

Mao Qiling's critical reflections on the Four Books

Pfister, Lauren F.

Published in:
Journal of Chinese Philosophy

DOI:
[10.1111/1540-6253.12038](https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6253.12038)

Published: 01/06/2013

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Pfister, L. F. (2013). Mao Qiling's critical reflections on the Four Books. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 40(2), 323-339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6253.12038>

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent publication URLs

LAUREN F. PFISTER

MAO QILING'S CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON
THE FOUR BOOKS

ABSTRACT

After introducing some scholarship on the value of Mao Qiling's (1623-1713) works, we present an account of canonization processes in order to understand the hermeneutic context of Mao's battle with the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. His work is an attempt to decanonize Zhu Xi's *Four Books*, preferring instead an alternative relying on the Old Texts of the *Taixue* 《太學》/ *Daxue* 《大學》 and *Zhongyong* 《中庸》. Mao argues against Zhu Xi's textual changes and interpretations on a number of bases, producing a hermeneutics of suspicion against the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. Instead, Mao offers an alternative account of the sagely way, following precedents of Wang Yangming.

Though it has been a standard assumption of overseas Chinese philosophical studies to take *The Four Books* as canonical literature, there were some substantial hermeneutic reasons for challenging that status after Zhu Xi (1130-1200) first brought the four texts together to form a seminal unit for Ruist ("Confucian") practices leading to sagehood. Five hundred years after his death, even when the Qing emperor authorized Zhu Xi's commentaries as the standard interpretations for that set of books, there were heated debates over their representativeness for Ruist traditions of thought and practice. One of the key opponents to the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy at that time was a Ming loyalist and Hanlin scholar, Mao Qiling 毛奇齡 (1623-1713).

As we will see, scholarly literature on the Ruist canon has known about Mao's criticisms to various degrees, but more recent studies in Mao's life and works has made it possible to build upon these findings to ask further philosophical questions related to the canonization and controversies surrounding the character and significance of *The Four Books* for Ruist traditions during the Qing dynasty.

In order to understand Mao's reasons for taking up a prolific opposition to the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy already established during the last years of his life, we will first deal with some introductory matters revealing how certain scholarship in English has described and appreciated the character of Mao Qiling's works. Then we will summarize assertions made about canonization and decanonization processes in various cultural traditions, relying in part on outcomes of a previous study dealing with the "canon-in-translation" of two of China's major missionary-scholars, James Legge and Richard Wilhelm. These will apply here to the contested realm of early Qing exegesis of *The Four Books*, focusing on the decanonization efforts which were formalized within some of Mao Qiling's representative works.¹ Subsequently, we will move on toward indicating through some focused discussion of certain claims in his critical studies of Zhu Xi's commentaries to *The Four Books* as a whole, as well as Zhu Xi's handling and interpretations of the *Daxue* in particular, why Mao adopted a "hermeneutics of suspicion" that lead to his prolific critical intra-canonical

hermeneutic that analyzed many elements of Zhu Xi's works in great detail.

Subsequently, we will consider the philosophical significance of these debates as they related to the rational justifications for opposing Zhu Xi's scholarship and view of Ruist cultivation, and their subsequent expression in the emergence later on of Ruist alternative traditions during the later Qing period.

I. INTRODUCTORY EXPLANATIONS

1. WHY MAO QILING?

Probably the most prominent way this unusual Ruist scholar became known to European and North American scholars of China occurred through notable comments made in three of the prolegomena of James Legge's *Chinese Classics*.² Legge had cited the title of Mao Qiling's collected works in the first volume published in 1861;³ and then continued to refer to him by both his style name, Mao Xihe 毛西河, and his birth name. This took place in different contexts, not only in the prolegomena, but also in the interpretive notes beneath Legge's English translations of the various Ruist scriptures he was rendering. Sometimes Legge only referred to Mao in more oblique manners, as when he only mentioning him by his family name or the title of one of his works.⁴ Though Legge noted that Mao's "treatises on the Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean have been especially helpful",⁵ it was in the interpretation of

the historical works of the Ruist canon that Legge found his critical judgments particularly revealing. Regarding Mao's commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 《春秋》) Legge was extremely complimentary, and so his comments are worth restating here in full:⁶

[Mao's commentary to *The Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋] is everywhere referred to in my notes. Occasionally one has to differ from the author, but his views have in general commanded my approval. I thought at one time of simply translating his Work instead of giving all the [*Zuozhuan* 左傳]; but I considered that to do the latter would be more useful for students. Agreeing for the most part with [the *Zuozhuan*], Mao seems glad when he finds reason to differ from him; and he makes [Hu Anguo 胡安國] his butt.

Here we sense how Legge not only could appreciate Mao's critical effort at historical reconstruction of ancient sources, something he had learned to appreciate in the work on Scottish history produced by the famous Scottish Latinist, George Buchanan,⁷ but was also aware of his bellicose criticisms that later spawned similarly intense criticisms by subsequent Ruist writers.⁸

Others have also noted Mao's critical vision and its challenge of orthodox Cheng-Zhu claims. One other notable missionary-scholar⁹ who did so was Ernst Faber 花之安 (1839-1899), who referred to this feisty Ruist scholar in the midst of a series of articles in which he considered in great detail Ruist teachings and ritual practices related to filial piety, *xiao* 孝.¹⁰ Notably, Faber made reference to Mao in the context of challenging Zhu Xi's accounts of the relationship between *xiao* and *ren*

仁 or cultivated humanness;¹¹ it was Mao's critical eye that stimulated Faber's own attempts to resolve certain justifications of the relationship between these two virtues.¹²

In the last two decades there were studies in Taiwan that have sought to argue for the importance of Mao Qiling's role during the early Qing Ruist developments. First of all, Huang Aiping has asserted that Mao is truly a representative Ruist intellectual of the transitional period between the Ming and Qing dynasties;¹³ subsequently, Lin Qingzhang initiated his volume on Qing dynasty scriptural learning with a chapter including Mao Qiling's critical contributions.¹⁴ Even more recent recognition of the prominent role of Mao Qiling in bringing forward critical assessments of a wide variety of problems in Zhu Xi's handling of *The Four Books* has been underscored in the study of the texts and scholarly commentaries of the *Taixue* 《太學》/ *Daxue* 《大學》 and the *Zhongyong* 《中庸》 published in 2012 by Ian Johnston and Wang Ping.¹⁵ Johnston and Wang mention Mao as being among four of the most prominent opponents to Zhu Xi, which included the notable Ruists Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) and Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692).¹⁶ Intriguingly, Mao Qiling is not given a place among the "famous Ruists" (*mingru* 名儒) in the account provided in the massive three volume work recently published under the editorship of Shu Dagang 舒大剛 entitled *Ruxue Wenxian Tonglun* 儒學文獻通論 [A Comprehensive

Discussion of Literature Documents in Ruist Learning].¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the volume on the Qing dynasty in *A History of Ruist Learning in China* produced under the aegis of Beijing University's College for Ruist Studies, Mao Qiling's studies are noted, described and evaluated in the Han Learning sections dealing with both *The Book of Odes* and *The Four Books*.¹⁸

In the light of these developments and significant references, one senses that it is high time more is done to understand Mao Qiling's role in helping to set up and justify philosophical alternatives to the Cheng-Zhu school. In fact, Mao was a noted classical scholar and was made the compiler of the Ming dynasty's history while serving as a scholar within the Qing dynasty's highest Ruist research institution, the Hanlin Academy 翰林院.¹⁹ Known to be a rigorous critic and to sport dogmatic airs about his criticisms, he took up bold interpretive positions and subsequently had some substantial scholarship spent on proving how some of his claims were wrong. In spite of these shortcomings, it is notable that Mao's extensive research stimulated a philological turn in Qing Ruist scholarship, leading to the Han Learning (*Hanxue* 漢學) interpretive emphasis that was strongly indebted to his own critical studies,²⁰ a movement which sought to counter the Song Learning (*Songxue* 宋學) approach highly dependent on Zhu Xi's commentaries to *The Four Books*.

2. WHY “CRITICAL INTRA-CANONICAL HERMENEUTICS”?

John Henderson has documented the development of Ruist canonical literature, showing how it not only expanded over the dynasties from the Han to the Song, but also developed new levels of integration, particularly once *The Four Books* became recognized as part of the Ruist canon.²¹ What this means concretely is that the number of texts recognized as canonical in the Han dynasty, essentially five *jing* 經 or scriptures, developed and grew over time. A thousand years later during the southern Song dynasty, there were thirteen texts considered to be part of the canon. Historically speaking, then, there had been an obvious process of accrual, assessment, and justification over time that is notably more flexible and open-ended than in many other intellectual or religious traditions.²² Yet what we are dealing with is the creation of a new set of works from within the standardized Ruist canon during the Song dynasty that took on a distinct status, serving in Zhu Xi’s account of these texts as the nucleus of the Sagely Way, the very heart of the orthodox tradition (*dao tong* 道統). Precisely in this sense, the controversy raged during Zhu Xi’s own day whether or not his claims were to be justified, and so it is quite notable that before he died, his previously earned academic honors were all stripped away, so that he was degraded to a commoner’s status by the imperially authorized Ruist scholars of his day.²³ These are matters that are rarely discussed in philosophical circles, but we

assert here that they are part and parcel of the processes of canonization and decanonization that were of particular significance in the later portions of the long history of Ruist traditions. These will also help us understand far more clearly the role and significance of Mao Qiling's own critical intra-canonical hermeneutics as applied to *The Four Books* more than four hundred years after Zhu Xi had passed away.

If *The Four Books* (*Sishu* 《四書》) have served as a “canon within the canon”, ultimately taking the status of a concise and explicit standard by which all other previous canonical works should be weighed and integrated into a new system, then a dynamic process of “canonization” was initiated by Zhu Xi's claims and their assessment by other Ruist scholars. These debates led also to the potential for a “decanonization” of these texts or even of other canonical texts if certain understood standards for canonization were not met. What Mao Qiling set out to do during the early Qing dynasty was to produce both specific evidence and more general reasons to question support for Zhu Xi's interpretations; he was employing a hermeneutics of suspicion based upon close readings of Zhu Xi's interpretations of *The Four Books*, and did so by casting Zhu's claims in the light of teachings and historical evidences drawn from other canonical as well as Han dynasty Ruist interpretive sources. His prolific output and support given by a coterie of younger disciples testify to the strong

sense of justification some gained from Mao's critical challenges.

3. UNDERSTANDING STANDARDS OF CANONIZATION

What are factors involved in a process of canonization, where texts that have been previously seen as important are heightened in status and authority so that they become standards representative of the whole tradition? Phenomena related to the processes of canonization and decanonization have been explored by a scholarly German couple, Aleida and Jan Assmann, resulting over two decades ago in a basic set of six characteristics which they referred to as the "canon syndrome".²⁴ From their perspective, any text that enters into the canon of a tradition must manifest

1. Resistance to time. Canonization is a means to save some elements of tradition from temporality and change.
2. Dehistorization. Canonization aims at immediate expressiveness, at meaningfulness in all contexts without historical mediation.
3. Institutionalization. Canonization requires some measure of societal differentiation according to which the preservation of tradition can be consigned to special groups.
4. Normativity. Canonization entails the paradigmatic and obligatory

character of the parts of the tradition concerned.

5. Identification. Canonization is helpful for participants in a given tradition to find their personal and communal identity.
6. Retrospection. Canonization implies a consciousness of decline and distance.

It is well known that by referring to the establishment of an orthodox line of transmission of the Ruist Dao, the so-called *daotong* 道統, Zhu Xi was instantiating an act of retrospection according to the above list. In order to dehistoricize the texts of the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, Zhu Xi reorganized the content of these texts in ways unknown before the Song dynasty, and then declared that within his new version of the *Daxue*²⁵ the first section was actually the *jing* or canon produced by Kongzi himself. While this added the feature of heightened normativity particularly to the *Daxue*, it was much harder for Zhu Xi to claim and justify that the redesigned versions of these two works were free from any historical change. As a consequence, even though the texts did undergo further steps in institutionalization, including the imperial stamp of approval for Zhu Xi's commentaries to *The Four Books* during the early Qing dynasty, there were intense debates over whether they were in fact representative of the Ruist tradition as a whole ("resistance to time"), so that opposition rose from a number of Ruist scholars who refused to identify with Zhu

Xi's account of Ruist orthodoxy.

Precisely in this sense, then, Mao Qiling served as a dissenting voice, challenging the credibility of the interpretive claims of the Cheng-Zhu tradition and its assertion of a new “canon within the canon” in the form of *The Four Books*. From his point of view, there were numerous reasons to challenge their interpretive justifications and Ruist authenticity, thereby questioning claims made in Zhu Xi's commentaries about having insight into the nature of the Ruist Way and the proper form of whole person cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). From this angle, then, Mao was leading the charge to demand decanonization, but we must see what form of decanonization was being asserted, and how this reflected his own understanding of the Ruist Way and the proper form of whole person cultivation.

In fact, even though the canonization process can be applied to the complicated process of the creation of *The Four Books* as a “canon within the canon” by Zhu Xi after the Song dynasty, especially leading to the later development of Zhu Xi's commentaries to those books being the imperially authorized standard of interpretation during the Qing dynasty, we can trace numerous tensions arising between different kinds of commentary and the characterization of this highlighted part of the full Ruist canon.²⁶ A very dynamic tension was being worked out between the Song and the Qing dynasties between the asserted and/or authorized

canon and the commentary literature which grew up round it. Central to these experiences are the phenomena of both canonization (as in the case of *The Four Books*) as well as efforts to insist on decanonization (as in the case of Mao Qiling);²⁷ we will illustrate how Mao promoted the latter effort through descriptions and illustrations of questions he raised in relation to *The Four Books* as a whole, but also especially in relationship to the nature of the text of *The Great Learning* or *Daxue* and its proper Ruist interpretation.²⁸

II. CRITICAL QUESTIONS STIMULATED BY MAO QILING'S INTRA-CANONICAL HERMENEUTIC CHALLENGES

Being a Ming loyalist who resisted submitting to the Manchurian usurpers after their conquering of northern China in 1645, the young Mao Qiling continued to follow the renegade Ming emperor for more than two decades, essentially becoming an intellectual refugee within the southern and western realms of the Chinese continent. Significantly, it was near the end of this long period of political dislocation that the 42 year old Mao heard lectures on the Old Text of *The Great Learning* (*guben Daxue* 《古本大學》) at the Shaolin Buddhist Temple by a Chan Buddhist monk named Gao Li 高笠 (dates unknown). The scholarly monk's presentation profoundly impressed Mao, for it provided arguments asserting that the "old text" (the original

text of the *Daxue* found as the 42nd chapter of *The Record of Rites* or *Liji* 《禮記》), also referred to by the name *Taixue* 《太學》 (or *The Highest Learning*)²⁹ should be taken to be the original canonical text of the Ruist sagely way.³⁰ This remained a steadfast commitment of Mao from that time onward; it became one of the major emphases of his own intellectual career and of those of his disciples during the years after he entered the Hanlin Academy in 1679. In fact, it was during the final year of Mao Qiling's life in 1712 that Zhu Xi's tablet was given a special place among the "twelve assessors" (*shi er zhe* 十二哲) in the Confucian temple by the Kangxi 康熙 emperor (rule, 1661-1721), so that his commentaries to *The Four Books* were granted imperial support as the regime's basic ideology in spite of all Mao Qiling's efforts to the contrary.³¹

As a consequence of this basic commitment to what Mao Qiling took to be the correct nature of and authentic interpretative traditions within the Ruist canonization process, a long term interpretive battle ensued where he sought to dislodge Zhu Xi's commentarial authority to *The Four Books* by various means. Mao's advantage was that he lived into his 90s, dying in 1713, and had gained much respect from a variety of scholars who became his disciples;³² as a consequence, these disciples helped Mao to disseminate many critical questions related to Zhu's scholarship, revealing also what Mao took to be Zhu's unjustified willfulness in making changes to the original

canonical corpus (here referring most often to *The Highest Learning*, but also sometimes to the *Zhongyong* or *The State of Equilibrium and Harmony*).

Over the last forty years of his life, Mao Qiling produced eleven works under his name dealing with various aspects of his criticisms of Zhu Xi's interpretations of parts or all of *The Four Books*.³³ Of these eleven works, four were specifically prepared by Mao Qiling himself, notably three of them dealing with *The Great Learning*.³⁴ They amounted to a total of 13 of the 57 *juan* published under his name, and so though relatively small in number, the overwhelming emphasis of his concern related to *The Great Learning* is perfectly manifest. In what follows we will refer to some of these works as well as the final compilation of Mao Qiling's extensive studies of *The Four Books* produced during the last years of his life.

1 . THE NEW TEXT *DAXUE* VERSUS THE OLD TEXT *TAIXUE*

Both the *Taixue* and the *Zhongyong* were originally chapters in The Record of the Rites, but through the canonization process involving Zhu Xi's representation of these two texts as parts of *The Four Books*, they became distinct scriptures within the Ruist canonical literature. Nevertheless, in both cases Zhu Xi reorganized and reinterpreted these two texts in significant ways, producing a hornet's nest of textual and interpretive problems that Mao Qiling took to be justification for decanonizing

these “new texts” created by Zhu Xi’s textual restructuring and interpretive license.

Johnston and Wang have produced comparative charts of these two texts in *The Record of the Rites* with their counterparts in Zhu Xi’s *Four Books*, indicating how the content shifted in each case,³⁵ but also summarizing the interpretive impact of these textual adjustments. With regard to “the essential differences” in Zhu Xi’s “new text” of the *Daxue*, they summarize the impact in six points. Among these points they include the following:³⁶

- (i) Grouping of the 3 Principles and 8 Particulars of the programme (and immediately related material) into a single opening section attributed to Confucius himself . . . , compared to the division of this material into two sections without specific attribution in the *Li ji* [sic] version.
- (ii) Treatment of all the remaining material as commentary attributed to Zeng Shen by Zhu Xi.
- (iii) Transfer of a major part of the quoted material to follow the opening section by Zhu Xi. . . .³⁷
- (iv) Identification of a largely lost explicatory section represented by a [remaining] fragment of 10 characters . . . by Zhu Xi. . . .

Though several other “essential differences” are also highlighted, including Zhu Xi’s creation of the last six “chapters” in the *Daxue* as independent commentarial texts reflecting the eight “Particulars” mentioned in the first item above, it was Zhu Xi’s creation of the fifth chapter, adding his own words to “complete” the “largely lost explicatory section”, that was seen as a particularly egregious emendation.³⁸

Furthermore, the linking of the “programme” with “making the intentions sincere” (*cheng yi* 誠意) is the most prominent feature of the first sections of the *Taixue*,

where it is made only part of the sixth chapter in Zhu Xi's new text version. This interpretive difference was one of the most prominent hermeneutic points of resistance raised by Mao Qiling against Zhu Xi's emended text.

2. MAO'S HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION AND *THE FOUR BOOKS*

It had been Wang Yangming who had first raised this interpretive challenge against Zhu Xi's new text of the *Daxue*. Subsequently, others followed his interpretive lead.

While Mao was not the first to follow Wang Yangming's hermeneutic criticisms of Zhu Xi's disruption of the *Daxue* by reordering its content and then creating his own rationalized reading of that "new text", he went beyond Wang Yangming's basic claim, joining with a number of Qing scholars in adopting a more vast and complicated hermeneutic challenge to the Cheng-Zhu interpretation of this text as well as the whole of *The Four Books*. They did so by adopting several critical hermeneutic pivots in raising doubts about the accuracy and validity of that interpretive school's claims regarding various elements within *The Four Books*.

In fact, just four years before Zhu Xi was honored by the Kangxi emperor, a number of Mao's disciples had compiled and published their most comprehensive challenges to Zhu Xi's commentaries on *The Four Books*, entitled *Sishu gaicuo* 《四書改錯》 (Correcting the Errors in [Zhu Xi's Commentaries to] *The Four Books*).

Following their teacher's interpretive example and identifying numerous critical questions he himself had raised, this large text consisting of 22 *juan* 卷 included 32 realms (*menbu* 門部) of concern and a total of 447 articles (*tiao* 條).³⁹ Among the most significant were Mao's challenges to Zhu Xi's equation of *tian* 天 (Heaven) with *li* 理 (patterned principle)⁴⁰ and his highlighting of 33 places in the whole of *The Four Books* where Zhu changed the order of the canonical scriptures (*gai jing* 改經).⁴¹ Such a litany of "errors" created an immense suspicion regarding the reliability, historical continuity, and representativeness of Zhu Xi's texts and commentaries.

Still another matter that fostered Mao's suspicions was the historical fact that after the Song Ruists began "redesigning" the Old Text of the *Taixue* to produce their own versions of the *Daxue*, a host of other versions of the *Daxue* began to appear. Within one of Mao Qiling's texts devoted to the documentation of these various versions, *Daxue Zhengwen* 《大學證文》or *Verification of Texts of The Great Learning*, he discovered that there had been one amended text of the *Daxue* claiming to be a very early version which was actually a Ming dynasty forgery, and eight other amended versions including two by the Cheng brothers and one by Zhu Xi.⁴² It would seem that the bold hermeneutic rationalism which Zhu Xi applied to canonical texts had opened a flood of subjective energies among some Ruist scholars that only

tended to confuse the textual traditions. Rather than “resisting time” and “dehistoricization”, this excessive proliferation of new versions of the *Daxue* could weaken any sense of normativity applied to the text, and make identification with these traditions all the more problematic. For Mao to discover that the earliest text, the *Old Text Daxue* in the 42nd chapter of the *Liji* was the most reliable would counter these tendencies, but simultaneously it would produce justifications for decanonizing the Cheng-Zhu School’s *New Text Daxue*.

As a consequence, then, the news of the elevation of Zhu Xi’s status by the Kangxi emperor had to be particularly distressing and devastating for the nonagenarian Mao Qiling to bear.⁴³

Nevertheless, we should underscore here that these suspicions of Zhu Xi’s texts and interpretations did not lead Mao Qiling to deny that *The Four Books* were not texts which could lead the diligent student to the sagely way. What he insisted on was that the Old Text versions of the two smaller scriptures within *The Four Books* (what we will refer to here and subsequently as *The Old Text Four Books*) were the authentic Ruist scriptures, and not the New Text versions promoted by the Cheng-Zhu School (or *The New Text Four Books*). Put in other words, Mao was arguing that there was a more authentic form of *The Four Books* which Zhu Xi’s creation of the Song dynasty *Four Books* distorted. Acting as a humanistic fundamentalist by

means of the hermeneutic principles of “returning to the canon”, Mao challenged Zhu Xi’s standard texts and commentaries on the basis of the pre-existing scriptures as they existed within the larger Ruist canon.

As a consequence, and in this context following the lead of Wang Yangming, Mao Qiling argued that the Old Text of the *Daxue* highlighted the roles of *cheng yi* 誠意 or “making the will sincere”, but he went beyond that Ming dynasty scholar’s interpretations by joining in a chorus of criticisms which railed against Zhu’s use of “patterned principle” (*li* 理) as a conceptual intrusion into these texts; *li* was essentially being used as an exegetical manipulation, a forced rationalistic interpretive principle imposed upon the text, which ended up distorting the original meaning of these texts and their sagely claims.

III. READING *THE FOUR BOOKS* AS ONLY ONE PART WITHIN THE LARGER CANON

Though Mao Qiling had promoted many suspicions regarding the Cheng-Zhu School’s interpretations, he was not opposed to taking the *Old Text Four Books* as a canonical text. From his point of view, the *Old Text Four Books* still would serve as a “canon within the canon”, but it would be far more consistently perceived as being

only one part within the larger canon. Here Mao promoted a new critical intra-canonical hermeneutic reflection, one which was more simply and easily integrated within the whole of the Ruist canon, by which one might still gain access to the sagely way.

From another angle, Chung-ying Cheng 成中英 has illuminated several possible ways one might interpret *The Four Books*.⁴⁴ Recognizing that the Analects had more to say about *xin* 心, the (human) heart-mind than *xing* 性 or (human) nature, he went on to indicate that the *Daxue* had only one passage dealing with *xin* without any unquestionable mention of *xing*, while the *Zhongyong* revealed much about *xing*, while not even mentioning the character *xin*. Cheng went on to argue that only in the *Mengzi* can one find a more developed understanding of both *xin* and *xing*,⁴⁵ suggesting that from a historical point of view, the *Mengzi* must be the latest text among those in *The Four Books*.

What we find, then, is that there is a dynamic hermeneutic tension within the four texts, specifically in their attempts to relate *xin* to *xing* as well as to link *xing* to *xin*, a tension which needs to be worked out through interpretive means. In Cheng's view, therefore, there is an onto-hermeneutic or onto-generative hermeneutic that can be worked out by reading the four texts within *The Four Books* in the order that starts with the Analects, passes through the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, and ends with the

Mengzi. In this way Cheng offers a new hermeneutic justification for the reading of *The Four Books* in order to attain a unity that would link *xin*, *xing* and principled pattern or *li* 理.

But then it is worth asking: what happens if Ruist interpreters adopt other approaches? Zhu Xi wanted to start with the reading of the New Text of the *Daxue*, and developed a rationalistic process of reaching sagehood, ending in the New Text of the *Zhongyong*. While other options might be considered, it is clear that Mao Qiling intended to run through the same process, but replaced the two smaller texts with the Old Text of the *Daxue* and the Old Text of the *Zhongyong*. The goal of this hermeneutic reading was to “know the root” in order to “establish the root” in sagehood, which located the onto-generative powers as initiated within the “will” (*yi* 意) and realized within an attitude shaped by perfect or authentic “sincerity” (*cheng* 誠).

While we could identify other ways Mao Qiling resisted what he considered to be the forced readings discovered within Zhu Xi’s interpretations of *The Four Books* and other canonical literature – including his rejection of an ontology based on *li* 理,⁴⁶ the willfulness of changing characters and phrases within texts as well as (in the cases of the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*) moving them to other places within the text itself, and insensitivity to the changes in Chinese language from the pre-Qin period to the Song

period (a matter of more than 1000 years)⁴⁷ – his concern was to decanonize *The New Text Four Books* and replace it with an *Old Text Four Books* which would maintain the authentic Ruist sagely way. Following precedents established initially by Wang Yangming, Mao focused on the hermeneutic practices which would confirm how one could “know the root” (*zhi ben* 知本) of the sagely way and “establishes that root” (*li ben* 立本) through proper self-cultivation.⁴⁸ The reading of the *Old Text Four Books* would lead one to the proper practices, ultimately aligning one’s inward life (which he referred to as the *xin* in the Old Text *Taixue* and the *xing* in the Old Text *Zhongyong*) to the sagely *dao*.

IV. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS IN THE HISTORY OF RUIST PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Ultimately, from the angle of cultural transformation and the goal of decanonizing the *New Text Four Books*, Mao’s efforts ended in failure. His critical intra-canonical hermeneutics produced some suspicions, but they could not overcome the rationalistic justification of advocates of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. Notably, his advocacy of a Wang Yangming alternative to whole person cultivation remained a vital option as an

alternative (though “heterodox”) Ruist tradition, as we have noted above, as well as the Han exegesis techniques Mao championed did become significant in subsequent Qing discussions.

What may not have been fully understood at the time of Mao Qiling’s death is that his resistance to any metaphysical reduction of *tian* to *li* opened a door for another Ruist alternative traditions to arise: a *shangdi*-ist interpretation based upon the Old Text of the *Taixue* as found in the 19th century writings of Luo Zhongfan 羅仲藩 (d. c. 1850).⁴⁹ Subsequently, it would seem also that his hermeneutics of suspicion also led to further questions related to the Cheng-Zhu canonical standards, so that some even more radical decanonization efforts were attempted. One such effort was championed in the ill-fated New Text School promoted by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927).⁵⁰ At the very least, however, Mao’s critical intra-canonical hermeneutics related to *The Four Books* remains a testimony to the creative diversity within later Ruist philosophical and exegetical traditions.

Hong Kong Baptist University
Hong Kong, China

Special thanks are offered to Prof. Chung-ying Cheng, Dr. Gu Linyu, as well as Prof. Huang Pumin, Prof. Liang Tao and others at the Guoxue Yuan at Renmin University for opening the door for me to participate in the international conference on *The Four Books* during April 28-29, 2012. It was due to their generous invitation that I worked on this project, and in subsequent discussions especially with Prof. Cheng have benefited greatly in working through this paper and some of its claims in great detail.

ENDNOTES

¹ Consult my article, “Classics or Sacred Books? Grammatological and Interpretive Problems of Ruist and Daoist Scriptures in the Translation Corpora of James Legge (1815-1897) and Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930)” in Max Deeg, Oliver Freiberger and Christoph Keline, eds., *Kanonisierung und Kanonbildung in der asiatischen Religionsgeschichte* [Canonization and the Formation of Kanon in the History of Asiatic Religions] (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011): 422-463. In this particular context I was concerned to indicate a phenomenon in sinological studies that had not been previously addressed in any precise detail, and which had brought about some unusual and even strange responses within larger audiences of foreign readers. The crux of the matter was in revealing how Wilhelm’s published texts which were given the titles of the traditional *Record of the Rites* (*Liji* 《禮記》) and the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 《易經》) were in fact distorted and reorganized versions of both canonical texts. Readers will recognize the parallels in argumentation as more about certain texts which Zhu Xi constructed into *The Four Books* is discussed.

² These appeared in both the first edition of this five-volumes-in-eight-tomes work, published between in 1861-1872, as well as its later republications, including the partially revised version of 1893-1895. It is the latter version that we will be citing here.

³ See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes: Volume 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), the first item found near the top of p. 131. The title of the work employed Mao’s style name: *Mao Xihe Xiansheng Quanji* 毛西河先生全集. Subsequently Legges work will be referred to below as “CC”, followed by the volume number (“CC1” being the volume cited above).

⁴ Legge’s own transliterations of his names changed over time. In earlier versions his birth name is found as “Maou K’e-ling” (CC5, Prolegomena: 8), and his style name as “Maou Se-ho” (CC3, Prolegomena: 20, footnote 17); in the later revised editions of CC1 and CC2, his birth name appears as “Mão Ch’i-ling” (CC1, Prolegomena: 20), but he is almost always referred to there instead by his style name, “Mão Hsi-ho” (CC1, Prolegomena: 131), or simply as “Mão”, especially in the notes to *The Doctrine of the Mean* (for example, see CC1: 395-396).

⁵ Quoted from Legge, CC1, Prolegomena: 131. Legge referred to Mao’s critical views on *The Great Learning* briefly only in his introductory essays (CC1, Prolegomena: 24-25), but more extensively in relationship to *The Doctrine of the Mean* in both the Prolegomena and the textual notes (CC1, Prolegomena: 48 and 53; textual notes: 393, 395-396, 398-399, 404-405, 411-413, 416, 418, 425 and 428). Legge’s many references to Mao Qiling’s works in these contexts indicate the contrasting views Mao had to Zhu Xi’s interpretations.

⁶ Quoted from Legge, CC5, Prolegomena: 140-141.

⁷ See Lauren F. Pfister, *Striving for ‘The Whole Duty of Man’: James Legge and the Scottish Protestant Encounter with China* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), Volume 1: 52, 213 (footnote 100), 218 (footnote 142).

⁸ In CC1 Legge adds that Mao Qiling is “a great opponent of [Zhu Xi], and would be a much more effective one, if he possessed the same graces of style as that ‘prince of literature’” (quoted from CC1, Prolegomena, 131). Here we see how Legge could identify the conflictual style which Mao often employed, challenging past icons of Ruist authority and provoking later Ruist scholars to overturn his own judgments on various canonical passages. All this being so, Legge still found much of value in Mao’s critical and historical comments, particularly in relationship to *The Great Learning* and *The Doctrine of the Mean* (or what he preferred later to call *The State of Equilibrium and Harmony*).

⁹ “Missionary-scholar” is a phrase developed in works by Norman Girardot and this author in our studies of James Legge. See its broader application to persons living between 1850 and 1950 in Lauren F. Pfister, “China’s Missionary-Scholars”, in R. G. Tiedemann, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume Two: 1800 to the Present* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2010), 742-765.

¹⁰ This is a series of nine articles written by Ernst Faber entitled “A Critique of the Chinese Notions and Practice of Filial Piety”, in *The Chinese Recorder*, from September 1878 till January 1880.

¹¹ Found in the seventh article. See Ernst, Faber, “A Critique of the Chinese Notions and Practice of Filial Piety”, *The Chinese Recorder* Vol. 10, No. 5 (September-October 1879): 324 and 326.

¹² Faber offered his own interpretive resolution to the problem in “A Critique of the Chinese Notions and Practice of Filial Piety”, *The Chinese Recorder* Vol. 10, No. 5 (September-October 1879): 325-326.

¹³ See the conclusion to the article produced by Huang Aiping 黃愛平, “Mao Qiling yu Mingmo Qingchu de xueshu” 毛奇齡與明末清初的學術 [Mao Qiling and Academic Studies at the End of the

Ming and Beginning of the Qing Dynasties] in Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰 and Jiang Qiuhua 蔣秋華, eds., *Mingdai Jingxue Guoji Yantaohui Lunwenji* 明代經學國際研討會論文集 [Proceedings of the International Symposium of Ming Dynasty Scriptural Learning] (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy of the Academia Sinica, 1996), 543-560.

¹⁴ As found in Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰, *Qingdai Jingxue Yanjiu Lunji* 清代經學研究論集 [Collected Essays on Studies of Scriptural Learning during the Qing Dynasty] (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy of the Academia Sinica, 2004), esp. 7-28, 34-36. This comes in an essay that had been first published in 1991.

¹⁵ This is the double rendering in English of the old text and new text versions of both Ruist scriptures, accompanied by extensive introductory essays and renderings of notable commentaries. Consult Ian Johnston and Wang Ping, trans., *Daxue and Zhongyong* Bilingual Edition (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ See these comments in Johnston and Wang, *Daxue and Zhongyong*, 40. The fourth person mentioned is Chen Que 陳確 (1604-1677). Another reference to Mao Qiling, related to his account of the authorship of *Daxue*, appears at *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ Consult the section in the third volume of this work where brief chronologies of “famous Ruists” from the Qing dynasty are included. Notably, three of Mao Qiling’s works related to studies of *The Four Books* are mentioned by their titles in the lists related to Qing dynasty studies of these texts in the second volume. Consult Shu Dagang, *Ruxue Wenxian Tonglun* 儒學文獻通論 (Fuzhou: Fujian People’s Press, 2012), Vol. 2, 1304-1305 and Vol. 3, 2127 ff.

¹⁸ This is found in the seventh of nine volumes in this series completed under the general editorship of Tang Yijie 湯一介 and Li Zhonghua 李中華, written by Wang Xuequn 汪學群, entitled *Zhongguo Ruxue Shi: Qingdai Juan* 中國儒學史：清代卷 (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2011), 282-284.

¹⁹ See the article written by Ouyang Kang, “Mao Qiling 毛奇齡” in Xinzhong Yao, ed., *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism, A-N* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003): 416-417. Subsequent descriptions follow summary statements made by Kang.

²⁰ See Kang, “Mao Qiling”: 417. Kang states there that Mao’s “research represents an early development of the Qing scholarship known as the Han Learning movement which aimed to return to the philological methodology of the Former Han dynasty, thus circumventing the biases of the Song and Ming scholars. Later Qing scholars often traced their origins to Mao’s work.”

²¹ Consult John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 38-61.

²² Henderson qualifies this claim in more subdued tones. “The formal raising of the works of later masters and commentators to the level of classics or scriptures is perhaps not so common in most other canonical traditions, especially those of the West. . . . [T]he imperfect closure of the Confucian canon has counter-parts in other Eastern traditions[, particularly in Hinduism].” See Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*, 56 and 60.

²³ According to Tillman the last few years of Zhu Xi’s life were under the proscription of an imperially authorized ban, supported by a number of alleged crimes including “disloyalty, disrespect for the emperor, lack of filial piety, and [having] sexual relations with two Buddhist nuns. Consult Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi’s Ascendancy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 143.

²⁴ Quoted from Aleida and Jan Assmann, eds., *Kanon und Zensur, Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II* [Canon and Censure: Archeology of Literary Communication II] (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987): 25, as cited in H. J. Adriaanse, “Canonicity and the Problem of the Golden Mean” in A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), Held at Leiden 9-10 January 1997* (Leiden: Brill, 1998): 313-314. Italics in the quoted materials occur in the original.

²⁵ The character of this “new text” (*xinben* 新本) of the *Daxue* will be discussed later in this article.

²⁶ See for example the summary account provided by John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*: 50-56.

²⁷ Not a little inspiration for taking this interpretive approach, as will be seen in subsequent endnotes, has been drawn from a recently published study by Chen Fengyuan 陳逢源 entitled *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu* 《毛西河四書學之研究》 [Studies of Mao Xihe’s Learning [based on] *The Four Books*] (Taipei: Hua Mulan Wenhua 花木蘭文化 Press, 2010).

- ²⁸ Various aspects of these phenomena linked to canonization and decanonization are addressed in several articles within van der Kooij and van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization*, including L. Boeve, “Tradition, (De)Canonization, and the Challenge of Plurality” (371-380), Th. L. Hetteema, “The Canon: Authority and Fascination” (391-398), Th. M. van Leeuwen, “Texts, Canon, and Revelation in Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics” (399-409), and M. B. ter Borg, “Canon and Social Control” (411-423).
- ²⁹ Reference to the *Taixue* and this title is found in Johnston and Wang, *Daxue and Zhongyong*, 41 ff. In subsequent literature on this topic, the “old text” is regularly contrasted with the “new text” as created by Zhu Xi. Plaks has also referred to his recent rendering of the *Daxue* with a new title, calling it *The Highest Order of Cultivation*, reflecting the same interpretive trend relying on pre-Song traditions regarding this text. See Andrew Plaks, trans., *Ta Hsüeh and Chung Yung (The Highest Order of Cultivation and On The Practice of the Mean)* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003).
- ³⁰ As discussed in Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 26 and 162-168.
- ³¹ According to Chen, Zhu Xi’s spirit tablet or *shenpai* 神牌 was given this prestigious place in the Temple of Kongzi in 1712 by the Kangxi 康熙 Emperor, so that his status and authority became all the more emphatic within the Qing empire. As we will see below, this was particularly difficult for the elderly Mao to bear. Consult Chen Fengyuan, *Maoxihe sishuxue zhi yanjiu*: 30-31 and 191-192.
- ³² See a summary of Mao Qiling’s life under his style name, Mao Xihe, in Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 11-20.
- ³³ See a summary chart of these eleven works found in Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 32-33.
- ³⁴ These four volumes are entitled *Lunyu Jiqiu Pian* 論語稽求篇 [Examinations and Investigations of *The Analects*], *Daxue Zhengwen* 大學證文 [Verification of Texts of *The Great Learning*], *Daxue Zhibentu Shuo* 大學知本圖說 [Explanations on the Diagram of “Knowing the Root” in *The Great Learning*] and *Daxue Wen* 大學問 [Questions on *The Great Learning*].
- ³⁵ For those interested in the details of these comparisons, please consult Johnston and Wang, *Daxue and Zhongyong*, 25 and 193.
- ³⁶ Quoting from Johnston and Wang, *Daxue and Zhongyong*, 27-28.
- ³⁷ This same material appears in sequence within four later sections in the *Liji* version.
- ³⁸ Find this section referred to as the fifth chapter of the commentary of the *Daxue*, along with this “appended commentary” (*buzhang* 補傳) in Legge, CC1, 355-356. For further discussions regarding this particular text and the debates it engendered, consult Jin Chunfeng’s 金春峯 article, “Zhu Xi zhi Yuanru dui Daxue de jieshi ji suowei ‘Zhu Lu heliu’ wenti” 朱熹至元儒對《大學》的解釋及所謂「朱陸合流」問題 [“Explanations of The Great Learning from Zhu Xi to Yuan Ruists and the Problem of the so-called Confluence of Zhu [Xi] and Lu [Jiuyuan]”] in Yang Jinlong 楊晉龍, ed., *Yuandai Jingxue Guoji Yantaohui Lunwenji: Xia* 元代經學國際研討會論文集：下 [Proceedings of the International Symposium on Yuan Dynasty Scriptural Learning: Volume 2] (Taipei: The Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy of the Academia Sinica, 2000), 761-794.
- ³⁹ These concerns are summarized by Chen Fengyuan in a single chart, referring there to all the 32 different categories of those critical challenges. See Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 52.
- ⁴⁰ As found in the second *juan* of Mao Qiling, *Sishu Gaicuo* 四書改錯 in the *Xuxiu Siku Quanshu* 續修四庫全書, Vol. 165 (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Press, n.d.), 20.
- ⁴¹ As indicated in the 15th *juan* of Mao Qiling, *Sishu Gaicuo*, 135-146.
- ⁴² These texts are named in the sequence that they appear in the book in Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 127. Elsewhere Mao stats that “since the two Cheng brothers produced their own amended versions, several dozen (*yue shu shi ben* 約數十本) additional versions” had been produced between the time of the Southern Song to the end of Ming dynasty. Quote found in Mao Qiling, *Sishu Gaicuo*, 135. Therefore, one could understand why Mao would approach claims related to the nature of the *Daxue* text with deep suspicions.
- ⁴³ As also described in Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 191-217.
- ⁴⁴ Presented in his essay, Cheng Chung-ying, “On Creativity and Harmony: A Generative Ontology based on Unity of Mind and Nature in *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*”, at a conference held at the People’s University in Beijing at the end of April 2012.
- ⁴⁵ He comes to the conclusion that in the *Mengzi*, *xing* is *xin*, but *xin* is not necessarily *xing*. On this basis, he seeks to offer an onto-generative account of how *xin* might become *xing*.

⁴⁶ Found in Mao Qiling, *Sishu Gaicuo*, 20-21. He argues in the following manner, If *tian* 天 is *li* 理, then the initial saying of the *Zhongyong* becomes incomprehensible, since both *tian* and *xing* 性 are defined by Zhu Xi as *li*. As a consequence, *li* as *tian* ends up “decreeing” *li* as *xing*, causing what he considers to be a reductive tautology to occur. Mao apparently prefers some other metaphysically more substantial form of *tian*.

⁴⁷ A factor that remained one of his positive intellectual legacies. See Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 208-211. See also endnote #20 above.

⁴⁸ Find summaries of the charts reflecting these claims, based on teachings received from the Chan Buddhist monk, Gao Li, in Chen Fengyuan, *Mao Xihe Sishuxue zhi Yanjiu*: 167 and 174.

⁴⁹ See this work in my article “Discovering Monotheistic Metaphysics: The Exegetical Reflections of James Legge (1815-1897) and Lo Chung-fan (d. circa 1850)” in Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng and John B. Henderson, eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999): 213-254.

⁵⁰ Consult Lauren F. Pfister, “Kang Youwei (K’ang Yu-wei)” in Antonio S. Cua, ed., *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003): 337-341.