***Lure of the Supreme Joy: Pedagogy and Environment in the Neo-Confucian Academies of Zhu Xi.*** By Xin Conan-Wu. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2024. Pp. 275. $132.00.

Bewildered by the purportedly limited words of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) on the pedagogical role of nature and the lack of attention to this topic from philosophers, this book seeks to uncover Zhu's so-called natural pedagogy through the lens of art history. To achieve this, it primarily draws on the material aspects of history, such as the author's fieldwork, local gazetteers, landscape poetry, and painting, skilfully weaving together an extraordinary expanse of space-time. This includes Zhu's three major teaching sites—the Yuelu Academy 嶽麓書院, the White Deer Academy 白鹿洞書院, and the Wuyi Retreat 武夷精舍—and their Korean counterparts during the Chosun dynasty, as well as the later revival of Zhu's pedagogy at Yuelu by Qing scholars.

The book begins with a brief archaeological exploration of "visuality" and "spatiality" in ancient Chinese history, setting the stage for its discussion of Zhu Xi's innovative teaching sites. Notably, its investigation of Yuelu Academy is framed within a broader analysis of the stylistic tradition of paintings known as the Eight Views of Xiaoxiang (*Xiaoxiang ba jing* 瀟湘八景). In this tradition, Confucian (Ru or Ruist) scholars' moral engagement with politics is subtly conveyed through the aesthetics of the broader Xiao and Xiang River region, where Yuelu Academy was located. The interplay between the book's expansive scope and its detailed focus makes its reading akin to the joyful experience of appreciating a long, internally diverse yet panoramically unified landscape painting—beautifully reflecting the book's title.

The concepts of "visuality" and "spatiality" emphasize the contributions of culture, tradition, and artistic creativity—such as poetry, painting, and architecture—to the manifestation of vision and space in the human world. Or, as the author aptly states, these analytical meta-categories aim to "retain the concreteness in the engagement with the environment as it was perceived in the cultural gaze of the twelfth-century Chinese scholars" (p. xxx). A particularly successful application of this approach is found in Chapter 4, "The Ten Scenes of Yuelu [Academy]," where the author translates the exchanged poetry of two neo-Confucian, or *Daoxue* 道學 scholars, Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180), which names ten scenes of the emerging academy they helped to establish. The author's commentary on these poems highlights their connections to Ru classics and philosophy and presents them as a distinctive cultural activity of "place-making," an integral aspect of Ru pedagogy. I found this chapter to be a beautifully crafted introduction to the theme of Ru academies, interweaving philosophy, history, poetry, education, mountaineering, and more—making it well-suited for a variety of undergraduate courses.

Another insight afforded by the broader perspective of art history is its meticulous study of Korean Ru academies in comparison to Zhu Xi's legacy in China. The author emphasizes that the geographical and historical distance makes the academy-building and place-making of Korean Ru scholars an art of "presence" rather than "representation" (p. 193), as these scholars strived to immerse themselves in these new sites to authentically embody Zhu's heritage.

Overall, the book has three key strengths: (1) its unique research approach, which focuses on the material aspects of *Daoxue* through the lens of art history; (2) its remarkably broad scope across space and time; and (3) its historical documentation and narrative, which skilfully weaves together disparate elements. Undoubtedly, it makes a valuable contribution to the advancement of *Daoxue* studies.

Since my expertise lies in philosophy and religious studies, I will offer some critiques of this book's major interpretations of *Daoxue* ideas. These critiques do not diminish the author's unique contribution as an art historian. However, following the example of the noble-minded who use the letters to cultivate friendship (*Analects* 12:24), I hope these reflections provide an art historian with a glimpse into a philosophical perspective. The critiques will be presented in the order of priority.

First and foremost, the book's interpretation of Zeng Dian's 曾點 joy, vividly depicted in *Analects* (11:26) as a spontaneous spring excursion, requires reconsideration—particularly given the weight the author places on this interpretation as a foundation for Zhu Xi's natural pedagogy.

Within the context of the *Analects*, "joy" is a recurring theme, and Zeng Dian's joy coexists with other passages that depict the joyful states of Kongzi and Yan Hui (*Kong Yan lechu* 孔顏樂處). The *Daoxue* commentarial tradition—building upon an even older tradition of *Analects* commentary—typically interprets these passages together to address Zhou Dunyi's 周敦頤 (1017–1073) question to the Cheng brothers (二程): "where dwells the joy [of Kongzi and Yan Hui]?" (p. 137). Since this question was later regarded by Ru scholars and historians as initiating the entire *Daoxue* discourse, Ru masters devoted significant effort to contemplating, interpreting, and practising this joy.

Unfortunately, the brief remarks the author provides (pp. 137–38) do not situate her interpretation of Zeng Dian's joy within the broader commentarial Ru tradition of the *Analects*. Nor does she extensively reference Zhu Xi's own discussions on the topic. Without a fuller integration of her interpretation into the broader metaphysical-ethical *Daoxue* framework, the author does not clearly articulate the role of "nurture" in Zhu Xi's "natural" pedagogy. Nor does she adequately distinguish between the classical Daoist understanding of "nature" and the Ruist appreciation of it.

As evidence of this lack of integration, the unresolved tension between the two aspects of Zhu Xi's natural pedagogy remains noticeable throughout chapters of the book. The author portrays learning through texts and rituals as cultivating "the will to wisdom," while learning through engagement with nature is described as the pursuit of "absolute wisdom" (pp. 110, 228). Inside Ru academies, the latter quest is "downplayed," whereas within the natural landscape, the former mode of learning is downplayed (p. 165). Since these two aspects of Ru learning are presented in juxtaposition, or even in contrast, the author raises an extremely important question—one that will likely provoke all readers of the book: "How could this encouragement to the carefree life of a Confucian sage in the landscape be reconciled with the ritualized life dedicated to textual studies inside an academy?" (p. 157)

Beyond invoking the ancient yin-yang cosmology to suggest that these two aspects of Ru learning naturally alternate between stillness and activity, the book provides no detailed answer to this question. The author frequently expresses uncertainty about their relationship, even using terms such as "paradoxical" (p. 166) and "contradictory" (p. 194) to characterize their dynamic. Meanwhile, the author frequently draws upon classical Daoist thought, citing passages that appear to resemble Zeng Dian's spontaneous joy in nature at first glimpse. For example, the author evokes Zhuangzi's intuitive perception of the happiness of fish (p. 221) and references the practice of "sit and forget" (坐忘), which is interpreted as a pursuit of "complete detachment" from the cultural world (p. 149).

Given the implied crucial Daoist influence within Zhu Xi's Ruist natural pedagogy, the resolution of the alleged paradox—and, by extension, the answer to the aforementioned question of ritualization—ultimately hinges, according to the author, on the existence of a unifying "space" in the form of Ru academies. These academies function as sites that integrate seemingly "heterogeneous" (p. 164) elements into a cohesive whole: "The spatiality of the academy . . . was a form that brought together unrelated things, places, territories, Confucian sages, contemporary people, past and present events, and images into a visual unity in the mind, a visualization" (p. 215).

From an art historical perspective, this solution emphasizes the role of place-making in unifying Zhu Xi's pedagogy. However, from a philosophical perspective, it lacks conceptual coherence and does not fully address the unique nature of *Daoxue* discourse, which seeks to construct a comprehensive system in which each component—including ontology, cosmology, spirituality, aesthetics, ethics, politics and others—is intentionally distinct from its Daoist or Buddhist counterparts. There is limited space in this review to explore these distinctions, especially since the mutual influences and interactions among these three major Chinese spiritual traditions are inherently complex and must be examined carefully on a case-by-case basis. To aid

further reflection, I have attached references on alternative interpretations of Zeng Dian's joy from a Ruist perspective.[1] Briefly, I'll explain the role of nature in a Ruist world-view as follows:

If *Tian* (天) is translated as "nature," the upper-case Nature designates the broadest realm of being—one beyond which human imagination cannot reach. It encompasses the ritualized human world as an integral part of its order. When Zeng Dian immerses himself in this Nature, his excursion is neither solitary (as he "assembles a company of five or six young people and six or seven children") nor detached from the human world (since the group "enjoys the breeze upon the Rain Dance Altar and then returns singing to their residence"[2]). Rather, the harmonious, dynamic, and spontaneous unfolding of cosmic unity between human individuals and the totality of being gives rise to a profound sense of joy, ecstasy, and mystery—an experience from which a distinctly Ruist form of "religious experience" emerges.

However, when *Tian* is mentioned alongside earth and human beings, it refers to only a part of the universe—namely, a lower-case "nature" in the sense of the non-human natural world, which includes landscapes and non-human living beings. Ruists frequently utilize landscape painting and poetry to artistically express their feelings toward Nature as a whole. However, their deepest philosophical belief holds that human efforts within a ritualized and civilized society contribute unique, irreplaceable values to the uncarved, non-human world of nature. Thus, the essence of a Ruist lifestyle lies in manifesting the ineffable, mysterious harmony of *Tian* within the human world in a distinctly humane and civilized manner. In other words, nurturing is a deliberate effort that adds uniquely humanistic value to nature, thereby revealing the mysteriously harmonizing power of Nature within human society. In this sense, the capacity for nurturing is human nature.

Understood in this way, Zeng Dian's religious experience represents an ideal that Ru self-cultivation continually aspires to. However, the *Daoxue* tradition up until

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[1] Bin Song and Stephen C. Angle, "A Ruist (Confucianist) Vision of Joy and the Good Life," in Drew Collins and Matthew Croasmun, eds., *What Is the Good Life? Perspectives from Religion, Philosophy, and Psychology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023); and Li Huangming 李煌明, *Lixue zhihui yu rensheng zhi le: "Kong-Yan zhi le" lun de lishi kaocha* 理學智慧與人生之樂：「孔顏之樂」論的歷史考察 [Wisdom of the principle learning and joy of human life: A historical investigation of "Kongzi and Yan Hui's joy"] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010).

[2] Translation is my own, based on Song and Angle, "A Ruist (Confucianist) Vision of Joy and the Good Life," p. 70.

Zhu Xi consistently emphasizes that such an experience should by no means be the central focus of daily life—let alone be elevated to the status of "absolute wisdom," as the author designates it. As Zhu learned from his teacher Li Tong 李侗 (1093–1163), while Ruism, like Daoism and Buddhism, acknowledges that the entire universe can be unified under a single principle (*li yi* 理一), Ruism is distinct in its emphasis on recognizing how this singular principle unfolds in its many manifestations (*fen shu* 分殊).[3] Thus, the world of ritual and civilization is not diminished when Ruists engage with the natural world. Rather, inspired by the aesthetic experience of unity with Nature, Ruists are motivated to continually manifest that unity within the ritualized human world—acting appropriately in each situation to sustain the ongoing harmonization of a civilization.

As another foundational Ruist text, *Centrality and Commonality* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), affirms, a Ru "stands extremely high and bright, yet on a central and normal path."[4] Likewise, when speaking privately with Zeng Dian, Confucius cautioned him and reaffirmed the value of the seemingly mundane ambitions expressed by his other students. The supreme joy of Zhu Xi's natural pedagogy, therefore, lies in integrating the natural landscape into human life and, in doing so, returning to the human world to live an ordinary and normal life.

Secondly, just as a coherent relationship between nurture and nature has not yet emerged in the author's interpretation of Zhu Xi's natural pedagogy, the book partially presents Zhu Xi's key self-cultivation method, "investigation of things" (*gewu* 格物), as well as the object of such investigation, "principle" (*li* 理).

The author asserts that "the principle is prescriptive, not descriptive" (p. 57). Hence, "the purpose of the investigation of things is to reach an understanding of 'that by which a thing ought to be' [*suo dang ran*], rather than 'that by which a thing is as it is' [*suo yi ran*]" (p. 53). Therefore, "the process of approaching the *li* of things does not imply empirical analysis but rather a kind of 'resonance' between the mind's *li* achieved by reflection and the thing's *li* obtained by observing" (p. 56). The author furthermore specifies that Zhu Xi described reaching the *li* of things as "seeing (*jian* 見 or *kan* 看) the *li* rather than 'knowing' (*zhi* 知) it" (p. 56).

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[3] See Zhao Shixia 趙師夏, "Yanping dawen ba" 延平答問跋 [Postscript to questions and answers with Li Tong], in Zhu Renjie, et al., eds., *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 [Complete works of Zhu Xi], vol. 13 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe; Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), p. 354.

[4] Song and Angle, "A Ruist (Confucianist) Vision of Joy and the Good Life," p. 87.

Emphasizing the moral dimension of the investigation of things might help the author connect natural environment more closely to Ru learning in academies. However, this line of reasoning overlooks the objectivity of *li*, which belongs to things themselves and shall transcend the uncultivated perceptual abilities of the human heart-mind (*xin* 心). This distinction is crucial, as it marks a key difference between the learning of principle (*lixue* 理學) and the learning of the heart-mind (*xinxue* 心學) within the *Daoxue* discourse, with the *xinxue* lineage often downplaying or interpreting such objectivity differently.

Therefore, the author's interpretation of *li* not only runs counter to Zhu Xi's well-known definition—that *li* encompasses both what a thing is and what it ought to be[5]—but also creates significant tensions with two of the author's key claims: that Zhu's investigation of things shifts visuality in ancient Chinese art history from metaphysics to "epistemology" (p. 65); and that this investigation "contributed to the Yuan and Ming development of botany and pharmaceutical knowledge" (p. 66).

A more appropriate treatment of the concept of *li* in relation to Zhu Xi's natural pedagogy would emphasize its non-dual nature as both prescriptive and descriptive, encompassing both empirical analysis of facts and moral appreciation of values. This perspective challenges the conventional dichotomy between fact and value or nature and nurture found in other systems of thought.

Other miscellaneous points that, once reconsidered, will improve the book's core argument include but are not limited to the following three aspects:

The book often forcefully argues for the originality of an author or a stage of artistic and intellectual history without sufficient evidence, leading to an impression of exaggeration. For instance, Zhu Xi's advocacy of the significance of emotions for Ru learning is characterized as a "conceptual revolution" (p. 148), and the teaching method of Luo Dian 羅典 (1717–1808) at Yuelu Academy to enable students to be "shrewd with current affairs" (p. 213) "had not been anticipated by Zhu Xi" (p. 222).

Zhu Xi's famous "method of reading books" (*Zhuzi dushu fa* 朱子讀書法) includes thoughtful discussions on how reading books, without engaging with nature and society, would not be adequate for Ru self-cultivation. The author asserts that the rationale for choosing the material site of Ru academies as the primary research focus is the lack of Zhu Xi's own words on natural pedagogy. While this assertion is generally reasonable, a further incorporation of Zhu's own pedagogical writings would strengthen the author's argument.

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[5] Zhu Xi, "*Daxue huowen*" 大學或問 [Another inquiry into the *Great Learning*], in Zhu, *Zhuzi quanshu*, vol. 6, p. 522.

Western theories are introduced but not carefully integrated into a comparative analysis. For instance, Hans Jonas's theory of "vision" is prominently mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1 but remains absent throughout the main chapter until the final "synopsis," where its significance for analysing the presented materials of Chinese art is not entirely clear.

In conclusion, the book offers an exquisite presentation of artistic materials surrounding Ru academies and could be further strengthened in its philosophical and intellectual historical analysis.

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