

# The Derivative Process of Wang Yangming's Philosophy of Mind in His Travel Works

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## Abstract

*Since the mid-Ming Dynasty, Yangming Philosophy of Mind has emerged as a Confucian trend, representing the confluence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in Chinese intellectual history. It has directly influenced the literati society of the late Ming. To this day, it remains one of the major subjects in traditional philosophical thought research. However, Yangming Philosophy of Mind did not suddenly emerge overnight with the “Awakening at Longchang”; rather, it gradually developed through Wang Yangming's life experiences and became an inner journey experience. Based on Mencius' perspective of “understanding a person by understanding their times,” this paper employs modern Western “literary sociology” to analyze the author, their works, and the social context. The focus is on Wang Yangming's surviving prose travelogues and landscape poetry to explore the origins of his philosophy of mind and the trajectory of his inner thoughts.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Wang Shouren (1472-1529), originally named Wang Yun, with the courtesy name Bo'an, used “Yangming” as his pseudonym. He was from Yuyao, Zhejiang, and later revered as Master Yangming. In 1499, during the Hongzhi era of Emperor Xiaozong, he passed the imperial examination as a jinshi. He held various positions, including serving as the Minister of Justice, the Director of Longchang Post Station

in Guizhou, the Magistrate of Luling County, the Deputy Inspector General, the Governor of Southern Guangdong and Jiangxi, and the Grand Coordinator of Guangdong and Guangxi. He suppressed uprisings in Fujian, Guangdong, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Guangxi, quelled the rebellion of Prince Ning Zhu Chenhao, and was granted the title of Xinjian Bo (Count of Xinjian) for his military achievements. In his later years, he served as the Secretary of the Ministry of War

in Nanjing and the Left Censor-General. During the reign of Emperor Muzong, he was posthumously honored as a marquis with the posthumous title “Wencheng”. In 1584, during the Wanli era of Emperor Shenlong, he was enshrined in the Confucian Temple. His life and accomplishments can be found in the “Biography of Wang Shouren” in the “History of Ming” [1]. His collected works, compiled by his disciples from his lifetime writings and oral teachings on philosophy of mind, form the 38-volume “Complete Works of Wang Wencheng Gong”. The earliest edition was printed during the Longqing era of Emperor Muzong by Xie Tingjie, the Circuit Intendant of Zhejiang. It has been recompiled by Lu Heyun and renamed “The Complete Works of Wang Yangming” [2], consisting of five volumes: Volume 1 contains “The Annals of Wang Yangming” in seven chapters; Volume 2 includes “The Collected Writings of Wang Yangming” in nine chapters; Volume 3 features “Instructions for Practical Living by Wang Yangming” in three chapters; Volume 4 comprises “The Poetry Collection of Wang Yangming” in two chapters; and Volume 5 includes “The Memorial Essays of Wang Yangming” in twelve chapters.

### 1.1 Topic Origin

Modern sociology places significant emphasis on studying the dissemination and impact of literary works. For instance, French literary scholar Robert Escarpit (1918-2000) discusses in his work “Sociology of Literature” that “the value of literature is largely determined by the position of the literary world and writers within that society, by the awareness of their circumstances, and by the assumption of responsibility inherent in this awareness. [3]” This perspective views the responsibilities of

literary works to society from the writer's point of view.

Traditional Chinese literary criticism places great emphasis on Mencius's assertion that “to praise their poetry, read their books, without knowing about their lives—is it possible? Therefore, one must discuss their times.” This highlights the importance of considering an author's personal circumstances and the era's characteristics when studying classical texts. This concept, known as “understanding the person and discussing the age,” focuses on the close relationship between Wang Yangming's philosophy of mind and his life journey. Thus, this article examines his timeless masterpieces, including prose travelogues and verse landscape poems, in conjunction with his life experiences, to explore his inner thoughts and the development of his mind philosophy.

The title of this study, combining both Chinese and Western perspectives, is “The Development of Mind Philosophy in Wang Yangming's Travel Writings.” The chronological events are referenced from “The Annals” in Volume 1 of “The Complete Works of Wang Yangming,” while also consulting “The History of Ming.” Literary content analysis includes prose travelogues from Volume 2 of “The Collected Works” and landscape poetry related to travel in Volume 4 of “The Poetry Collection.” Additionally, it draws on “Instructions for Practical Living” in Volume 3, which records Wang Yangming's oral teachings on mind philosophy to his students. This study explores the relationship between Wang Yangming's life journey and the development of mind philosophy.

### 1.2 Literature Review

Wang Yangming is esteemed by later

generations as the culmination of mind philosophy studies, holding immense research value in traditional Chinese philosophy. Numerous studies, akin to stars, focus on exploring the meanings of words and phrases in “Instructions for Practical Living” and philosophical thought discussions. In recent years, the rise of interdisciplinary research fields has effectively fills the shortcomings of traditional research methods, providing rich insights into various aspects of Wang Yangming, including his person, deeds, works, and societal impact. Some significant recent achievements are listed as follows:

Fu Xinhong's “Wang Yangming's Early Experiences and the Formation of a Great Mind Scholar [4]” is focused on his early experiences before his enlightenment at Longchang, exploring the trajectory of the formation of mind-oriented thought. Wang Deyan's “From Mountains to Earth—Wang Yangming's Aesthetic Education Thought and Its Modern Implications [5]” discusses how his life realm directly influenced the literary style of the late Ming period, including the “Theory of Childlike Heart,” “Nature Theory,” and “Emotion-Based Theory.” An Shibao's “Life Consciousness in Wang Yangming's Poetry [6]” uses images such as “flowers” and “birds” in his works to showcase Wang Yangming's varied life experiences at different stages. Hua Jianxin and Pan Huajia's “There is a Bright Moon in My Heart—Interpretation of Wang Yangming's Poetic Aesthetic Realm [7]” argues that Yangming mind studies focus on the value and significance of life and the harmonious virtues of social development, guiding people to enhance their aesthetic judgment and moral character

perfection. This is reflected in his poetry creation and has influenced the development of classical Chinese aesthetics since the mid-Ming dynasty. Guo Molan's “On the Three Stages of 'Objects' in Wang Yangming's Poetry” [8] divides his poetic realms into three levels: “The self-centered realm of empathy with objects,” “the realm of peers conversing with heaven and earth,” and “the practical realm of achieving results through implementing.” It explains how he initially sought harmony between “self” and “objects” while studying Cheng-Zhu rationalism. Later, after setbacks in his official career, he befriended and accompanied “heaven and earth” with his “mind” upon moving to Guizhou. He then completed the specific understanding from “mind is principle” to “awakening conscience.” Finally, as his thoughts evolved after leaving Guizhou, he achieved “unity of knowledge and action,” fully validating his mind philosophy in his life achievements.

Closely related to the argument of this article is Yu Xiuzhi's “Creation of Wang Yangming's Narrative Essays and Their Relationship with Mind Philosophy [9],” which analyzes the transformation in Wang Yangming's narrative essay style and its relationship with mind philosophy, as well as its literary and artistic value. This discussion focuses on traditional literary criticism and offers insightful perspectives. Li Ni's “Wang Yangming and the Story of the Xiang Shrine [10]” explores the only existing ancient Xiang shrine located in Lingbo Mountain, Bijie City, Guizhou Province. The shrine has become a cultural symbol for the region due to Wang Yangming's single essay, “Xiang Shrine Record,” and the paper discusses its integration with contemporary cultural

tourism. Cui Lingzhi's "Aesthetic Study of Wang Yangming's Poetry [11]" examines the different creative styles and aesthetic implications of his poetry before and after his ideological transformation. Meng Jiawei's "An Analysis of Wang Yangming's Poetry from Ganzhou [12]" dissects the over 40 poems written during two periods: when Wang Yangming served as the governor of Southern Jiangxi from 1516 to 1521 and when he traveled through Southern Jiangxi on his way to Guangdong in 1527. These works record his thoughts and reflections during his time in Ganzhou, showcasing the area's beautiful landscapes while expressing his concern for reality and his sense of responsibility for the nation, as well as his desire for a reclusive life in the mountains, indifferent to fame and wealth.

In summary, listing recent research on Wang Yangming that involves poetry and prose creation, as well as records of his travels, along with traditional literary studies focusing on poetic imagery, and historical discussions such as local gazetteers and biographies in the "History of Ming," all provide significant assistance in constructing this paper.

Based on the above, the major transformation in Wang Yangming's mind philosophy was during his "Awakening at Longchang." This paper uses this turning point to divide his life experiences into three parts: "Travel Diaries from His Youth," "Works from the Period in Longchang," and "Poetry and Prose after Leaving Guizhou."

## II. TRAVELOGUES FROM YOUTH

Looking for Wang Yangming's masterpieces combined with his life chronology, it is found

that in 1502, at the age of 31, he returned to his hometown in Zhejiang from the capital. He felt that among his old acquaintances in the capital, everyone was vying for fame through talent, writing classical poetry and prose. He sighed, "How can I use my limited spirit on useless formalities?" Thus, he feigned illness and returned to Yuyao, building a house in the Yangming Cave to practice Daoist exercises [13]. At this time, he had no interest in traditional poetry and prose. He resigned from his post and returned to his hometown in Shaoxing, Zhejiang, to cultivate Daoist practices. Soon after, he felt that the level of his cultivation was unsatisfactory and moved to West Lake in Hangzhou the following year to enjoy a carefree and leisurely life without official duties.

### 2.1 Divine Wandering Prose "Record of Pingshan Academy"

During his stay in Hangzhou, he visited his former superior, then the governor of Hangzhou, Yang Wenfu. He wrote the first prose travelogue of his renowned works, "Record of Pingshan Academy [14]." The essay begins by specifying the location, individuals involved, and the reason for writing: "Pingshan is located three li north of Fengling. Today's Hangzhou governor, Mr. Yang Wenfu, once studied there during his youth. Since Mr. Yang's father, the Inspector General, became an imperial scholar, Mr. Wenfu has continued this tradition. Now that Mr. Wenfu has attained high office, he has built it into an academy." Hearing stories from his old superior about studying in Zizhou, Hunan, Wang Yangming was inspired to write this contemplative piece, vividly describing the academy's scenic beauty—nestled against mountains and beside rivers, with lush forests

and diverse seasonal landscapes, making it an ideal place for reading and recitation.

Wang Yangming never visited Pingshan Academy; based solely on Yang Wenfu's oral description, he vividly depicted the academy's environment and natural scenery, imagining himself immersed within it, forgetting the mundane world. In literary history, authors who have left scenic descriptions without visiting the site are notably exemplified by Fan Zhongyan's "Record of Yueyang Tower" from the Northern Song Dynasty. This piece was clearly influenced by that tradition, but Fan's work is centered on "The Evening Scene of Dongting Lake," intertwining Confucian ideals of "prioritizing worries before pleasures" with the shared exile experience of Teng Zongliang. Wang Yangming, however, soared into the scene through mere oral accounts, embodying the spirit of Zhuangzi's "Free and Unfettered Excursion," which likely relates to his practice of Daoist mysticism and its associated Tianren Ganying (Heaven-Man Resonance).

Subsequently, the article shifts back to reality, comparing Hangzhou's West Lake scenery with the statement, "The turbulent waves of Qiantang and the beautiful landscapes of West Lake are unparalleled in the world when it comes to famous scenic spots." It suggests that Hangzhou's natural charm, represented by the Qiantang tides and West Lake, is unmatched. Yang Wenfu, who never forgot his early education place, must have had profound reasons for doing so. At the end of the article, it quotes from "The Analects of Confucius, Chapter Ji Shi": "Retreat to pursue one's aspirations, act righteously to achieve one's path." It praises Yang Wenfu for studying at Pingshan Academy,

later repairing the academy after becoming an official to benefit future generations, and frequently remembering and caring for the place. This highlights Yang Wenfu's virtues and righteousness, as well as his self-expectations. The piece deeply reflects Confucian ideals of entering public service while also showing Daoist thoughts of enjoying nature. A comprehensive analysis reveals its influence from Cheng-Zhu Rationalism, particularly the concept of "nature being reason."

## **2.2 Prose Poem "Journey to Yuelu Literary Matters"**

During the Hongzhi period of Emperor Xiaozong, many landscape poems were written, mostly concise five-character quatrains such as "Double Peaks," "Lotus Peak," "Arrayed Immortals Peak," "Cloud Gate Peak," and "Hibiscus Pavilion (two poems)." These works often use mountains to metaphorically express a desire to serve the country. This period also saw the creation of a long seven-character ancient poem titled "Journey to Yuelu Literary Matters [15]," which spans 38 couplets and 532 characters. The poem describes Wang Yangming and several friends, including Zhao and Zhou, traveling to Yuelu Mountain in Changsha, Hunan. They arrived at the foot of the mountain by boat on the Xiang River. The scenery is described as "floating clouds scatter and sunlight spreads; at this moment the peaks become more clear and bright... traces of willow paths and plum embankments remain, while the mountains' forests and valleys remain unchanged as they always were." As the clouds part, the mountain's charm is revealed, and entering the forest path, the group enjoys their journey amidst the lush greenery.

The poem's title, "Tour," refers to Yuelu Mountain. The term "Writing/Book" originally meant describing the tour experience, but the "Yuelu Academy" by the mountain has remained famous to this day. This is due to Zhu Xi of the Southern Song Dynasty promulgating "Zhu Zi Academy Precepts" here, which became the "motto" for academy education from the Southern Song Dynasty onwards. Additionally, the couplet "Only Chu has talent, and it thrives here," written during the Qing Dynasty, has become the main scenic feature at the entrance of the current tourist area. The poem mentions "ceremonies in the hall are appropriate, bowing at the place where Zhu and Zhang rested," referring to the historical "Zhu and Zhang Lecture" held by Zhu Xi and Zhang Shi, which further elevated the ancient educational status of Yuelu Academy.

When traveling from the Xiang River to Yuelu Mountain, Wang Yangming, a young and talented scholar, wrote narratives with clear and straightforward prose. His landscape descriptions carry an uplifting and vigorous tone. However, upon deeper examination of his poetry, it seems that his insights are superficial, lacking the profound and introspective reflections that come from deep inner contemplation. As a result, the mountains remain just mountains, the scenery merely scenery, and historical references stay as mere references. The author appears to be an observer rather than someone who has transcended the mundane world to achieve a harmonious unity of mind and nature.

The poem focuses solely on depicting scenery, combining the spiritual thoughts and emotions from the previously mentioned "Pingshan Academy Record," revealing that

Wang Yangming had already integrated Confucian and Daoist ideas. However, due to his incomplete understanding of the essence of mind philosophy, he still harbored dual feelings of traditional Confucian ambition for officialdom and Daoist desire for transcendence, reflecting his youthful mindset and attitude.

### III. WORKS FROM THE LONGCHANG POSTAGE PERIOD IN GUIZHOU

In 1507, during the Zhengde era of the Ming Dynasty, Wang Yangming, at the age of 36, was exiled to the remote and harsh region of Guizhou for over two years due to offending eunuch Liu Jin. It was here that he deeply understood the concept of "mind is principle" and realized how to "awakening conscience," thereby completing his philosophy of mind theory systems.

#### 3.1 Early Travel Essays

During this period, he also wrote several travel essays such as "The Humble Pavilion," "The Gentleman's Pavilion," "The Play with the Book of Changes Cave," "The Xiang Shrine," and "The Rebuilt Moon Pond Temple and Official Residence." The first three describe his living quarters, and their names reflect changes in his mindset. For example, "The Humble Pavilion" is the name of his residence at Longchang Station, which shares a similar spirit with Liu Yuxi's "Inscription on a Modest Abode" from the Tang Dynasty; "The Gentleman's Pavilion" describes bamboo within his residence; "The Play with the Book of Changes Cave" is a mountain hollow where he temporarily stayed upon first arriving at Longchang, where he read the "Book of Changes": "Initially, when he did not understand it, he looked up in thought and down in doubt, encompassing the universe in its minutiae,



feeling lost and aimless, like a lone stump. But if he were to grasp it. [14]" In nature, he found harmony with the cosmic principles of the "Book of Changes." This site is now one of the cultural tourism attractions developed by the local government. "The Xiang Shrine" describes the Shun Emperor's mausoleum on Lingbo Mountain, which remains an important tourist destination today. Wang Yangming was asked by the local ethnic minorities to write about it because they regarded Shun as a heavenly deity, leading to the renovation of the shrine and a request for a commemorative inscription [14].

### **3.2 Awakening at Longchang and Record of the Reconstruction of Yuetan Temple and Establishing Guesthouses**

During the Guizhou period, Wang Yangming's travel essays are richest in the content of Neo-Confucianism and compatible with the beauty of mountains and waters. They focus on the pleasant scenery of mountains and rivers and were written to address the inconvenience for travelers and merchants due to poor facilities. The essay "Record of the Reconstruction of Yue-Tan (Moon Lake) Temple and the Construction of Official Residence" [14] begins, "To the south of Longxing lies a rock called 'Yue-Tan.'" It stands tall like a thousand feet of cliffs, its eaves drooping hundreds of feet, and above it is a misty and exquisite cave system. Floating objects resemble clouds and mists, stretching ones like rainbows and arches, opening up like pavilions and gates, and hanging down like drums and bells. The canopy and tassels look like the wind-beating Peng bird, fluttering geese, intertwined dragons and snakes, startled monkeys and leopards, all displaying bizarre transformations that cannot be fully

described; yet below it lies a clear pond and deep valley, unfathomable caves, hidden secrets and twists; towering forests and beautiful trees cast their shade and provide shelter; babbling streams and clear brooks form picturesque scenes."

The karst topography of Guizhou is well developed, with numerous limestone caves formed by water erosion and rugged mountainous terrain. Located at the southern edge of Longxing (northwest of Zunyi City), where Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces meet, there is a large rocky cliff and deep valley pool known as "Yue-Tan." The cave scene is varied and countless, making it difficult to describe completely. Here, dense forests, clear streams, beautiful trees, and waterfalls create a beautiful landscape. What captivates visitors is the glossy reflection of the rocks, which can reflect the moonlight upon them. Thanks to Wang Yangming's writings, this place has become a renowned scenic spot along the mountains and waters of Guizhou to this day.

Wang Yangming, while there, highly praised the magnificent landscapes of the expansive Yun-Gui region. Travelers found the journey arduous due to the terrain. Whether they intended to enjoy the scenery or simply travel, they could find rest and recreation at Moon Lake Temple. This temple, located between Yan Boundary and Pian Bridge, stretched for dozens of miles. Travelers arriving here were often exhausted and hungry, making it necessary for them to have a place to rest. The temple at the mountain foothills was originally built by local soldiers, officials, and indigenous people who lived together. During festivals, they would all gather here to offer prayers. The origin of Moon

Lake Temple was as a local religious center. Over time, it fell into disrepair. Zhu Wenrui, the Inspector General, was moved by the scenic beauty and the need for travelers to rest. He initiated fundraising to renovate the temple and added three guest rooms. In his concluding remarks, Zhu Wenrui stated, "Those in power should take advantage of favorable conditions to accomplish tasks so that matters are handled efficiently and the people are at ease. Now, travelers have no place to stay, and when envoys travel a hundred miles, they cannot eat or rest. I plan to create something that benefits both the long-term and the immediate needs; is this not a good idea?" On the text surface, these words highlight Zhu Wenrui's efforts to care for the people, but they also reflect the surrounding scenic beauty of Moon Lake Temple. Furthermore, through his travelogue, he integrates Confucian teachings (mind philosophy), advocating that those in power do not necessarily need to follow rigid laws; the key is to provide convenience for the people. Similarly, in implementing moral education, one does not have to blindly follow ancient practices; the crucial point is to guide people towards goodness. Only by understanding that "the mind is the principle" can one "awaken conscience," and in governance, one must achieve "unity of knowledge and action." Although this piece was written to showcase the achievements of higher officials, Wang Yangming expressed the charm of the mountains and waters with realistic and descriptive writing, making it an important travelogue during his "Awakening at Longchang" phase.

During period in Guizhou, he pondered the meaning of life amidst hardship, integrating the

thoughts of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. He broke through the barrier of Cheng-Zhu's doctrine of extinguishing human desires, believing that "the way of the sage is self-sufficient within my nature; seeking reason from things was a mistake." He reorganized Lu Xiangshan's theory that "the mind is the principle," using "awaken conscience," as the criterion and "unity of knowledge and action" as the guiding principle for his actions. Eventually, he had a sudden enlightenment, historically known as the "Awakening at Longchang," which can be felt in his writings where his prose flows smoothly, naturally, and fresh, with no trace of carving or clichés when describing landscapes. The style of literary works is inevitably directly related to the writer's state of mind and insights, and this is also because the study of the mind philosophy traces back to Mencius' belief in "innate goodness." For example, Mencius advocated that people have four inherent virtues—benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom—within their hearts, and that "the way of learning has nothing else but to seek the return of one's lost heart." Wang Yangming said: "The nature endowed by heaven is present in our hearts, and within its entirety, all the principles and details are fully equipped, hence it is called 'heavenly principle.' [14]" Further, he aimed to return the found good heart back to its natural state, skillfully blending the philosophical meanings of Cheng-Zhu's "nature is principle" and Xiangshan's "mind is principle" into one pot. Mencius sought to find the lost "original heart," while Wang Yangming's "heart pure of heavenly principle" is what Xiangshan referred to as the original heart, and it is also the heart of Mencius' "four beginnings," and upon further elevation, it



becomes the "benevolence" heart of Confucius. Therefore, in the text "Record of the Reconstruction of Yuetan Temple and the Construction of the Official Residence," Wang Yangming highlighted Zhu Wenrui's act of kindness, which indeed resonates with the philosophical principles of his own heart studies.

### 3.3 Landscape and Poetry

In terms of rhymed verse, the academic community has counted over a hundred poems by Wang Yangming during his more than two years in Guizhou [16]. These poems document his journey through political storms and harsh natural environments, reflect on the path of life, and express spiritual joy after enlightenment. A small portion blends landscape charm with philosophical contemplation, such as one of the three poems from "Upon Finding the Eastern Cave, I Decided to Rename it Yangming's Little Cave": "Ancient cave hidden in desolate wilderness, seemingly empty waiting for doubtful guests; Stripping away weeds and ascending windy steps, moving happily into the secluded clearing; Setting up camp near the rock crevice, laying out my bed against the stone pile; Sealing off the dome with fragrant smoke, leveling the uneven ground again and sweeping clean. Books piled haphazardly around, wine vessels shine brightly. The simple dwelling indeed seems humble, but tranquility is what truly lies within. How could there be regret if not for the hometown's affection? Contentment in one's place, without regrets. [15]" The "Yangming Cave" is located in Xiuwen County, Guizhou, where he used a natural stone cave as his study while exiled at Longchang, and it also became a place of enlightenment. Upon arrival, the ancient cave was concealed deep within towering

mountains and dense forests. After cleaning and arranging books here, the last four lines of the poem indicate that he did not consider living here to be anything less than comfortable, because tranquility and contentment were his true aspirations. Although he still missed his hometown, he had no regrets about his current situation. This sentiment echoes the final line of Su Shi's Song Dynasty poem "Ding Feng Po," which reads: "Looking back at the bleak places I've been, while returning, neither wind nor rain nor clear skies," expressing an indifferent state of mind beyond worldly concerns. He, who suffered political persecution and lived in impoverished mountains and waters, maintained broad-mindedness unaffected by the environment. It can also be said that under the dual adversities of court politics and natural conditions, this enhanced his pace of enlightenment at Longchang.

When he wrote "Passing the Natural Bridge," he also intended to convey a sense of transcendence: "The water gleams like a white silk falling over the long pines, and above the clouds, the natural bridge conceals a rainbow. The crane from Liaodong does not come here as the rotten pillar at the southern gate fades away, and the immortal leaves this world forever as the stone bridge remains empty. I only hear about magpies flying across on an autumn night, but vainly talk of Qin Shi Huang's whip reaching the eastern sea. Moving it back into the Yangtze River still saves us from danger; pity that it was in vain amidst thousands of mountains [15]. " The "natural bridge" refers to a naturally formed stone archway, which a landscape spanning two mountains is created by years of erosion from flowing water. Wang Yangming passed through

the natural bridge in Dafang County, northwest of Longchang Post Station, where the two mountains are connected by a natural stone archway, allowing one to see the water below and the pine forests between the mountains. The sky bridge soars high into the clouds like a white rainbow. Then, four mythological allusions are used consecutively: Ding Lingwei's story of becoming an immortal with a crane from Liaodong, Wang Qiao's chess game on the decaying board mountain in Zhejiang, the Qixi Festival's magpie bridge meeting, and Emperor Qin Shi Huang's quest for immortality, all belonging to Taoist tales of seeking immortality. The final couplet expresses the lamentation of being exiled in the dangerous mountains, reflecting a desire for seclusion from the mundane world.

During this period, there were also poems such as "Baiyun Hall," "Laixian Cave," "Spring Journey," "Clear Night," "Monk's Quarters," "Eagle and Sheep Mountain," and "Sizhou Temple." These works all carry a sense of detachment from the mundane world amidst the beauty of mountains and waters. This is because before he realized the philosophy of the mind, he had pondered deeply on Buddhist and Taoist thoughts for a long time, which imbues his works with a profound sense of transcendence.

#### **IV. POEMS AND ESSAYS AFTER LEAVING GUIZHOU**

Wang Yangming was released from his penal servitude in Guizhou after the fourth year of Emperor Wuzong's Zhengde era (1509) and returned to serve as the magistrate of Luling. The following year, he was promoted to be the Chief Clerk of the Nanjing Ministry of Punishments,

and two years later, he was recalled to Beijing to hold several positions within the Ministry of Personnel. In the seventh year of Zhengde (1512), he went to Nanjing to serve as the Grand Censor of the Imperial Stables, and two years later, he was promoted to the Grand Censor of Honglu. In the eleventh year of Zhengde (1516), he was elevated to the position of Left Censor-in-Chief of the Imperial Censorate, tasked with overseeing Fujian, Jiangxi, and Guangdong regions. The following January, he quelled the bandit Xie Zhishan. In the fourteenth year of Zhengde (1519), he once again suppressed the rebellion of Prince Ning Zhu Zhenhao, for which he was posthumously honored by Emperor Jiajing with the title of Marquis of Xinxian.

This experience led to the maturation of his mind philosophy learning thoughts, which served as a guide in life. He was adept at handling state affairs, whether administrative or military, and achieved significant accomplishments in both areas. Analyzing his later landscape poetry reveals a change in style, such as in "Touring Mount Tai": "Swift torrents plunge into cloud caves, a thousand feet pour down from high coldness. Yesterday I saw it among the mountains, truly like looking at it through a painting. The pine wind blows my short hair; frosty air solemnizes the group of peaks. It's good to remember where we met, deep autumn on the eighteen turns. [15]" In ancient Chinese literature, Mount Tai has always stood out due to its political status being exalted above all other mountains. Since the Wei and Jin dynasties, works often symbolize personal integrity with the loftiness of Mount Tai or represent the prosperity of the empire. The most famous is Du Fu's line from "Looking at the

Mountain," "I shall surely climb to the highest peak, and then all other mountains will seem small."

Wang Yangming's Mount Tai features a thousand-foot waterfall, pine trees and clouds, as well as the beauty of its winding terrain. It is a place where one can feel spiritually enriched in the midst of nature, without any personal allegory or political implications. It transcends the previous inexplicable reverence for Mount Tai, presenting a pure natural landscape. For instance, when discussing how to discern between people's virtues with his student Qian Dehong in "The Record of Transmission," Qian said: "If Mr. Wang were like Mount Tai before us, there would be those who do not look up; they must be blind." Wang Yangming replied: "Mount Tai is no larger than a flat ground; what can be seen on the flat ground?" [17] There is deep meaning behind this exchange. The student was stuck in the clichéd use of mountains to symbolize character, drawing upon Confucianism's idea that "one should look up to high mountains and follow the example of great men," viewing traditional veneration of Mount Tai as the ultimate exemplar of character. However, Wang Yangming used the broader concept of the earth, which all rely on yet often overlooks the principle of "the land bears heavy virtue." He guided students not to see only the scenery before them but also to forget the source of life. This layer of meaning fits into the aforementioned "Touring Mount Tai," where content lacks deliberate metaphorical intent. From the superficial appreciation of "seeing the mountain as it is" to the symbolic interpretation of "seeing the mountain as something else," and finally returning to the purifying state of "seeing

the mountain again as it is," this aligns with the path of conscience.

"Traveling to Mount Tai" was written in the sixteenth year of Emperor Wuzong's Zhengde era (1521), twelve years after Wang Yangming had his enlightenment at Longchang. He said, "Before I went to Nandu, there were still some remnants of a petty-minded person in me; but now that I trust this innate conscience and truly discern right from wrong, acting without any concealment, then only can I be called a madman with an unrestrained heart [17]." With the confidence of having found the innate conscience, his works became more majestic and grand. For example, the couplet at the end of "Moonlit Night," which he wrote while drinking and singing freely on Tianquan Bridge with his students: "Tonight I sing wildly, transformed into the heavens filled with clarity."

Literary sociology, in exploring the relationship between works and their historical context, posits that the interconnectedness of literary works and their experiences is a continuously developing social process. It involves the mutual influence between writers and their socializing environment, which in turn affects the creation of literary works. The works themselves are then accepted by the socio-cultural environment and reflect upon it. With the support of the philosophy of mind, Wang Yangming's 'madness' is not arrogance or self-importance towards others, but rather an effortless freedom integrated within heaven and earth, leading to significant changes in the overall academic trend of the late Ming Dynasty.

## V. CONCLUSION

This article focuses on the extant works of Wang Yangming, including prose travelogues and rhymed landscape poetry. It broadly divides his career into three stages: his early years, his time in Guizhou, and after leaving Guizhou. By analyzing the content of his works, we explore the author's process of life experience and gradual cultivation of the Philosophy of Mind, as well as the differences in the connotations of his works. It is affirmed that before his enlightenment at Longchang, Wang Yangming was still trapped within the dogmas of traditional Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, intending to break free but not yet having succeeded. His exile to Longchang in Guizhou marked a dark period in his life, which also led him to find a way out and reconcile the divergence between Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism and Xiangshan Mind Studies since the Southern Song Dynasty. After leaving Guizhou, Wang Yangming's official career gradually entered its peak, and the Philosophy of Mind began to lead the trend. The connotations of his works were inclusive of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, no longer confined by the traditional notion of poetry expressing aspirations. Wang Yangming possessed both literary and martial virtues, and his works were effortlessly expressive, embodying greatness.

This article focuses on the changes in Wang Yangming's inner thoughts at the level of literary works such as prose travelogues and rhymed landscape poetry, without delving into the core issues of his philosophical thought. It only demonstrates that his internal qualities are consistent with relevant theories in literary sociology. In the future, it could be expanded to

analyze how this approach can lead the trends of late Ming Dynasty literature, adding new pages to the contemporary study of Yangming's philosophy.

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