

"Hone the Spirit in Shi" in Wang Yangming's Theory

Yuqi Li

Country Institute of Research on Yangming and Guizhou studies, Guiyang University, Guizhou Guiyang 550005

Abstract: "Hone the spirit in Shi" is an important proposition of Wang Yangming's theory, which has the characteristics of Chinese traditional philosophy. Wang Yangming put forward the proposition in order to avoid being addicted to the emptiness brought by the meditation. Shi operates with ideas rising from the spirit and work together with liang-chih. Spirit, the original state of operation of Shi, become transparent from honing in the concrete things. In essence, spirit and Shi are one. People hone the spirit through Shi, seeing human nature. With the awakening of the spirit, all things in the universe can be observed, and man himself becomes a saint.

Keywords: Wang Yangming; Spirit; Shi

1. Put forward "Hone the Spirit in Shi"

"Hone the spirit in Shi" is an important proposition in Wang Yangming's philosophy. In Wang Yangming's meaning, "spirit" is not the category about the organ of the physiological sense, nor is it a simple intention in the mind. The category includes consciousness, thinking, feeling, emotion, etc. "Shi", which is transliterated, can not be simply understood as objective things, but a dynamic process accompanied by the activity of consciousness of individuals. Of course, the category also includes concrete things. Wang Yangming put forward the proposition in order to avoid the possibility that the spirit might be addicted to nothingness while practicing meditation.

In spiritual cultivation, Wang Yangming stressed that it is necessary to test and consolidate the mental quality from meditation by dynamic state, which means people should hone the spirit in Shi. In his early years, Wang Yangming practiced meditation, which influenced his whole life. In famous Enlightenment in Dragon Field, Wang Yangming benefited from meditation. The Complete Works of Wang Yangming records: "I sat upright in order to be completely quiet. After a long time, the spirit is clean..... I began to understand that the Tao of the saints lays in my spirit. It was wrong to seek truth from external things."^[1] Later, Wang Yangming turned to hone spirit in the actual matter. Yang Ming once said: "Is there any way to lead an army? It is just to keep the spirit still through learning."^[1] Leading an army means honing spirit in Shi. In Wang Yangming's view, the real cultivation of spirit embodies practice in concrete matters, and the core is to keep one's mind still.

When teaching his disciples, Wang Yangming used to guide them to understand the unity of knowing and doing by sitting quietly, and then guided them to hone the spirit in Shi. Yang Ming had taught his disciples about the unity of knowing and doing, but they felt confused. Therefore, Wang Yangming switched to teaching meditation, and his disciples finally understood the unity of knowing and doing. However, the meditation caused some disciples to indulge in nothingness. In order to prevent them from being deserted, Wang Yangming emphasized that his discipline should hone the spirit in Shi. One of Yang Ming's disciples once asked: "Why can I keep my mind calm when I am sitting quietly, but I cannot be calm when something happens?" Wang Yangming replied: "It's because you are just sitting quietly but not introspecting. When facing with specific things, you would fall over. People need to hone their spirit in Shi so that they can be steady in both stillness and motion."^[1]

2. Operation of Shi

In Wang Yangming's philosophy, the connotation of "Shi" is where the idea reaches, and the extension is all people's cognition and the object in cognition. When ideas rise and even trigger the whole body and spirit to participate in an activity, the process is the Shi. Wang Yangming said: "The place where ideas act is the thing. The thing is Shi. For example, thoughts are used for serving, which is Shi, relatives, and serving relatives is a thing."^[1] "Shi" and "thing" exist in the same process of the activity and are not separated. Of course, there is a subtle difference between "Shi" and "thing". "Shi" emphasizes how an idea or action occurs, while "thing" emphasizes objects that ideas point to.

In Wang Yangming's theory, the Shi is by no means a single isolated external object, but corresponds to the relevance of the subject

and the use of idea. The field in which Shi happens is no longer a dualistic model of "subject-object", but a monadic model with intersubjectivity. In other words, instead of treating others as cold objects, subjects should feel and observe others in the process of Shi. In this way, Shi can also be regarded as a dynamic process, which is completed in the interaction between subjects. Tang Junyi distinguished Wang Yangming's cognition from that of ordinary people. He said: "Thus the so-called external objects are merely indirectly related to liang-chih, or are merely the constituent elements of our affairs, or things which are intended by our ideas."^[2]

In the theory of Wang Yangming, people should participate in the process of Shi with the cultivation of the spirit. People can show their own wisdom in Shi, and support the state of the Shi through individual wisdom. Shi can reflect the state of mind. Therefore, people should observe the spirit in all kinds of things. When the spirit is clear, they can see the operation of Shi. The key is to break the selfish desire and follow the human nature.

3. The Discipline of the Spirit

According to Wang Yangming's theory, the process of the Shi can reflect the value of the spirit. The value of the spirit can be honed through Shi. In such training, the benevolence of the spirit will echo and flow to all things. The individual is aware of the benevolence in the spirit, and then expands it from one thing to all things, such as family, country and world. Yang Guorong and Hou Jian also hold the same view on the relationship between spirit and Shi of Wang Yangming's theory and emphasize the meaning of spirit. They said: "In Wang's philosophy, the heart-mind is connected with the unfolding of events, where events constitute the precondition for understanding things and grasping the Way, and serve as the origin in the cultivation of human beings."^[3]

In Wang Yangming's philosophy, liang-chih is the original state of the spirit, and Wang Yangming often uses "spirit" to call "liang-chih". In Chinese traditional philosophy, concepts are not defined as rigorously as in Western philosophy. Because Chinese traditional philosophers pay more attention to the ineffable meaning behind words, leading to more flexible interoperability between concepts. In the context of Wang Yangming, Shi is all things that liang-chih should feel. Tang Junyi has a clear expression of Wang Yangming's concept of liang-chih. He said: "Liang-chih which knows the good and evil of the ideas exists on a still higher level, or on the highest level, and can include ideas known by itself as within itself also. Therefore, the realization of Liang-chih, which stretches through ideas, affairs, and down to objective things, can definitely include also the investigation of objective things."^[2]

The purpose of training the spirit is to enlighten the original function of Liang-chih. If the function of Liang-chih is opened, people can have a clearer understanding of their own cognition, and at the same time, a more thorough understanding of the operation of Shi. The awareness of liang-chih determines what the subject knows about the world. Wang Yangming said: "The sage encounter the Shi at present. I am afraid the mirror is not clear, not afraid of things can not be reflected. The core of grasping the change and development of Shi is to be aware of the present state of mind. The premise is that the learner's spirit is bright. One should worry that spirit is not bright enough, not that I cannot cope with the change of things."^[1] In Wang Yangming's view, everything develops and changes constantly. The key to being at ease in complex and competitive affairs is to light own spirit. Wang Yangming compares the spirit to a mirror, thinking that only the pure spirit can reflect the essence of things. If the spirit is clear, people can stay flexible in the process of things, in a calm state to cope with all changes.

4. The Unity of Spirit and Shi

Shi is all that involved in the thoughts that come out from spirit. Things are the results of the operation of Shi. The spirit has no concrete image, but can perceive everything. Liang-chih is original state of spirit. The relationship between spirit and Shi is homogeneous. To be more precise, liang-chih is original state and Shi is function, and liang-chih and Shi are integrated. The integrated relationship between spirit and Shi is not purely logical construction, but intuitive experience. The integrated relationship between liang-chih and Shi is manifested in the dynamic interaction between people and things. This interaction is twofold. On the one hand, people and things have commonness and homogeneity, which will show that all things are integrated in the movement of Shi. On the other hand, compared with things, people have awareness, which will reflect the potential of sanctification in human activities.

Liang-chih is the original state of the spirit. In this sense, all things are the same and no difference. Wang Yangming: "Liang-chih is the spirit of nature. The spirit reveals the meaning of heaven and earth, and is indeed not separated from things. If a man's liang-chih is recovered, he is as good as dancing in the universe. Is there any pleasure in heaven and earth that can take its place?"^[1] Liang-chih is in the same body with the universe, creating all things through transformation. In other words, liang-chih imparts meaning to things. In this process, the person beyond the limitations of individual existence, making it possible for everything to be integrated.

Liang-chih lives in the individual. In this sense, the person is unique among all things. Wang Yangming pointed out that the spirit of

heaven and earth lies in liang-chih. People live in heaven and earth, and liang-chih endowed people with rationality, which makes people no longer ignorant, takes the initiative to personnel activities, and further participate in the operation of the universe. Furthermore, the existence of Shi is actually presented by people's own liang-chih. Of course, this is not abstract existence, but a natural manifestation in the clear light of liang-chih.

Once the potential energy of liang-chi is inspired, it is possible for a person to transcend the state of existence of the self-solidified individual and become a sage in the situation of coexistence with Shi. Wu Zheng said: "Wang's Unity Doctrine is a thesis that is both ontological and practical, and reveals the humanistic spirit of Tianxia theory."^[4] Indeed, by honing the spirit in Shi, individuals can not only awaken their own nature, but also achieve the realm of the integration of all things. Chen Lisheng clearly expresses the value of the studies in modern times. He said: "It manifests the loftiness of Heaven,the profundity of Earth,the dignity of humanity,and the source of creativity for all things. Yangming Studies in the twenty-first century will be aiming at the loftier,vaster,deeper,and greater expectations that the human mind is capable of, rather than narrowing,restricting, or fixing it to nationalism or regionalism."^[5]

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