overt political jeopardy. (Twenty years later, when Huang Tsung-hsi wrote about Ch'en's bamboo hat, he called it a "Han bamboo-skin hat," which may have been less politically dangerous.)<sup>11</sup> Ch'en could not be dissuaded from making his own hats, and he carried on with his practice. "This year [1654] in the eighth month I went again to the Yellow Mountains. I obtained some sections of mottled bamboo and hairy bamboo to take home. Our household has a boat-maker, and I borrowed his boat-scraper to work on the coarser places. I used the finger-knife bequeathed to me by Cha Erh-ya 查二雅 on the finer spots. A finger-knife is like a boat scraper in that if the pressure is too light they do not go into [the bamboo], and if too heavy they make gouges, so the best results lie somewhere in between."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Huang, "Mu-chih-ming," in *Ch'en*, shou-chüan, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> "Chu kuan chi," *Ch'en*, p. 215.

<sup>11</sup> See Huang, "Mu-chih-ming," in *Ch'en*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 215. I do not know who Cha Erh-ya was, but Cha was a common surname in Hai-ning.

Ch'en's point seems to be that in using tools, as in other aspects of life, one must find the middle way. He could turn hat-making into a social as well as a personal practice. "When a guest would come, I would lay aside my work to chat, and when the guest left, I went back to work, although sometimes I would chat and work at the same time. I could finish a hat of Hsiang 湘 [mottled] bamboo in one day, and one of Yun 雲 bamboo in two or three days."<sup>13</sup> His three types of bamboo hats – Ming, Hsiang, and Yun – were worn differently, which affected how his specially made hat-pins were used and when he wore them. "In the spring I wear my Yun hat, in the summer my Ming hat, and in the autumn my Hsiang hat. In the winter I wear a head wrap. With these hats my rustic apparel is complete."<sup>14</sup> Like his descriptions of his tools and his working with them, Ch'en's idiosyncratic garb was intended to manifest his non-official, non-literatus social status. Using nonverbal means – making hats, wearing hats – he was demonstrating he was independent, with overtones of being a non-collaborator (*i-min*).

To bring out his philosophical points, Ch'en Ch'üeh used the readily available convention of a dialogue with a guest.

A guest saw my hats and exclaimed, "How beautiful! How superb! But you have not heard the Way. A gentleman does not personally involve himself in such petty matters. Don't you have a worker you could have do this for you?" I said, "On the contrary, exerting one's limbs and toiling with one's head are performing one's duties of respecting and venerating [one's superiors and parents] (alluding to the *Doctrine of the Mean*, section 31), so how could I refrain from doing this [merely because of your false claim that a gentleman does not personally *do* things]?" The guest retorted, "Of course that is so. But the Master [i.e., K'ung Tzu] said, 'If an artisan wants to be good at what he does, he must first sharpen his tools.'<sup>15</sup> Now someone who wants to be involved in some work [like making bamboo hats] without the tools for it might get the work done, but he would not be making good use of the relevant knowledge [of how to do it, as an artisan would]." I said, "Yes, but one with the relevant knowing does not wholly depend on the relevant things (such as tools, materials and artisanal methods); he depends on he himself having the occasion to use them (i.e., there

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 216

<sup>15</sup> K'ung Tzu is quoted as saying this in the treatise "Hsing fa chih" 刑法志, in *Han shu* 漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1962) 23, p. 1091. The context is a discussion of rulers needing to use all the "tools" of governance, including coercive weapons and instruments of punishment as well as the powers of cultural suasion and transformation.

is personal agency). In general, someone must have a task and then he gets the sharp tools to help him do it. As a consequence, the work is halved and the output is doubled. But if he rejects the task in first place, then how would any sharpness [of a tool] be of any benefit! Or if he depends on 'sharp' [tools] but does not complete the work, he would only succeed in injuring himself and any work he did would be a loss. Although the tools I now use are extremely blunt, I am careful and cautious.<sup>16</sup> I fear I will not use up all my strength, but I also fear that I will too quickly use up my strength. If after a long time my eyes dim or my hands become fatigued, then I rest a bit before starting again, as I want to use my spirit when it is intact. Although my blade dulls, I resharpen it from time to time. Although the bamboo is tough, I diligently keep after it. By not hurrying, not lagging, not neglecting anything and not forcing anything, my strength does not slacken and my hat is finished. Even if I had had the power of advantages ten or a hundred times what I did have, the outcome would have been identical (i.e., the final product in either case is a hat). Isn't this because I have put into practice the making of a hat? Thus, what one's heart wants, his skills and strengths bring into being, (but heart, and will, must come first). From this [experience] I increasingly came to know about learning (*hsüeh*). When one's will is correct and strong, and one's heart is humble and cautious, although he does not speak of 'going out toward [things] and extending [knowledge]' (as Chu Hsi did in explaining *ko wu* 格物 in the *Great Learning* as investigating things and extending knowledge), he is doing nothing other than going out toward and extending."<sup>17</sup>

The guest of course expresses his admiration for Ch'en Ch'üeh's philosophical point and says that, like the hat, it is suitable for the host of Confucians (*ju*).

Ch'en Ch'üeh's essential points in his "Record of My Bamboo Hats" are that in moral action one's heart (*hsin*) starts with the intention of acting, one acquires more knowledge (*chih* 知) as one pursues the task oneself rather than depending on others, and one must carry the action to completion in order to achieve the intended outcome (whether a hat or a moral good); these three stages or processes are required for making

<sup>16</sup> "Careful and cautious," *ching ching yeh yeh* 兢兢業業, is from "Kao Yao mo" 皋陶謨, in the *Shu ching*; see Bernard Karlgren, "The Book of Documents," *BMFEA* 22 (1950), pp. 9-10. Karlgren's translation of the phrase is, "it is fearsome, it is awe-inspiring," which is applicable for a sovereign but it seems too immodest for what Ch'en Ch'üeh intends.

<sup>17</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 216.

a bamboo hat and for acting morally, in spite of contemporary claims about innate moral knowing being sufficient in itself. One cannot make a hat with innate knowledge. One cannot make an unprecedented hat (as Ch'en Ch'üeh had) with inherited or received knowledge. Doing it for yourself, for Ch'en, was what learning is about.

On a more overtly philosophical plane, Ch'en Ch'üeh claimed that at the core of Chu Yuan's, and Liu Tsung-chou's, teachings going back to Wang Yang-ming was the ideal, in his words, of "cautiously never turning against one's originating heart 兢兢無負其本心," which entailed one's knowing and correcting his faults as he takes action.<sup>18</sup> According to Ch'en, Wang Yang-ming's key term, "innate knowing" (*liang chih*) could only mean "originating heart" (*pen hsün*). Wang's prescriptive slogan, "extending one's innate knowledge of the good" (*chih liang chih*) could only mean "cautiously never turning against one's originating heart"; it could not mean the liberating, spontaneous, intuitive knowing claimed by too many later Confucians (*ju*) who sought to emulate Wang Yang-ming. Ch'en explained Liu Tsung-chou's slogan, "taking care in solitude" (*shen tu* 慎獨) using the same terms.<sup>19</sup> Ch'en was situating himself as the authentic interpreter of Liu Tsung-chou's and Wang Yang-ming's teachings; he was revivifying a late Ming fashion in the early Ch'ing period.

#### CH'EN CH'ÜEH'S FORAY INTO TEXTUAL SCHOLARSHIP

To justify himself and his interpretation of the central importance of "originating heart" in the process of learning (*hsüeh* 學), Ch'en Ch'üeh focused on discrediting the *Great Learning* (*Ta hsüeh* 大學), the text that was the foundation of Chu Hsi's grand project of learning based on "fathoming coherence" (*ch'üung li* 窮理) through "investigating things" (*ko wu* 格物). Pointing to the origins of the *Great Learning* as a chapter in the *Records of Rituals* (*Li chi* 禮記), a Han compilation, Ch'en tried to pull the rug out from Ch'eng I's and Chu Hsi's treating the opening section of the *Great Learning* as a reliable expression of K'ung Tzu's ideas and the ten sections of elaboration as the ideas of his disciple, Tseng Tzu 曾子. Ch'eng and Chu were mistaken, Ch'en wrote again and again. Their ideas, expressed as the Learning of the Way (*Tao hsüeh* 道學) and learning based on coherence (*li hsüeh* 理學), were not in fact

<sup>18</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 239.

<sup>19</sup> *Ch'en*, pp. 239-40. A useful introduction to these issues is Tang Chün-i, "Liu Tsung-chou's Doctrine of Moral Mind and Practice and His Critique of Wang Yang-ming," in W. T. deBary, ed., *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1975), pp. 305-31.

the ideas of the sages.<sup>20</sup> Ch'en was not the first to come to this assessment of the *Great Learning*, as some of his contemporaries pointed out, but many of his contemporaries did not accept it or were dismissive. Chang Li-hsiang 張履祥 (1611-1674), for example, acknowledged that the *Great Learning* was not directly from the hands of K'ung Tzu and Tseng Tzu, but it was still unacceptable to claim the text did not correctly represent their teachings.<sup>21</sup> Ch'en's rejection of the canonical status of the *Great Learning* as one of the Four Books was part of his attack on Ch'eng-Chu teachings built on the concept of coherence (*li*) existing externally to our minds.

Ch'en Ch'üeh presented his philosophical rejection of the implication of the ideas in the *Great Learning* through a series of letters and exchanges collected in the 1650s under the title, "Critiques of the Great Learning" ("Ta hsüeh pien" 大學辨).<sup>22</sup> Ch'en's main complaint against the *Great Learning* and the interpretation that Chu Hsi imposed on it was the over-emphasis on "knowing" (*chih* 知) at the expense of "acting" (*hsing* 行), which led to Ch'an-like thinking. In this complaint Ch'en Ch'üeh was following Wang Yang-ming. Ch'en argued this point with his contemporaries who resisted his disestablishing the *Great Learning*, which for two centuries had been accepted as a foundational text in the Ming imperial system. In one of his letters to Chang Li-hsiang, Ch'en wrote, "Learners who follow and trust [the *Great Learning*] are extremely stupid. The *Great Learning's* emphasis on knowing is as if to say that as soon as one is investigating [things] and extending [his knowledge], there is nothing else to do in learning [i.e., in the conscious actions that are moral in the experiential world]; this is the basic thrust of the *Great Learning* [as interpreted by Chu Hsi]. Although shunning Ch'an Buddhism, by celebrating the *Great Learning* Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi undoubtedly drove later generations into Ch'an."<sup>23</sup> Ch'en Ch'üeh was arguing against taking "knowing" as a static or permanent state

<sup>20</sup> "Ta hsüeh pien," in *Ch'en*, pp. 552-53.

<sup>21</sup> Chang Li-hsiang, "Yu Ch'en Ch'ien-ch'u shu," *Yang-yuan ch'üan-chi* 楊園全集 3, quoted in Wang Mao 王茂, *Ch'ing tai che-hsüeh* 清代哲學 (Anhui: An-hui jen-min, 1992), p. 488. Chang Li-hsiang made a similar comment in another letter, cited in *Ch'en*, shou-chüan, pp. 45-46. Huang Tsung-hsi wrote that Ch'en's criticism did not really matter; Chu I-ts'un was more sympathetic. See Wu, "Ch'en nien-p'u," in *Ch'en*, pp. 848-49. The reading of Chang's name as Li-hsiang follows Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Off., 1943-44), p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> The opening of the "Ta hsüeh pien" has a note with the date 1654 and an appended note date 1659. *Ch'en*, p. 552 and 559. In a postface dated 1655 for the "Ta hsüeh pien" collection, Ch'en wrote that he began to make it "in the sixth month of last year," i.e., 1654; *Ch'en*, p. 609.

<sup>23</sup> "Yü Chang K'ao-fu shu" 與張考夫書, "Ta hsüeh pien," *Ch'en*, p. 586.

of mind one could attain, as in enlightenment. He sought to recover the idea that for the sages “knowing” involved a continuous, reflective process connecting with what one is doing as a process of (moral) “acting,” or “carrying out.” The *Great Learning* was misleading because it prioritized knowing.

Chang Li-hsiang tried to argue that knowing must occur before acting by deploying a simple analogy. “When one is to take a step forward, he first sees (i.e., knows where to step) and only then will he succeed in proceeding (i.e., in taking the next steps, or acting).” Ch’en Ch’üeh conceded the analogy, but then turned it to his advantage:

That being so, then when one is to proceed to a certain place he would first have to *see* the steps [he must take]. You are able to *see* your [next] steps inside a room, but [while still in the room] are you able [literally] to *see* your steps outside the room?...If you want to see the steps outside the room, you must proceed (i.e., take an action by moving) out of the room and only then are you able to see (i.e., know) your [next] steps outside. My saying that knowing is advanced (e.g., one knows where one now is) only after one’s acting has advanced (e.g., one has taken the steps to arrive here), lies exactly in this.<sup>24</sup>

In his critical evaluations, Ch’en Ch’üeh did not altogether exempt Wang Yang-ming. Although Ch’en’s emphasis on acting accorded with Wang’s saying about “knowing and acting are united as one” and “there is no priority in knowing and acting,” that is, they must proceed simultaneously, Ch’en found an inconsistency. The *Great Learning*’s obvious (to Ch’en Ch’üeh) prioritizing of knowing was in effect followed by Wang with his precept of extending one’s innate knowledge (*chih liang chih* 致良知), which assumes that knowledge of what is good comes before extending it in action. This had led later men into relapsing into a claim of spontaneous knowing held without effort, which Ch’en opposed as false learning. Ch’en Ch’üeh was adamant in his argument against the notion of “sudden” knowledge.

For the gentleman, the process of learning is a life-long process [as K’ung Tzu said of himself in the *Analects*]. So the process of knowing also is a life-long process. [Knowing being an on-going process rather than a static, innate state,] consequently one who today knows about the “highest good” (*chih shan* 至善) under today’s conditions then tomorrow will know about [a new] “highest good”

<sup>24</sup> *Ch’en*, p. 588.



under tomorrow's conditions. It is not that one is able simply to know it [i.e., the highest good], nor that one can holistically know, nor that my intellect and knowledge can presume completely [to know the highest good].<sup>25</sup>

Even the sage rulers of antiquity, Ch'en Ch'üeh pointed out, are reputed to have shown caution and trepidation rather than easy confidence that they knew everything. "The principles (*li*) of our world are unlimited and an individual's mind is limited. When someone who arrogantly trusts himself considers his knowing to be without deficiencies, he must be the world's biggest ignoramus, so how wouldn't he with one morning's worth of his great insight be casual about the daily unfolding of the principles of the affairs of our world!"<sup>26</sup> This might be taken as criticism of, for example, Wang Yang-ming's sudden realization in 1509 that within his own nature he already had the means of attaining the way of a sage man,<sup>27</sup> but that does not seem to be Ch'en's intent. Ch'en Ch'üeh's complaint here is not even so much with those who misconstrued Wang Yang-ming's notion of innate knowledge of moral good, that is, those among the followers of Wang who held it implies the sufficiency of apprehending one's original mind (*pen hsin*) and thus no further cognitive effort is required. Ch'en's inclusive interpretation was that Wang Yang-ming's insight about "extending one's innate knowledge of the good" (*chih liang chih*), Liu Tsung-chou's slogan "taking care in solitude" (*shen tu*) and even Ch'eng Hao's emphasis on the primacy of showing respect (*chu ching* 主敬) all could be understood to line up consistently with the teaching of the sages of antiquity. Even though the Ch'eng brothers', Wang's, and Liu's teachings all might be construed to be about "knowing" (*chih*), Ch'en was confident in his claim that for all of them showing respect (*ching*) was an essential, continuously required operational step.<sup>28</sup> Ch'en's complaint was that any inconsistency was solely caused by the *Great Learning* itself in overly privileging knowing to the detriment of effort.<sup>29</sup>

Ch'en Ch'üeh criticized Wang Yang-ming on textual grounds. According to Ch'en, when Wang realized he could not base his concept of extending innate moral knowledge on Chu Hsi's established version of the text of the *Great Learning*, Wang turned to the so-called "ancient text" (*ku pen* 古本) version as it appeared in the *Records of Ritual* (*Li chi*

<sup>25</sup> Ch'en, "Ta hsüeh pien," p. 554.

<sup>26</sup> Ch'en, p. 554.

<sup>27</sup> See Wei-ming Tu, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)*, (Berkeley: U. California P., 1976), p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> Ch'en, "Ta hsüeh pien," p. 556.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 556.

禮記) and Wang's followers later sought to use the so-called "stone inscription classic" (*shih ching* 石經) version. This showed, Ch'en claimed, that Wang was searching through and choosing texts to justify his ideas rather than deriving interpretations directly from the sages' texts, as Ch'en thought himself to be doing.<sup>30</sup> Ch'en was demonstrating a sensitivity to the issue of the authenticity of any given text invoked in support of an argument. This issue had been raised repeatedly through the sixteenth century, and in Ch'en's time it was receiving more attention than he was prepared to give it. Although Ch'en Ch'üeh could make arguments based on texts, he did not accept that what he meant by "learning" (*hsüeh*) was based on texts.

#### CH'EN CH'ÜEH AS AN ADVOCATE FOR HIMSELF

For Ch'en, the process of "learning" involved "rectifying the heart" (*cheng hsin* 正心), that is, not deviating in one's actions from the latent directive powers in the "originating heart" (*pen hsin*). He explicitly rejected Chu Hsi's program of learning starting from investigating things (*ko wu*).<sup>31</sup> "Aiming to read books and thereby to fathom coherence (*li*) is no different from acting in a dream: what is called 'knowing without acting' is to end up with no [actual] knowing."<sup>32</sup> Ch'en condemned his contemporaries who continued to confuse reading books (another process stuck merely in knowing) with actual learning.<sup>33</sup> Continuous pursuit of acquisition of more knowledge was fruitless, Ch'en asserted, in an attempt to block the current trend toward scholarly, intellectual endeavors. "In our times men of learning mostly put aside what is already clear and day after day they seek what is not clear to them. Of course what is not clear may not necessarily be able to be sought, but when they appear to succeed in their search, it is merely knowledge that was already clear."<sup>34</sup> That is, they already innately "knew" whatever was significant and knowable; the rest of the knowledge derived from investigation of things is ephemeral and worthless. Ch'en's own ideas would be the needed corrective. Ch'en wanted to save his contemporaries from this fault, just as he wanted to save them from presuming on the adequacy of innate knowing as a state or condition of one's heart.

Ch'en's motive for getting the meaning of these ideas correct was not mere pedantry. His argument was that when teachings are in disarray, everyone loses contact with his "originating heart" in everything

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 588.

<sup>31</sup> For example, *Ch'en*, p. 559.

<sup>32</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 97.

<sup>33</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 460.

<sup>34</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 97; written in 1655.

he does. For five or six hundred years (that is, going back to the times of Ch'eng I and Chu Hsi), men have been discussing the grand philosophical ideas such as coherence (*li*) and human nature (*hsing*) as if they could surpass K'ung and Meng. They had heedlessly appropriated Buddhist ideas and accepted key ideas from authors other than the sages. Given this corrupt transmission, Ch'en asked, "How could humans not become wild animals, and how could the central states (*chung-kuo* 中國) not become barbarian?"<sup>35</sup> The world has lost the Way. The solution, according to Ch'en Ch'üeh, is to set aside philosophical debates and emphasize "the goodness of one's originating heart 本心之良." This would lead to genuine scholarship and genuine men. In an obvious jab at followers of Chu Hsi, Ch'en wrote that any Confucian (*ju*) who wanted to fathom coherence and fully manifest his human nature, and who tried to pursue broad learning and moral cultivation without starting from the goodness of one's own originating heart, would end up merely being broad; this would be using false means to acquire false learning. Ch'en Ch'üeh tried to show that Chu Yuan's and Liu Tsung-chou's teachings reduce to the concept of "originating heart" (*pen hsin*), even though they used other words.<sup>36</sup> If everyone read the writings of Liu and Chu and grasped the message of not turning away from one's originating heart, which Ch'en claimed was the central message in both even if left unsaid, then the mind that held that Heaven would not destroy our culture (that is, K'ung Tzu in *Analects* ix/5) and that unified everything at the Yu 虞 court (that is, the sage ruler Shun 舜) would be transmitted to present and future generations.<sup>37</sup> Ch'en Ch'üeh clearly thought his contemporaries should and could rely on learning based on their own originating hearts rather than on text-based learning, regardless of the texts.

In a short essay entitled "A Discussion of Other Strands" ("I tuan lun" 異端論), Ch'en Ch'üeh set out an explanation, and justification, for his being disputatious, that is, why he engaged in the fights that he did, and not in others, such as combating the two most pervasive "other strands," Buddha's teachings and Lao Tzu's teachings.<sup>38</sup> The implicit question that he posed for himself in this essay derived from *Meng tzu* 3B/9: why are you fond of disputation (*p'ien* 辯)? The first part of Ch'en Ch'üeh's discussion was structured along the line of an examination essay, with pairs of complementary sentences.

<sup>35</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 240. This passage was not included in the print version of Ch'en's preface to Chu Yuan's writings in 1659 because of its anti-Ch'ing implications. Ch'en seems to be casting himself in the role of a latter-day Meng Tzu.

<sup>36</sup> *Ch'en*, pp. 240-241.

<sup>37</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 241.

<sup>38</sup> The essay is in *Ch'en*, p. 166.

The first two pairs explain his stance on when there is no need to dispute and when it is necessary.

It is not necessary to dispute in the case when [adherents of] an “other” strand recognize themselves as an “other” strand. We must vigorously dispute in the case when [adherents of] our Way are an “other” strand (because they do not recognize themselves as “other”).

It is not necessary to dispute in the case when there is an “other” strand and everyone else understands it as an “other” strand. We must vigorously dispute in the case when an “other” strand’s competing against our Way is extreme and the calamity to society is extreme but everyone else still is not aware that it is an “other” strand.

According to Ch’en Ch’üeh, the threat to be feared lies within, among us, when the otherness is not recognized, which could lead to an internally induced calamity.

The next two pairs of sentences suggest we can set aside concern about the “other strands” of Buddhism and Taoism, and they reveal what Ch’en Ch’üeh identifies as insidious, internal threats: burial masters and teachings based on the *Great Learning*.

As for cases of there being an “other” strand and everyone else knows it is an “other” strand, Buddha’s teachings and Lao’s teachings are examples. As for a case of there being an “other” strand that is extreme in competing against our Way and bringing profound calamity to society and yet everyone does not understand it as an “other” strand, the theories of burial masters are examples.

As for cases of an “other” strand recognizing itself as an “other” strand, Buddha’s teachings being [self denominated] Buddhist and Lao’s teachings being Lao-ist are examples. As for a case of being of our Way yet being an “other” strand, the teachings based on the *Great Learning* are examples.

Alluding to Meng Tzu’s self-justification in *Meng tzu* 3B/9, Ch’en Ch’üeh asks of himself, “How can I do otherwise than dispute them!” Burial masters and the *Great Learning* are the threats that concern Ch’en in many of his writings. The teachings based on the *Great Learning* are a threat, Ch’en argued many times, because they privilege “knowing” and were the misleading foundation of Ch’eng-Chu teachings but unrecognized as such. The threat posed by burial masters was more social than philosophical. Burial masters were local, nonclerical, funeral specialists who managed the timing, location, construction, and ritual

for a burial. On the death of his wife in 1650, Ch'en began to try to take control of burials for his family and community, and for the remainder of his life he wrote for and talked with his fellow literati on the necessity of their taking control of the ritually significant event, a burial. A burial was an event that required action, not merely knowledge, and thus Ch'en could apply his philosophical position to judge that the threat posed by burial masters was undermining the integrity of the local leadership of literati and was equal to that of the pernicious *Great Learning*.

He dismisses his imagined interlocutor: "When we come to your theory about [the threat of] the two teachings [of Buddha and Lao], then since the T'ang dynasty the great Confucians (*ju*) have already disputed them in detail, and although there have been disputers since then, none has been able to go beyond what was said, so it is permissible not to dispute [those two 'other strands']." In other words, the two teachings are no longer a threat because they are clearly marked as "other"; Ch'en's concern is with corrosive, internal threats.

Ch'en Ch'üeh allowed his imagined interlocutor to press the point about the need to combat the "other strands" of Buddhist and Taoist teachings if they became more threatening. "What you say is so, but if the adherents of the two teachings proliferated day after day and their teachings became increasingly provocative day after day, then what?" Ch'en's response placed the blame for such a situation on us rather than on the others.

I say that would not be the fault of the two teachings, it is the fault of us Confucians 吾儒. By analogy, when barbarians enter and occupy the central states 中國, it is not the fault of the barbarians, it is the fault of those in the central states. The central states are bigger (than the barbarians' territories), but if there is no man here to rule them, then barbarians enter and rule them. If we Confucians have no man among us (to promote correct teachings about our Way), then adherents of the two teachings will proliferate day after day, and their teachings will be increasingly provocative day after day; what would be more calamitous than the inevitable result of that! (That is, Our Way would succumb to those two teachings like the central states succumb to barbarians when there is no one adequate to lead the resistance.) I deplore a man of learning (such as yourself) who is not concerned about himself but is concerned about the two teachings, who rattles on about them day after day, saying "That Lao, he is an other strand, and that Buddha, he is

even worse as an other strand, and who is of no help to our Way and of no detriment to the two teachings even though he might wear himself out in the process. How is this different from the desperado from the hinterland who, declaring himself a righteous general (referring to Li Tzu-ch'eng 李自成 [1605?-1645], who gave himself such a title before toppling the Ming government in 1644) but bringing harm to commoners and court, absolutely could not achieve anything!

Ch'en Ch'üeh's argument here was a politically delicate one to be making in the 1660s. He was blaming his fellows, "us Confucians," for the predictable calamities that ensue when "we" have lost contact with our "originating heart." Ch'en's premise is that only the ideas he was transmitting, which stem from Wang Yang-ming through Liu Tsung-chou and Chu Yuan to him, can save the world. The irony is that at more or less this same time Ku Yen-wu 顧炎武 (1613-1682) was blaming Wang Yang-ming's ideas for the debilitating effects that led to the fall of the Ming dynasty.

Finally, Ch'en Ch'üeh closed the discussion in "A Discussion of Other Strands" with a conciliatory gesture. The interlocutor was allowed to criticize Ch'en Ch'üeh for his devotion to combating the theories of burial masters and the *Great Learning*. "If what you say is so, then how is your critiquing in your 'Discussions of Burials' and your '[Disputing] the *Great Learning*' any different [from the type of man of learning you said you deplore]?" Rather than defending himself, Ch'en appears to give in: "I say that what you say is so. Attacking an enemy who comes from within is only part of the way of governance. From now on, I will not be only concerned about myself [and our internal threats], but stir myself with your words [about external 'other strands']." In other words, Ch'en Ch'üeh declared he was now moved to combat externally generated threats, but it is left unsaid whether those threats were limited to Buddhist and Taoist teachings or barbarians who had occupied the central states. There is no sign that Ch'en took action against the occupiers. In either case, Ch'en Ch'üeh's rhetoric allies him with Meng Tzu's in *Meng tzu* 3B/9. Meng Tzu, of course, positioned himself to be regarded by later generations as a sage (see 2A/2); we may surmise that Ch'en Ch'üeh was not unmindful of that possibility for himself. It has not happened yet.

With his emphasis on "originating heart" and on doubting or disputing appeals to authority, Ch'en Ch'üeh was an extreme example of philosophical self-reliance, or reliance on one's self, one's heart, one's

mind. Although Ch'en Ch'üeh was certain he stood against Ch'an Buddhist influences on "us Confucians," the emphasis on one's own heart as the seat of morality had been perceived as more a threat than an opportunity at least since the founding of the Tung-lin Academy at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The threat, which Ch'en Ch'üeh's ideas exemplified, was to the intellectual elite's cohesion, and after the fall of the Ming dynasty efforts were made to move away from arguments in favor of relying on one's own heart and mind as the starting point for true learning, even when accessing that heart required effort, experience, and action, as Ch'en Ch'üeh stressed. Ch'en disparaged the idea prevalent among his contemporaries that merely "reading books" constituted learning, but by the 1660s the claim was gaining favor that critical handling of textual evidence was the primary means to a secure, sharable basis for durable "knowing."

#### CH'EN CHUEH GETS LOST, AND FOUND

After formally recognizing Liu Tsung-chou as his teacher in 1644, Ch'en Ch'üeh remained involved in the veneration of Liu, his criticisms and revisions notwithstanding. In 1655 Ch'en edited a compilation of Liu's recorded discussions.<sup>39</sup> Ch'en's main rival as builder and protector of the legacy of Liu's contributions to learning would turn out to be Huang Tsung-hsi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), who had more claim than Ch'en to being a student in close contact with Liu Tsung-chou. Huang had acknowledged Liu as his teacher in 1626 on the eve of the death of his father in prison. In the 1650s Huang reinvolved himself in Liu's teachings, and he did not condone Ch'en's revisions of their teacher's ideas. In 1666 Huang Tsung-hsi went to Hai-ch'ang 海昌, where Ch'en was living, to participate in a meeting for discourses on learning (*chiang hsüeh*). Huang used the occasion to call on Ch'en, and they spent a day in conversation although Ch'en was already ill. In the ensuing years Huang and Ch'en exchanged letters discussing their interpretations of learning. Ten years later (1676) Huang again went to Hai-ch'ang, but by then Ch'en was too ill to rise from his bed to receive him.<sup>40</sup>

After Ch'en Ch'üeh died the next year, his eldest son went and asked Huang Tsung-hsi to write the tomb inscription because they were fellow students of Liu Tsung-chou. Huang wrote that he could not but agree because there were almost no other students of Liu sur-

<sup>39</sup> Wu, "Ch'en nien-p'u," in *Ch'en*, pp. 850-51.

<sup>40</sup> Huang, "Mu-chih-ming," in *Ch'en*, shou-chüan, pp. 3 and 8.

living in Chekiang. In the tomb inscription Huang lauded Ch'en for the many talents he had shown as a young man as well as his scrupulous moral conduct and his disinclination to accept patronage. Huang acknowledged how quickly Ch'en Ch'üeh had settled down from his unrestrained ways after meeting Liu Tsung-chou in 1643, and also how quickly Ch'en achieved recognition as one of Liu's superior followers. Huang reported on Ch'en's involvement in making his own bamboo hats and his predilection for dressing in old-style clothes, but Huang implies Ch'en's actions were idiosyncratic, and he overlooks Ch'en's moral intent. Huang insinuated that Ch'en Ch'üeh's approach to learning was also idiosyncratic. According to Huang, Ch'en went against established interpretations (for example, Wang Yang-ming's and Liu Tsung-chou's) with what Ch'en discovered from his own mind (*hsin*). "Thus he had many theories that startled the world," wrote Huang in the tomb inscription. Ch'en was firm in his convictions, and "would close his eyes to argument and remain impassive," a comment that may reflect Huang's own experience in his conversations with Ch'en.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the tomb inscription, which recorded personal details, Huang wrote several more versions of a critique of Ch'en's ideas that still carry the title of tomb inscription, but which are more in the style of the critical "source book" (*hsüeh an* 學案) format that Huang was working on for his influential *Ming ju hsüeh an* 明儒學案.<sup>42</sup> In one critique Huang gave a selection of Ch'en's iconoclastic interpretations of key phrases that earlier commentators had misunderstood, or so Ch'en claimed. An easy example is the quotation of Ch'en's reductive handling of Chou Tun-i's 周敦頤 (1017-1073) teaching about having no desires:

Chou's teaching of "have no desires" is Ch'an without being Ch'an. We Confucians only speak of having few desires, not of being without desires. The heart of a sage man is no different from the heart of an ordinary man. What an ordinary man desires is just what a sage man desires. A man's heart originally does not have what is called heavenly coherence (*t'ien li* 天理) (that is, coherence of that which is external to the human himself); heavenly coherence correctly is derived from the actualization of a human's desires. A human's desires being congruently in the right place is actual heavenly coherence (i.e., the coherence is a function of the hu-

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. For an account of the disagreement that sympathizes with Huang, see Lynn A. Struve, "Chen Que versus Huang Zongxi: Confucianism Faces Modern Times in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18.1 (1991), pp. 5-23.

<sup>42</sup> See the note on p. 9, Huang, "Mu-chih-ming," in *Ch'en, shou-chüan*.



man's actions; it is not external to him in its origins, as Chu Hsi claimed). It follows that if there are no human desires, then it can be said that there is no heavenly coherence.<sup>43</sup>

Huang's wry comment was that "Ch'en Ch'üeh's pronouncements generally were like that. He only perceived the brain (*t'ou-na* 頭腦) (and not the heart) in the learning of the sages. Consequently, in some cases he was profoundly on the mark in identifying deficiencies in various Confucians' ideas; in other cases what he argued for was the ideas of the various Confucians."<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere Huang Tsung-hsi noted that Ch'en Ch'üeh went beyond what was proper when he alleged that the *Great Learning* was an accretive text that did not come from K'ung Tzu.<sup>45</sup> By being dismissive of Ch'en Ch'üeh's idiosyncratic, anti-authority, skeptical, and even iconoclastic views, Huang was implicitly making room to establish himself as the authentic transmitter of the ideas of his, and Ch'en Ch'üeh's, teacher, Liu Tsung-chou, and as reconciler of the plenitude of teachings advanced during the Ming period, particularly those passing through Wang Yang-ming, that emphasized *hsin* (mind, heart). Huang lived twenty years longer than Ch'en Ch'üeh. Huang outlasted, and probably outmaneuvered, Ch'en as the early Ch'ing spokesman for the learning based on the heart (*hsin hsüeh* 心學).

After his death in 1677 and the tomb inscriptions written by Huang Tsung-hsi, Ch'en Ch'üeh was not wholly forgotten, but Huang had set a tone. For example, in his massive *Ching i k'ao* 經義考, a critical bibliography of classical studies completed in 1701, Chu I-tsun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) noted that at least four of Ch'en's contemporaries had been troubled enough by his view on the *Great Learning* to challenge him in exchanges of letters, but Ch'en could not be dissuaded.<sup>46</sup> Fifty years later Ch'üan Tsu-wang 全祖望 (1705-1755), who was involved in the first attempts at preparing a historical account of early Ch'ing intellectual efforts, made positive comments about Ch'en Ch'üeh, but almost none of Ch'en's writings made it into print during the Ch'ing period.

This began to change in the 1930s, when Ch'ien Mu 錢穆 added a few pages on Ch'en Ch'üeh as an addendum to the chapter on Huang Tsung-hsi in *Chung-kuo chin san pai nien hsüeh-shu shih* 中國今三百年學術史 (1937); Ch'en was presented as a foil for proving Huang Tsung-

<sup>43</sup> Cited by Huang in *ibid.*, (second version), in *Ch'en*, shou-chüan, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>45</sup> *Ch'en*, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Chu I-tsun, *Ching i k'ao* 經義考 (Taipei: Chung-yang yen-chiu yuan Chung-kuo wen-che yen-chiu so, 1997), vol. 4, p. 344.

hsi's views. However, Ch'ien Mu included an extended excerpt from Ch'en's "*Ta-hsüeh pien*" on the grounds that it had never been printed. Ch'ien Mu also noted that manuscripts by Ch'en existed, but they were not accessible to him. The revival of Ch'en Ch'üeh's standing continued when he received notice (seven pages) in volume five of Hou Wai-lu's 侯外廬 authoritative *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung shih* 中國思想通史, published in 1956.<sup>47</sup> Ch'en began to be included with a chapter of his own in philosophical anthologies in the 1960s as a materialist thinker, which is an odd justification for his rehabilitation, given his emphasis on "originating heart." Ch'en Ch'üeh received his due with the publication of a carefully prepared edition of his collected writings, based on manuscripts that had ended up in the Shanghai Library and, in another manuscript version, the Nanking Library. The editing was finished by 1962, according to the editors' anonymous preface, and eventually printed in two volumes, almost eight hundred pages, in 1979 as *Ch'en Ch'üeh chi* 陳確集. Finally, Ch'en Ch'üeh was established as an early Ch'ing thinker who had found his own distinctive views even if he was continuing to focus on Ming concerns and did not continue or start a "trend."

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

*Ch'en*            Ch'en Ch'üeh, *Ch'en Ch'üeh chi* 陳確集

<sup>47</sup> Hou Wai-lu put his name on the publication of a selection of Ch'en Ch'üeh's philosophical writing, most of which had not been previously available, which was one in a series of books on "materialist philosophers." See Hou Wai-lu et al., *Ch'en Ch'üeh che-hsüeh hsuan-chi* 陳確哲學選集 (Peking: K'o-hsüeh, 1959); pp. vi-vii provide a convenient summary of the publication history of Ch'en's writings that were printed before 1958. Also see *Ch'en*, "Tien-chiao shuo-ming," pp. 1-2.