CHAPTER 3

The Debate on Ren between Zhu Xi and the Huxiang Scholars

Modern scholars of classical Chinese philosophy find the indistinctness of notions as well as the lack of a single conceptual system to be among the greatest obstacles to the interpretation of philosophical texts. These characteristics are traceable to the uniqueness of the mode of writing and even thinking that prevailed in ancient China. An example of this uniqueness is the *Analects*, which is the most authoritative Confucian text, composed of a series of disconnected short dialogues and events wherein we cannot discern a single overarching systematic series of representations. In part, this is because of how the text was compiled. Two generations of students collected their quotes for almost a century, and it took another hundred years before those quotes were “tied together” as a single book. As Michael Nylan writes in her edited book on the *Analects*, “The text is a patchwork: fragments from different hands have been stitched together, with uneven skill—there are some repetitions, interpolations, and contradictions; there are some puzzles and countless loopholes; but on the whole, there are very few stylistic anachronisms: the language and syntax of most of the fragments is coherent and pertains to the same period.”¹

This is in contrast to the somewhat more systematic dialogues of Plato,² especially the earlier ones, where the *elenchus*, or method of Socrates, is revealed with discussions that often begin with a definition of terms and are then followed by a disputation by Socrates. The *elenchus* usually unfolds with the assertion of a thesis, which becomes the target of refutation by Socrates, followed by his introduction of further agreed upon premises that ultimately imply the falsity of the original thesis, making its negation true.³ Although at some level it is appropriate to call these discussions debates or arguments, they typically
unravel in good nature (similar to the “debates” in Chinese philosophy) with the emphasis placed on dialogue, a going through (dia) language (logos) to ascertain the truth and a better way of ultimately being human.

To be sure, in the Analects we also occasionally find argumentation, such as that in 17.21 where Confucius discusses the significance of a three-year mourning period with his pupil Zai Wo 宰我, but most dialogues in the Analects lack argumentation. The use of the Hegelian idea of notion in the Analects is also unfamiliar to modern readers. As is well known, the notion of ren 仁 holds a central position in Confucius’ thought. There are forty-eight sections in the Analects where Confucius uses the notion of ren and discusses its meaning. In addition, there are five sections where Confucius’ pupils talk about ren. Among these examples, however, we find no consistent formulation, except between passages 17.17 and 1.3. In the Analects we do not find attempts by Confucius to establish a precise Socratic-like definition of ren. Owing to these characteristics of Confucius’ sayings, Hegel in a moment of Germanic superiority dismissed the Analects because they lacked the kind of speculative philosophy and rigor found in Cicero’s De officis.

Confucius’ way of “defining” key concepts not only perplexes modern readers, but has led to over a millennium of debates by later Confucians to ascertain what he actually meant. The Song Confucian scholar and philosopher Cheng Hao expressed perhaps just a little exasperation when he commented on passage 6.30 in the Analects: “It is very difficult to speak of ren.”8 His younger brother Cheng Yi also wrote: “It is very difficult to describe the principle of ren. The closest term to it is gong 公 [impartiality]; but this does not mean that gong is identical to ren.”9 Zhu Xi quoted the comment by Cheng Hao about ren and explained it in similar terms: “It is not easy to speak of ren, because it is subtle in its entirety.”10 The subtlety of extremely fundamental terms was in many ways an acceptable practice in the Chinese philosophical tradition and would have likely been a practice rejected by the Greeks and the subsequent Western philosophical tradition.

Conceivably because of the difficulty in apprehending Confucius’ notion of ren, Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133–1180) compiled a book with the title Confucius’ Sayings about Ren (Zhu Si yan ren 洙泗言仁). This book is no longer extant, but its preface is preserved in Zhang’s collected works.11 The preface lists the text’s contents: (1) sayings about ren from the Lu edition of the Analects; (2) the Cheng brothers’ interpretations of ren; and (3) Zhang Shi’s comments on the Cheng brothers’ interpretations.12 At first Zhu Xi opposed the compilation of this text and others like it for two fundamental reasons. First, since all sayings of Confucius have direct or indirect references to ren, extra glosses are unnecessary. Second, these texts encourage pupils to take shortcuts in their moral self-cultivation instead of following the proper and prescribed order.13 However, in
a letter to Zhang Shi, Zhu Xi admitted that compilations like *Confucian Sayings about Ren* would be conducive to moral self-cultivation. This book was followed by a series of similar compilations that later became popular among Confucians.

The difficulty in comprehending Confucius’ sayings about *ren* originates from the fact that these sayings give neither lexical explanations of terms found in later Han Confucian writings, nor do they offer philosophical definitions of the type Socrates attempted to create. Mou Zongsan has pointed out that Confucius’ sayings about *ren* are suggestive and heuristic in nature with a view to lead people into realizing *ren* as a morally creative reality. Confucius, therefore, varied his explanations of *ren* according to the dialogic situation, the pedagogic demand, and the rank and temperament of his speech partners. In this sense, it is an exercise in futility to attempt to find a lexical (nominal) or philosophical (real) definition that will accord with all of Confucius’ renditions of what constitutes *ren*. In what follows, I discuss the problem of the interpretation of *ren* in terms of the debate between Zhu Xi and the scholars of the Huxiang school, among which Zhang Shi ranks as one leader. Hu Hong, the founder of the Huxiang school, was Zhang Shi’s teacher. Because Hu, Zhang, and their followers carried out their cultural and intellectual activities mainly in the area of Huxiang (Hunan province), the school was given this designation.

**The Zhu Xi–Zhang Shi Debate on Zhong and He**

Just before the debate between Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi took place, Zhu Xi’s philosophical development took a crucial turn. He changed his interpretation of the notions of “equilibrium” (*zhong* 中) and “harmony” (*he* 和) as found in the *Doctrine of the Mean*. At first Zhu Xi followed his teacher Li Tong 李侗 (1093–1163) on questions of achieving the primordial tranquility of heart-mind through quiet-sitting (*jingzuo* 靜坐). In 1168, still under the influence of his teacher five years after Li’s death, he formulated his own interpretation of “equilibrium and harmony.” In formulating this interpretation, Zhu Xi exchanged ideas with Zhang Shi in person as well as through correspondence. In 1169 at the age of forty, Zhu Xi suddenly felt doubtful about this “old interpretation” as a result of conversations with his pupil Cai Yuanding 蔡元定 (1135–1198). This prompted Zhu Xi to spawn a “new interpretation” of “equilibrium and harmony,” which he formulated in his “Treatise on the Manifest State of Heart-Mind and the Indistinct State of Heart-Mind” as well as in his correspondence with Zhang Shi and his followers.

A comparison between Zhu Xi’s old and new interpretations of equilibrium and harmony is much too complex to be fully discussed in this chapter, and it is also unnecessary because Mou Zongsan studied this difference in detail.
In brief, Zhu Xi’s “old interpretation,” according to Mou’s analysis, reflected his wavering between Cheng Hao’s and Cheng Yi’s directions of thought, whereas his “new interpretation” exclusively followed Cheng Yi. An essential contribution of Mou to the study of Neo-Confucianism lies in how he differentiated Cheng Hao’s direction of thought from Cheng Yi’s, instead of following previous scholars who treated them as a pair. Generally speaking, Zhu Xi’s formulation of the new interpretation of “equilibrium and harmony” marked the fixing of his own philosophical framework. As Mou puts it, this framework includes a dual ontological structure of *li* 理 (principle) and *qi* 氣 (material force), as well as a threefold anthropological structure of *xin* 心 (heart-mind), *xing* 性 (nature), and *qing* 情 (emotion or feeling). For Zhu Xi, *xing* belongs to the higher realm of *li*, whereas *xin* and *qing* belong to the lower realm of *qi*; and *xin* as the subtlest of *qi* (*qi zhi ling* 氣之靈) integrates *xing* and *qing* with each other.

Within this philosophical framework, Zhu Xi drafted his “Treatise on Ren” (Ren shuo 仁說). This treatise took its final form after Zhu Xi’s repeated correspondence with Zhang Shi. Around the same time, Zhang Shi also wrote an essay with the same title. Owing to the remarkable similarity between the formulations found in both treatises, Zhang Shi’s treatise was mistakenly considered to be Zhu Xi’s, and the latter was considered to be a preface to the former. As Hitoshi Sato points out, even Zhu Xi’s pupils Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159–1223) and Xiong Jie 熊節 (who received the *jinshi* degree in 1199) thought that Zhang’s treatise came from the hands of their teacher. On the basis of these facts, the contemporary scholar Liu Shu-hsien suggests that Zhu Xi, as editor of Zhang Shī’s collected writings, wrote another treatise on ren and added it to the collection. The key argument for this thesis rests on Zhang’s radical turn away from the views of the Huxiang school to those of Zhu Xi, as reflected in the text of this treatise. Liu writes: “I have grave suspicions about such a radical change in Zhang Shī’s thought. Frankly speaking, I suspect that this treatise on ren, in fact, did not come from the hands of Zhang Shī.” This thesis is strongly disputed by Wing-tsit Chan. Chan’s stance should likely be preferred since Liu seems to ignore the fact that the resemblance between the treatises of Zhu and Zhang is superficial rather than substantial. Even after the end of this debate, Zhu Xi acknowledged that there were differences between his views and those of Zhang. Once, Zhu’s pupil Zheng Kexue 鄭可學 (1152–1212) asked him: “My master, in former times you repeatedly discussed ren with Nanxuan 南軒 [Zhang Shī]. Did you agree with each other in the end?” Then Zhu Xi answered: “There still were some disagreements. The views of Jingfu 敬夫 [Zhang Shī] come from Mr. Hu [Hong].” In order to determine where these “disagreements” lie, it is necessary to make a philosophical comparison between the texts of the two treatises.
The Treatise on Ren

In his standard work *Heart-Mind as Reality and Nature as Reality*, Mou Zongsan has a detailed philosophical analysis of Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Ren" and his discussions about the interpretation of ren with Zhang Shi and his followers. Surprisingly, however, nowhere in this work does Mou mention Zhang Shi's treatise on ren. According to Mou's analysis, the debate between Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi concerned the following topics: (1) the meaning of xin and its ontological position, (2) the relation between ren and love (ai 愛), (3) the relation between ren and jue 覺 or zhijue 知覺, (4) the thesis of the unity of all things and the self, (5) the relation between ren and gong (impartiality), and (6) the interpretation of Analects 4.7. Since point 6 is secondary, the following discussions are limited to points 1 through 5.

Before proceeding to the meaning of xin and its ontological position, it is informative to repeat Zhu Xi's well-known definition of ren as "the principle [li] of love and the character [de 德] of xin." In the first part of this definition, ren is viewed as the metaphysical ground for love as a kind of feeling (qing). In his twofold ontological structure, ren as xing (nature) belongs to the higher abstract realm of li, and love as qing belongs to the lower concrete realm of qi. In the second half of this definition, Zhu Xi provides an ethical gloss for ren by viewing ren as the metaphysical ground for the activities of xin (heart-mind) as moral agency. In his dual framework, the relation of xin to ren is the same as that of qi to li, with the caveat that xin is "the subtlest of qi."

Now let us consider the first section of Zhu Xi's "Treatise on Ren":

"Heaven and Earth have the mind to produce things." In the production of man and things, they receive the mind of Heaven and Earth as their mind. Therefore, with reference to the character of the mind, although it embraces and penetrates all and leaves nothing to be desired, nevertheless, one word will cover all of it, namely, ren. Let me try to explain fully. The moral qualities of the mind of Heaven and Earth are four: origination (yuan 元), flourishing (heng 亨), advantages (li 利), and firmness (zhen 貞). Moreover, the principle of origination unites and controls them all. In their operation they constitute the course of the four seasons, and the material force (qi) of spring permeates all. Therefore, in the mind of man there are also four moral qualities—namely, humanity (ren), righteousness (yi 義), propriety (li 礼), and comprehension (zhi 智)—and ren embraces them all. In their emanation and function, they constitute the feeling of love, respect, being right, and discrimination between right and wrong—and the heart of commiseration pervades them all....
ren as the Way (dao 道) consists of the fact that the mind of Heaven and Earth that produces all things is present in everything.

The primary question in this passage concerns “the mind of Heaven and Earth.” What does this phrase specifically mean? In his discussions with Zhu Xi about the old text of this treatise, Zhang Shi expressed his dissatisfaction with the proposition “Heaven and Earth have the mind to produce things.” Surprisingly, this proposition came from Cheng Hao, whose direction of thought Zhang Shi usually followed. In reply, Zhu Xi stressed that Heaven and Earth possess the Way (dao) for producing things but that the process of producing is separate from the Way. In a letter to Zhu Xi, Zhang Shi suggested replacing this proposition with the following: “The mind of Heaven and Earth that produces all things is that which man receives as his mind.” From this correspondence it would appear that by “the mind of Heaven and Earth” Zhu Xi understood the principle (li) for the process of producing in the realm of qi rather than a cosmic mind with creative forces (as did Zhang Shi). So in this context Zhu Xi used the term “mind” (xin) only as an analogy, as Mou Zongsan has pointed out.

In the first paragraph of Zhu Xi’s treatise on ren, we see four different orders: ontological (origination, flourishing, advantages, firmness), cosmic (spring, summer, autumn, winter), onto-ethical (humanity, righteousness, propriety, comprehension), and ethico-psychological (love, respect, being right, and discriminating between right and wrong). In his dual ontological framework, the relation of the first to the second order is nothing more than the relation of li to qi; and the relation of the third to the fourth order is the relation of xing to qing, which specifies the relation of li to qi. For Zhu Xi, li as principle is abstract and static; it contains no action in itself. Although it can be a metaphysical ground for some action, this occurs only in the realm of qi. Consequently Zhu Xi does not conceive of principle as a metaphysical entity with creative forces, since creation means action.

In contrast, Zhang Shi’s treatise on ren continues to promote his notion of such a metaphysical entity: “What is called the principle of love is none other than the mind of Heaven and Earth to produce things, and it is from this that ren originates.” It should be noted that Zhang Shi does not use the term “mind” as an analogy in the way Zhu Xi did. This is apparent in subsequent passages: “If nothing beclouds the principle of love, it will be internally combined with Heaven and Earth and all things like arteries and veins and hence function everywhere.” Here the principle of love, which Zhang identifies with “the mind of Heaven and Earth,” is obviously not only an abstract, static principle (as in Zhu Xi), but a dynamic entity with creative force that can penetrate all things. This is just one of the core ideas of the Huxiang school, which can be
traced back to Cheng Hao. In Zhang Shi’s preface to *Confucian Sayings about Ren*, compiled around 1170 and hence before his discussion about ren with Zhu Xi, we find also “Ren is the mind of Heaven and Earth, which is present in humans. This is what ren means.” From this it would appear that, with respect to “the mind of Heaven and Earth,” Zhang Shi did not change his original position after his discussion with Zhu Xi.

To be sure, Zhang Shi said in his treatise on ren that “to designate love as ren is to be blind to its substance, for ren is the principle of love.” To this sentence he himself added a comment: “This is what Master Cheng [Yi] meant by the saying that ‘love is qing [feeling] and ren is xing [nature].’” Both Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi considered the distinction between ren and love to be a distinction between substance and function, but there is an essential difference between their views. The substance-function relation is vertical for Zhu Xi, whereas it is horizontal for Zhang Shi. In other words, for Zhang Shi, love as a function of ren pertains to the same ontological level as ren. Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, however, would not agree with this view.

**Ren and the Principle of Love**

In light of what has been discussed, we can now consider the second point, namely, the relation between ren and love (ai). In his “Treatise on Ren,” Zhu Xi continued from where we left off above:

*Someone said:* According to our explanation, is it not wrong for Master Cheng to say that love is feeling (qing) while ren is nature (xing) and that love should not be regarded as ren?

*Answer:* Not so. What Master Cheng criticized was the application of the term to the expression of love. What I maintain is that the term should be applied to the principle of love. For although the spheres of man’s nature and feelings are different, their mutual penetration is like the blood system in which each part has its own relationship. When have they become sharply separated and been made to have nothing to do with each other? I was just now worrying about students’ reciting Master Cheng’s words without inquiry into their meanings, and thereby coming to talk about ren as clearly apart from love. I have therefore purposely talked about this to reveal the hidden meaning of Master Cheng’s words, and you regard my ideas as different from his. Are you not mistaken?
Here “Master Cheng” refers to Cheng Yi, whose direction of thought Zhu Xi steadily followed.

The passage from Cheng Yi that Zhu Xi discusses here appears in Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi’s *Henan Chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書:

Because Mencius said that “the heart of commiseration pertains to ren,” later scholars have regarded love as ren. Commiseration is certainly love; but love is just feeling (*qing*), whereas ren is just nature (*xing*). How can one confine ren to love? Mencius said that “[the heart of] commiseration pertains to ren”; for in the preceding text he had said that “the heart of commiseration is the budding of ren.” Since it is called “the budding of ren,” it should not be regarded as ren. Tuizhi 退之 [Han Yu 韓愈] erred in saying “universal love is ren.” To be sure, the person who has ren loves universally; but one may not therefore confuse ren with universal love.44

For Confucians it is not groundless to regard ren as love or even as universal love, since Confucius defined ren as “loving men” (*ai ren* 愛人) in reply to a question from his pupil Fan Chi 樊遲 (*Analects* 12.22). Likewise, Mencius adds to this sentiment by saying that “the person who has ren loves men” (*Mencius* 4B.28), and “the person of ren loves everyone” (*Mencius* 7A.46). Moreover, Mencius asserts that “the heart of commiseration is the budding of ren” (*Mencius* 2A.6) and that “the heart of commiseration pertains to ren” (*Mencius* 6A.6). Following Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi interpreted the latter in light of the former, because the former corresponded with his more dualistic anthropological framework of *xin* and *qing*. So the relation of commiseration (or love) and ren was viewed as that between *xin* and *qing*, or between *li* and *qi*.

In his treatise on ren, Zhang Shi agreed with Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi that love is not ren. But this concession is merely rhetorical rather than substantial because both sides presented divergent formulations. In accordance with their dual framework of *xin* and *qing*, Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi viewed ren as “the principle of love,” which, as abstract principle, contains no creative force in itself. Zhang Shi viewed ren likewise as the “principle of love,” but for him the term “principle of love” would mean something quite different. As mentioned above, “the principle of love” here does not mean something abstract and static, but rather a dynamic “mind” with creative forces that penetrate all things.

Generally speaking, although both Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi defined ren as the “principle of love,” the term did not mean the same thing to them. For Zhu Xi, the principle of love meant a static metaphysical principle for the feeling of love, and hence “principle” and “love” belonged to different realms. However, for Zhang Shi it meant a dynamic metaphysical principle that manifested itself as love, and hence “principle” and “love” belonged to the same realm.
The Relation between Ren and Jue

In considering the third point, namely, the relation between ren and jue (or zhijue), it should be first noted that the Chinese term jue is itself ambiguous. Among others, its multiple meanings include “sensation,” “perception,” “feeling,” “consciousness,” and “realization.” Let us consider a relevant passage from Zhu Xi’s “Treatise on Ren”:\(^4^5\)

**Someone said:** The followers of Master Cheng have given many explanations of ren. Some say that love is not ren, and regard the unity of all things and the self as the substance of ren. Others maintain that love is not ren but explain ren in terms of the possession of zhijue by the mind. If what you say is correct, are they all wrong?

**Answer:** From what they call the unity of all things and the self, it can be seen that ren involves love for all, but unity is not the reality which makes ren a substance. From what they call the mind’s possession of zhijue, it can be seen that ren includes the zhi (comprehension), but that is not the real reason why ren is so called. If you look up Confucius’ answer to Zigong’s question concerning the conferral of extensive benefit on the people and bringing salvation to all, and also Master Cheng’s statement that ren is not to be explained in terms of jue, you will see my point. How can you still explain ren in these terms?

Furthermore, to talk about ren in general terms as the unity of things and the self, this will lead people to be vague, confused, neglectful, and make no effort to be alert. The bad effect—and there has been—may be to consider other things as oneself. To talk about ren in terms of zhijue will lead people to be nervous, irascible, and devoid of any quality of depth. The bad effect—and there has been—may be to consider desire as principle.

In this passage, Zhu Xi disputed two theses about ren: first, that ren consists in the unity of all things and the self; and, second, that ren consists in the possession of zhijue by the mind. The first thesis was brought forward by Yang Shi 楊時 (1053–1135) and the second by Xie Liangzuo 謝良佐 (1050–ca. 1120).\(^4^6\) Both of these theses are logically connected and are further traceable to Cheng Hao’s saying “Medical books used to describe the paralysis of the hands and feet
as a lack of ren. This is a very good description. The person who possesses ren identifies himself with Heaven and Earth and all things.”

The first thesis will be considered in the next section. For now, we turn to the second thesis that ren consists in the possession of zhijue by the mind. In the above cited passage, “lack of ren” (bu ren 不仁) refers explicitly to a lack of perception (jue or zhijue), a euphemism for a lack of moral consciousness. In Analects 17.21, we witness a discussion between Confucius and Zai Wo concerning the significance of a three-year mourning period. When Zai Wo claimed that while in mourning he would feel at ease in eating good rice and wearing silk brocades, Confucius criticized him for being bu ren, that is to say, lacking moral consciousness. Thus, when Xie Liangzuo defined ren as the “possession of zhijue by the mind,” he also meant moral consciousness.

For Zhu Xi, however, jue or zhijue holds a different set of connotations, as we see in the following passage from the Zhuzi yulei ( Classified dialogues of Master Zhu): ”According to the meaning of these terms, ren is just the substance of love, and jue is just the function of zhi (comprehension). Both are properly different. But ren embraces four moral qualities [namely humanity, righteousness, propriety, and comprehension]. If one has ren, how could he have no jue?” We see that Zhu Xi understood the relation of zhi to jue to be equivalent to that of ren to love, or as the relationship of ti 體 (substance) to yong 用 (function). In this context, it is necessary to distinguish ren as “character of mind” from ren as “the complete character of original mind.” The former is one of the “four moral qualities,” whereas the latter embraces them all. Only in the latter sense of ren did Zhu Xi find the connectedness between ren and jue. Hence, for Zhu Xi, it is a misappropriation of categories to interpret ren in terms of jue.

Furthermore, when Zhu Xi delimited the definition of jue as the moral quality of zhi, he understood the term zhi in an exclusively cognitive sense. In a letter to Zhang Shi, Zhu Xi wrote:

What Shangcai 上蔡 [Xie Liangzuo] called zhijue is just the feeling of coldness, warmth, satiety, hunger and the like. Even [the capacities for] dealing with the changing situation and serving as an assistant to the spiritual pertain to nothing but this zhijue. But they have a wider or narrower scope of application. Nevertheless, their applications have reference only to the emanations and functions of zhi, and the person of ren alone can embrace them. Therefore, one can say that the person of ren possesses zhijue in his mind; but one cannot say that the possession of zhijue by the mind is ren.

Clearly, Zhu Xi understood jue (or zhijue) as a cognitive capacity that includes sensations caused by physiological reactions as well as the capacity to respond to
more complex situations. For him both are homogeneous, and they are different only in the scope of their applications.

But in regard to the thesis that ren consists of the possession of zhijue by the mind, Zhu Xi’s criticism was likely based on a misreading of both Mencius’ text and what Cheng Hao and his followers meant. In Mencius’ assertion that “the heart of right and wrong pertains to zhi” (Mencius 6A.6), the “right and wrong” (shifei 非非) undoubtedly refers exclusively to moral judgment but not to the judgment of knowledge as Zhu Xi assumed. Therefore, even if we, following Zhu Xi, understand jue in terms of zhi, it should be noted that zhi as the capacity for moral judgment pervades all moral activities. In this sense, zhi constitutes an essential aspect of jue, since we cannot conceive of moral consciousness without moral judgment.

At this juncture it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of jue, namely, between jue as sensation or perception, and jue as moral consciousness. They are heterogeneous in regard to either their origins or their functions. Hu Dayuan 胡大原, Hu Hong’s nephew, seemed to realize this distinction when he wrote:50

“Ren consists in the possession of zhijue by the mind.” This is the core thesis that Shangcai [Xie Liangzuo] brought up for his teaching of Dao. Therefore, it seems impossible for this thesis to be problematic. Furthermore, zhijue has different degrees of depth. All ordinary people can feel coldness, warmth, satiety, and hunger. If one considers such feelings to be the culmination of zhijue, it would be more than problematic! This is also the reason why Yichuan [Cheng Yi] said that “ren is not to be interpreted in terms of jue.” Because he worried that one may merely adhere to the word jue.

In this context, Max Scheler’s distinction between Gefühl (feeling) and Fühlen (to feel) is illuminating. For Scheler, Gefühl in a general sense refers to the sensible state that has a determinate location in the body, whereas Fühlen refers to intentional comprehension a priori.51 In this sense, he speaks of Werwfühlen (feeling of value). According to this distinction, we can say that what Cheng Hao, Xie Liangzuo, and the Huxiang scholars meant by jue or zhijue pertains to Fühlen but not to Gefühl. Here it should be noted that Hu Dayuan seems to misunderstand Cheng Yi’s comments about jue, because Cheng Yi did not presuppose the heterogeneity of jue. In Zhang Shi’s treatise on ren, he wrote simply that “only the person of ren possesses clear zhijue. This is what constitutes zhi [comprehension].”52 Only in this statement do we find some trace of Zhang Shi’s concession to Zhu Xi’s point, since Zhang Shi here understood zhijue in terms of zhi as did Zhu Xi.
The Unity of All Things and the Self

As mentioned above, there is a logical connection between the two theses that \textit{ren} consists in the possession of \textit{zhijue} by the mind and that \textit{ren} consists in the unity of all things and the self. For Cheng Hao, Xie Liangzuo, and the Huxiang scholars, \textit{jue} or \textit{zhijue} as moral consciousness also possesses an ontological meaning. This is the case because \textit{ren} is at the same time a creative force, which belongs to the same level as its substance, namely, the “mind of Heaven and Earth.” For this reason, Mou Zongsan called it “ontological feeling.”

Through such “feeling,” humans gain access to the “mind of Heaven and Earth” and hence enter into the macrocosm. Only based on such “feeling” can Cheng Hao and others speak of the “unity of all things and the self.” This idea can be traced back to Mencius’ following statements: “He who gives full realization to his heart-mind will understand his own nature, and he who understands his own nature will understand Heaven” (Mencius 7A.1) and “All things are there in me” (Mencius 7A.4). For Mencius, the “original mind” (\textit{benxin}) of humans has an ontological dimension. As a moral agent the original mind possesses the capacity for self-realization and thereby for creating a world of values wherein the essential meaning of “Heaven” resides.

For Zhu Xi, however, \textit{jue} has no ontological connotation in itself; just like love, it belongs to the realm of \textit{qi} (material force) and thus to a lower level than \textit{li} (principle). In other words, for Zhu Xi, all kinds of \textit{jue} are homogeneous. For this reason he criticized Cheng Hao, Xie Liangzuo, and others for “considering desire as principle.” Furthermore, in Zhu Xi’s dual ontological framework, such an “ontological feeling” that opens up a world of values common to humans and other things is not conceivable. Consequently, he criticized them for “considering other things as oneself.”

In light of the above discussion, we can come to consider the fifth point, the debate between the two sides about the relation between \textit{ren} and \textit{gong} (impartiality). In the first section of this chapter, Cheng Yi’s statement was cited: “It is very difficult to describe the principle of \textit{ren}. The closest term to it is \textit{gong} [impartiality]; but this does not mean that \textit{gong} is identical to \textit{ren}.” Zhu Xi agreed with this statement because he, like Cheng Yi, viewed “impartiality” as a formal characteristic of the notion of \textit{ren}. In other words, through the notion of “impartiality,” the connotations of \textit{ren} are easily understood. In this sense, \textit{gong} is not conceptually identical with \textit{ren}. In contrast, Zhang Shi contended that \textit{gong} was the substance of \textit{ren}. In a letter to Zhu Xi, Zhang Shi wrote:

If one overcomes his selfishness, he will become totally impartial and internally combined with Heaven and Earth and all things like arteries and veins. Thereby, he possesses the principle of love in himself and can
apply it to external things so that all things between Heaven and Earth are embraced in his ren.

Undoubtedly, Zhang Shi’s thesis that gong is the substance of ren logically implies the thesis of the “unity of all things and the self.” In reply, Zhu Xi stressed:

What I call the “principle of love” is originally possessed by my nature. It comes to existence through total impartiality, but its being is not the result of total impartiality. It extends through my inner combination with Heaven and Earth and all things like arteries and veins, but its existence is not the result of such a combination.

Here Zhu Xi insisted on the ontological priority of ren as an abstract “principle of love” because, for him, the combination of ren with Heaven and Earth and all things could be only secondary in the ontological order. This is the main reason why Zhu Xi objected to Zhang Shi’s interpretation of ren in terms of gong.

Owing to Zhu Xi’s criticism, Zhang Shi added the following sentence to his treatise on ren: “To designate ‘impartiality’ as ren is to lose its reality, for impartiality is what enables man to be ren.”57 Even to this sentence he added a comment: “This is what Master Cheng [Yi] meant by saying, ‘It is very difficult to describe the principle of ren. The closest term to it is gong [impartiality]; but this does not mean that gong is identical to ren.’”58 Still, Zhang Shi did not concede Zhu Xi’s point, because in the same treatise he wrote:59 “The first thing for the realization of ren is self-mastery. If one overcomes his selfishness, he will become totally impartial, and the principle of love, which was originally possessed by his nature, will not be clouded.” This suffices in showing that Zhang Shi had not abandoned his original position.

In comparing these two treatises on ren, it becomes clear that, despite superficial resemblances, they still represent two divergent directions of thought, which are, moreover, traceable to the Cheng brothers. Zhu Xi, following Cheng Yi’s direction of thought, constructed his own philosophical framework, whereas Zhang Shi and his followers adhered to Cheng Hao’s direction of thought. Both sides tried to interpret the notion of ren from their own perspectives, although they seem to ignore the differences between the Cheng brothers. Nevertheless, this comparison serves to strengthen Wing-tsit Chan’s conviction that the treatise on ren included in Zhang Shi’s collected works came from his own hand.