

# The Philosophy of Mind (Xinxue) System of Wang Yangming

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## Abstract

Wang Yangming (October 31, 1472-January 9, 1529), a Ming Dynasty Chinese philosopher, inherited the teachings of Confucius and Mencius from antiquity and integrated them with the Neo-Confucian thought of the Song and Ming eras. Building on these foundations, he developed their core principles and established Xinxue (The Philosophy of Mind). To this day, scholars worldwide continue to engage in extensive research and debate on Xinxue, yet systematic exploration of its theoretical framework remains limited. This article addresses this gap by proposing a systematic framework that synthesizes the key tenets of Xinxue into a coherent structure. The framework consists of three hierarchical layers: the Tao layer (“Mind is Principle.”), the Morals layer (“Reaching Conscience”), and the Doing layer (“Unity of Knowledge and Action”). Organized sequentially as “Tao No. 1, Morals No. 2, Doing No. 3.”, this structure aligns with the principle of systemic progression—moving from the top layer to the middle and lower layers—and is thus termed the “Xinxue System”.

## Keywords

Xinxue (The Philosophy of Mind), System, Trilogy (Tao, Morals and Doing), Artificial Products, Artificial Materials, Spiritual Wealth, Brightness

## 1. Introduction

Xinxue (The Philosophy of Mind) is a discipline centered on the human mind and spiritual cultivation, originating from ancient Chinese philosophy. It aims to explore fundamental questions about the human inner world, psychological activities, and moral cultivation, emphasizing inner reflection and self-cultivation. Xinxue posits that by observing and understanding one’s inner landscape, individuals can enhance their moral awareness and elevate their spiritual state.

Its development traces back to pre-Qin Confucianism, exemplified by discus-

sions on human nature, morality, and self-cultivation by Confucius and Mencius. Later, influenced by Zen Buddhism and Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, the study of the mind within this tradition gradually evolved into a cohesive philosophical system. Among its key proponents, Wang Yangming emerged as a pivotal figure, advancing the theory to its intellectual zenith.

Wang Yangming (born Wang Shouren, courtesy name: Yangming) was an outstanding Ming Dynasty philosopher, writer, military strategist, and educator, a native of Yuyao, Zhejiang. He inherited and synthesized the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, along with ideas from both Confucianism and Buddhism—including Mencius' theory of innate goodness, the Buddhist Mind Sutra, and the philosophy of Cheng Hao (a Song-dynasty Chinese scholar) that “The mind is the universe”. Through revision, supplementation, and sublimation, he expanded the concept of the mind to its fullest expression, thereby developing a comprehensive and systematic philosophical framework (Wang, 2018).

Although the concept of “Mind” in psychology originated from Buddhist and Confucian thought and was limited by the social environment at that time, such as the Confucian dominated social environment and his own cognitive limitations, it was found through practice that the scope of “Mind” can be extended to the entire field of sociology, greatly enhancing its universality and forming a philosophical system—the Xinxue system, pushing it to peak.

## 2. Xinxue System

The core content of Xinxue rests on three foundational pillars: “Mind is Principle.” “Reaching Conscience” and “Unity of Knowledge and Action” have connotations that unfold across three hierarchical levels: the Tao Level (“Mind is Principle.”), the Morals Level (“Reaching Conscience”), and the Doing Level (“Unity of Knowledge and Action”). These levels progress sequentially from high to medium to low, collectively forming what is known as the “Trilogy of Xinxue.”

Together, they constitute a complete and logically coherent philosophical system—the Xinxue System—structured as “Tao No. 1, Morals No. 2, Doing No. 3”.

### 2.1. The “Tao” Layer—“Mind Is Principle.”

The first core idea of Xinxue, “Mind is Principle.”, is at the top level of the Xinxue system—“Tao” layer.

It inherited the concept of “The universe is my mind, and my mind is the universe”, originally proposed by the Southern Song Dynasty philosopher Lu Jiuyuan. Building upon this, Wang Yangming asserted that there is “No thing outside the mind” and “No principle outside the mind”. These assertions define the “Tao” layer, establishing the ontological core of the entire Xinxue system.

Once, Wang Yangming and his companions climbed a mountain. Halfway up, they encountered a patch of blooming flowers, and the group gathered to admire them. One companion remarked, “These flowers are beautiful, but they have nothing to do with the human mind. Their blooming and fading are merely matters of

time. How can we claim, “There is nothing outside the mind?” Wang Yangming replied, “When we do not see these flowers, they and we remain in silence—they are already present in our minds. Only when we see them do their colors begin to emerge.”

His meaning was clear: one recognizes the beauty of this flower only because the concept of “flower” already exists in the mind. For a baby who lacks this mental category, the blooming and fading of flowers holds no significance—this is the state of “silence”. Thus, the conclusion follows: What exists in the mind exists; What does not exist in the mind does not exist. Extending this insight to the cosmos, Wang Yangming articulated the famous dictum: “The universe is my mind; My mind is the universe.”

By cultivating the mind, one can grasp the truths and laws governing the universe, emphasizing the intrinsic connection between an individual’s inner mind and the broader cosmos. This serves as a cornerstone of Xinxue’s philosophical thought. The absence of selfish desires and distractions that obscure the true self aligns with the principles of nature. This true self inherently embodies benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust, and responds to external phenomena in accordance with natural laws. Here, “Principle” refers not only to metaphysical laws and human nature but also to objective truth and moral values. While these elements are rooted in his theory, they are also reflected in his practical experience.

“Principle” arises from exploring the mind, which demands continuous reflection on and exploration of one’s inherent self. The relationship between “Mind” and “Principle” is one of unity: this “Principle” cannot be found by looking outward, for it exists only within the mind. Only by seeking answers within oneself can a problem gain meaning and seeking externally is ultimately futile. This is the core idea and theoretical foundation of Xinxue, which holds universal relevance for social philosophy.

Then it emphasizes “Nothing outside the mind”, “Nothing outside the mind”, “No principle outside the mind”, and further clarifies the relationship between “Mind” and “Principle”, “Mind” and “Thing”: “Principle” is only a principle if it exists in one’s own mind. This doctrine emphasizes that “There is nothing outside the mind”, and “No principle outside the mind”, thereby clarifying the integral relationship between the mind and both principle and external objects. Principle is only true Principle when it is perceived and processed within one’s own mind (Wang, 2018).

If the mind is filled with goodness, truth, and beauty, then perceiving all external things is also an expression of goodness, truth, and beauty, and vice versa. This is because human understanding of everything outside the mind is based on experiences, knowledge, and thinking from the past, which has clear temporal limitations, making it subjective. For example, a person only learns the color of the sun after being told it is red; They only recognize the concept of the number two after formal instruction; And a person does not realize they have a headache until

they experience the sensation itself. Therefore, there is no truly objective existence in the world, and everything is subjective, as understanding any “Thing” or “Object” is mediated through human cognition. As long as someone believes the world exists objectively, the very belief that the world exists objectively is itself a product of subjective cognition, highlighting the illogical nature of attempting to use subjective experience to prove objective reality.

In the field of sociology, an “Object” outside of the mind remains an objective existence, which has no meaning or value for you and your mind, but then it has meaning and value after you have a certain “Object” in your “Mind”. After you learn scientific knowledge, you find that the sun revolves around the center of the Milky Way galaxy; When you feel hot, your arm will feel hot when it is close to the fire source; When you know the sky is blue, you know it is blue when you look up at the sky, and so on. All of which are subjective entities formed by your understanding of the world. It is because of you that you understand the world. If one day you are not there, then your world will not exist. So, all things and things outside of your mind are related to whether there is something in your “Mind”. If there is something in your mind, there is something, and if there is nothing in your mind, there is nothing. Here, “Existence” includes feelings and understanding of things and things. If you think you are rich, you are still rich even if you are poor. You think you are very healthy, but you can still be healthy even if you are seriously ill. You feel pleased, even if you are in pain, and so on. There is something if there is something in mind; There is nothing if there is nothing in mind, and it has little or no relationship with things or things outside your mind.

In ancient times, there was a village where three households (household A, household B, and household C) each had a son who took the imperial examination in the same year. The son of household A became a Xiucai (Scholar of the First Rank), the son of household B became a Juren (Provincial Graduate), and the son of household C became a Gongshi (Metropolitan Graduate). They each felt happy and proud of their sons’ exam results and even celebrated. A few days later, news of Farmer C’s son passing the imperial examination reached Farmer B’s mind. The farmer immediately felt that his son was not as good as Farmer C’s son, and his prospects would not be as promising. At this moment, Farmer B’s psychological state shifted from happiness to disappointment, from disappointment to jealousy, and he became increasingly gloomy. Meanwhile, news of Farmer C’s son’s success reached Farmer A. The farmer felt genuine happiness and envy for Farmer C’s son and personally went to congratulate the family, viewing the success as an honor for the village and an example for his own son. He was happy all day long. After this news was received by farmers A and B, the objective results of their sons’ exams remained unchanged. It was simply that the information entered the minds of the farmers, causing a change in their psychological states. That is to say, the change in mental condition occurred only after receiving the news in the mind. If this news does not enter their minds, farmers A and B will remain in their original states, and their moods will not change. Furthermore, even if farmers A and B

receive the same information, their reactions can differ. This means that different individuals respond differently when the same information is processed by their minds and consciousness. This variability results from the different “Principles” within each person’s “Mind” which acts as the processor of the consciousness system in the human brain.

Thus, the dictum “The universe is my mind; My mind is the universe.” reflects the insight that human life experience is fundamentally a compilation of internal perceptions. Some find life sweet; others deem it insipid; some perceive their existence as aimless; still others experience it as filled with sorrow, and so forth. All such experiences are products of the mind: different minds yield different products. Therefore, “Mind” and “Principle” are the origin of all things—they are inseparable and together form the essence of the “Tao”.

Irish philosopher George Berkeley (March 12, 1685-January 14, 1753) proposed that “To be is to be perceived”, which means that the existence of the world is entirely based on the existence of independent biological individuals who perceive the world. If there is no perceiving individual, then the world does not exist. He established the identity between perception and existence, meaning that the world does not exist without human perception. The concept of “Perception” is known to the mind, which is consistent with the meaning of “Mind” in Xinxue (Berkeley, 2009).

He established the identity and coexistence of “Perception” and “Existence”. Among them, “Perception” is known and owned by the mind, which is obviously consistent with the connotation of “Mind” in Xinxue. All these can only come from the “Mind”.

The philosopher Mencius (372 BC-289 BC, surnamed Ji, surnamed Meng, named Ke) was one of the representative figures of Confucianism during the Warring States period in ancient China. He was an ancient Chinese thinker, philosopher, politician, and educator. He said: “The organ of the heart is to think, to think is to obtain a result, to not think is not to obtain a result. The office of the heart is to think; By thinking, it gets the right view of things; By not thinking, it fails to do so.” The “Results” can be understood as material and spiritual wealth (Mencius, 2016).

In addition, Mencius’ concept of “The heart as the organ of thoughts.” was limited by the scientific development at that time, modern science has proven that the brain is the organ for thinking and mind is from the brain, However, currently in the Chinese writing system, the habit of using “Heart” instead of “Mind” is still used.

Similarly, German philosopher Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein (April 26, 1889-April 29, 1951) said, “The boundary of my language is the boundary of my world. The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Everything that can be said can be said clearly, and everything that cannot be said should be silent.” Therefore, “The boundary of language means the boundary of my world”. Language can describe the world, but what cannot be described does not belong

to my world. The world is not my world until it is described by language (If we can assume a pre-existing world.). When I create the conformation of the world, I create the logical isomorphism between language and the world, and language and facts correspond one-to-one. Because the connotation of language also comes from my mind and the essence of language is “Mind”, and it is the source of everything (Wittgenstein, 1922).

On the surface, the concept of Xinxue appears rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism; In reality, it transcends the scope of these traditions to encompass the entire field of social philosophy, showcasing the breadth, rationality, and logical coherence of its philosophical system.

It is the first “Tao” Layer for “Mind is Principle.” in the Xinxue system, and “Mind” is the source of all things and the cause.

## 2.2. The “Morals” Layer—“Reaching Conscience”

The second core idea of Xinxue is “Reaching conscience”, which is located in the middle layer of the Xinxue system—the “Morals” layer. Its original concept of “Extending Innate Knowledge” is an innate conscience.

However, with the development of society, conscience evidently encompasses not only innate factors but also the drive from acquired social activities, which is a dynamic process, and in addition, it is found that conscience is the original intention of Xinxue (in his books), while knowledge is not. So, the “Morals” layer is expanded to “Reaching conscience”.

“Reaching” means not only achieving, but also a process of reflection and reflection, which requires continuous thoughts of eliminating evil. The purpose is to form a conscience and determine the operating trend of behavior to ensure the expected results. If the expected results are not achieved, it is necessary to make “Reaching” again.

“Conscience” refers to kindness and morality deep within the mind. Wang Yang-ming believes that human nature is inherently good, and everyone has an inherent “Conscience” that can distinguish right from wrong, good from evil. However, due to the temptation and influence of the external environment, it is obscured or eroded, leading to immoral behavior. Therefore, “Reaching conscience” means awakening and realizing this inner “Conscience” through self-reflection and cultivation, so that one’s behavior meets moral requirements. This process requires people to constantly examine their own behavior and thoughts, eliminate selfish desires and distractions through self-reflection and cultivation, restore and enhance their moral consciousness, and achieve inner quiet and clarity.

The direction of “Reaching” is from “Tao” (Principle) to “Morals” (Conscience), which is an evolutionary process that pushes “Tao” towards “Morals”, and obeying the original mind, originating from the mind, conforming to heavenly principles, and ultimately reaching conscience. That is to say, the “Conscience” obtained without any external interference or influence belongs to nature. The four teachings of Xinxue: “Human nature is divided into no good and no evil; They produce

good and evil when people have desires; Cultivating a conscience to know good and evil; Exploring ways to drive away evil deeds and engage in good deeds.” This is the result of a concrete description of “Reaching conscience” (Wang, 2018).

In fact, “Conscience” can also be understood as cognition, value, and idea, which will comprehensively expand the original connotation of Xinxue to the whole field of social philosophy. Such as “value”, universal values: fairness, justice, kindness, freedom, democracy, and the legal system. In a modern context, “Reaching conscience” can be understood as a broader framework of cognition, values, and ideas. This interpretation expands the original connotation of Xinxue into the wider field.

Conversely, it can also be the opposite of “Reaching conscience” extend to “Evil thoughts”, such as greed, selfish desires, evil, and jealousy. It is just that the behavior is different in the subsequent trip due to different ideas, and its logic is consistent.

While the resulting behaviors differ based on the underlying ideas, the internal logic remains consistent: The mind acts as the source of the intent. Therefore, the framework of “Reaching conscience” can be generalized to “Reaching [X]” where “X” represents any core value or cognitive principle, etc. This demonstrates the broad, universal attributes of Xinxue theory.

Obviously, the connotations of Xinxue can be extended to the whole social philosophy system with extensive attributes.

In summary, “Reaching conscience” belongs to the “Morals” level within the Xinxue system, a practical path to actualize moral principles.

### 2.3. The “Doing” Layer—“Unity of Knowledge and Action”

The third core idea of the Xinxue system is “Unity of Knowledge and Action”, which forms the bottom level of Xinxue—the “Doing” layer.

“Unity of Knowledge and Action”: It means practicing along its determined direction under the promotion of its ideology, combining cognition and practice, and keeping one’s thoughts, words, and actions consistent after the formation of “Conscience”. Specifically, it means actively putting learning and thinking into practice, constantly reflecting and summarizing, gradually improving one’s cognitive level and practical ability, and truly forming one’s own code of conduct based on what one thinks, learns, and does.

In this context, “Knowledge” refers to more than mere intellectual awareness and encompasses depth of insight and genuine understanding.

Wang Yangming stated, “Knowledge is the beginning of action, and action is the completion of knowledge. Knowledge is the intent of action, and action is the practice of knowledge.” His philosophy integrates action within knowledge—there is knowing embedded in action—such that knowledge and action are unified. This underscores their inseparability: true knowledge emerges through action, and meaningful action is directed by knowledge (Wang, 2018).

In ancient China, an old lady had two sons: the elder was a weaver, and the

younger sold umbrellas. She worried about them constantly. When it rained, she fretted because her elder son—his woven cloth couldn't dry in the rain. When the skies cleared, she worried that her younger son would buy umbrellas on a sunny day. Trapped in this cycle of anxiety, the old lady wore a perpetually worried face, rarely knew joy, and eventually fell ill and grew gaunt.

Later, a wise master advised her, "Why not flip your perspective? When it rains, rejoice for your younger son—he can sell umbrellas! When the sun shines, celebrate for your elder son—he can dry his clothes!"

The old lady found this wisdom sound. From then on, she embraced each day with happiness, and her health naturally restored itself.

The same thing, when he learned of the negative outcome, his psychological activity changed from being ordinary to worrying or anxious; Behavior may also change from playing all day long to living in seclusion, etc. The results may also change, from a sunny and cheerful state to a lethargic and pathological state, and vice versa. Obviously, "Knowledge" is the starting point of "Action" and also determines the results that "Action" leads to. The only difference in the connotation of "Knowledge" lies in the different "Knowledge" in the mind, which also determines different "Action". That is to say, what you know, you will do, become one. The amount you know determines how much you can do. The variability in outcomes lies in the different "Knowledge" held within the mind, which in turn dictates the nature of one's "Action". In this framework, what one truly knows, one will inevitably do; the two become one. The depth of one's knowledge determines the extent and quality of one's actions.

In addition, "Knowledge" is not merely a superficial awareness; It encompasses breadth and depth of insight, genuine understanding, and specialized expertise. Everyone's cognition is at different levels, such as elementary school level, junior high school level, high school level, university level, and expert level, which will determine their different behaviors and the subsequent outcomes when dealing with others. Everything arises from knowledge and doing, and its degree of doing is also limited to the scope of its cognition, which is difficult to surpass. That is, the amount of "Knowledge" and "Action" cannot be exceeded. Only when cognition is elevated to a higher level, his or her behavior will also be elevated to a higher level, which requires returning to the cycle of "Reaching conscience", and "Reaching" again.

Wang Yangming once said, "It is easy to defeat the bandits in the mountains, but difficult to defeat the bandits in the mind." Evil thoughts arise when one harbors a "bandit" in the mind; Overcoming them requires a compassionate mind to attain the ultimate state of goodness. External enemies are easier to vanquish than internal ones. The true adversary is not others, but our own mind (Wang, 2018).

The ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi (c. 6th century BC), the founder of Taoism and author of the "Tao Te Ching", stated: "He who knows others is wise; He who knows himself is enlightened." (Lao, 2006)

Similarly, the foundational Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 BC) champi-

oned the maxim “Know thyself” an aphorism famously inscribed upon the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

“Unity of Knowledge and Action” is the “Doing” layer in the Xinxue system, which naturally produces results according to going with the flow.

### 3. The Application of Xinxue in Sociology

The Xinxue system is a hierarchical structure that progresses from high to low, illustrating the logical relationship between “Tao”, “Morals”, and “Doing”.

In sociology, “Tao” and “Morals” can be understood as human thoughts because they are from the mind, and all activities are of thoughts in the mind, and the result of “Doing” must be an artificial product, including artificial materials and spiritual wealth.

It can be simplified for the process as follows:

***Thoughts* → *Doing* → *Results***

**Artificial products: the results generated through human social activities.**

For example, artificial materials and spiritual wealth.

**Artificial materials: the material results generated through human social activities.**

For example, land, tools, assets, products, money, and health can be understood as forms of material wealth. Its characteristic is tangible and formed by the transformation and retransformation of natural materials.

**Spiritual Wealth: the spiritual results generated through human social activities.**

For example, happiness, status, knowledge, faith, enjoyment, and satisfaction. At the same time, this concept can also be interpreted as a humanistic spirit, which is characterized by intangibility and is the spiritual results generated by human inner activities.

In ancient China, people needed to make a living through hunting, so tools became very important. Based on her knowledge and experience, the ancestor Ji selected suitable materials such as wooden sticks and stones, and processed them through cutting, slicing, tying, and grinding techniques to create a sharp hunting tool—the spear. Throughout this process, these elements will be involved: Ji first has the idea of making the tool, then determines the shape or model of the tool in her brain (equivalent to concepts such as drawings or samples mentioned in modern society), selects materials (wooden sticks, stones, ropes, etc.) through her eyes, and then processes them with her hands, feet, and eyes based on her knowledge and experience to complete the hunting tool—a long spear with attributes such as size, appearance, sharpness, and weight. From this, it can be seen that the activities of all human organs (hands, feet, eyes, etc.) are completed under the command of the brain, such as sharpening, grinding, puncturing, and examining, and the source of the brain’s command comes from this Ji’s thought and cognition. So, whether this tool exists or not determines whether Ji wants to do it or not. If you want it, there is; If you don’t want it, there is nothing. Obviously, Ji’s thought first

determines the existence or nonexistence of the tool, the state of material existence or nonexistence.

Additionally, the quality of this tool—such as weight, reliability, sharpness, and usability—depends on the user’s experience and cognitive skills. These qualities are stored in their brains as industry knowledge and become part of their ideology. For example, three people—Ji, Yao, and Jiang—simultaneously worked on long spears, and as a result, Ji’s spear exhibited superior quality indicators in all areas, making it suitable for tiger hunting. Yao’s spear had average quality indicators and could hunt wolves; Jiang’s spear had poor quality indicators and was only able to hunt sheep. Therefore, Ji can be considered a senior technician in the manufacturing and handling industry, Yao a mid-level technician, and Jiang a junior technician. The outcomes of the same task performed by different individuals can vary widely—from high to low, and good to bad—due to their differing levels of industry knowledge.

Due to individual differences in thought, the methods used to implement behavior can vary, leading to different results. In other words, human thought determines the perceived attributes of an object, such as its size, value, color, and function. The decision to create an object is itself a product of thought. The quality of the resulting product reflects the level of thought behind its creation. When different people create the same type of product, the attributes of their creations, such as quality, will also differ. These products, or artificial materials, can all become sources of wealth, and it is evident that their origin lies in human thought, including ideas, cognition, thinking, and knowledge. Thus, the conclusion is that human thought determines the nature of artificial materials.

For example, Bill Gates may have a wealth of over 100 billion US dollars now, 5 billion US dollars 20 years ago, and only 500 million US dollars 30 years ago. One day in 1976, while pondering how to start a business in an underground garage, his material wealth was zero, but he came up with an entrepreneurial idea. As time passed and his career expanded, it continued to develop and succeed, accumulating material wealth from \$ 0 to \$ 100 billion. Obviously, the idea was the source and starting point of wealth at that time, and it played a decisive role in determining the amount of wealth that followed. Because without this idea, there would be no wealth in the future; If this idea is unreasonable, the wealth behind it will be reduced; If this idea is wrong, then the subsequent wealth may not only be non-existent but also potentially negative. From this, it can be seen that the “Thoughts” are a key element in determining the number of Gates’ artificial products.

Among them, “Thoughts” includes conscience, experience, goodwill, selfish desires, and evil thoughts, and is the cause; “Doing” is the process of transforming “Thoughts” into concrete human activities, which are carried out by various organs of the human body. Of course, it is a process of integrating knowledge and action under the command of the mind. “Results” refers to a result that includes artificial products.

Obviously, all the “Results” deduced by a social entity are determined by its previous “Thoughts”, which include “Tao” and “Morals”.

So, the essence of the Xinxue is consistent with sociology.

#### 4. Practice in Xinxue

Wang Yangming fully demonstrated the system concept of “Tao → Morals → Doing” through his actual governance and military campaigns.

In the Gannan region in China, there are high mountains and dense forests where banditry was rampant, robbing families and houses, with tens of thousands of people. They routinely attacked cities and occupied land, killing officials and civilians. Because the bandits were all locals, they were numerous in number. The imperial court had deployed a large army several times to attack, but it had always been unable to be eliminated, and the recruitment was uneasy, leaving the authorities helpless and gradually becoming a hidden danger to the Ming government.

Wang Yangming accepted his commission in the face of danger and arrived in Gannan with an empty title, under the condition of no soldiers or generals. He quickly found out the eyeliner planted by the bandits, and successfully subdued them, and then implemented the protection law, cutting off the breeding ground for bandits. Subsequently, he recruited and trained a new military force to suppress bandits and formed a new army with their own disciples and students. At the time of the battle, Wang Yangming used various tactics to make the bandits suffer unbearably, making them afraid to attack or retreat. In the end, they lost their will to fight and returned to their fields to resume civilian life.

The remaining bandit dens used the method of literary attack, writing letters to persuade the surrender. The letter states: “If there is still a way to survive in this world, who is willing to become bandits and leave a bad reputation for future generations? Also, when you decided to become bandits, you dared to seek death for living people. If you could turn evil into good, then the dead would have a way to live, and you wouldn’t dare to do so. If you could do the same as you did when you were bandits, desperately break free from the bandits’ den, how could the government insist on killing you? If we could easily kill you, the underworld in the underworld, we will suffer retribution, and disasters will affect future generations. Why do we have to do this?” “If there were still a way to survive in this world, who would willingly become a bandit and leave a shameful reputation for future generations? When you chose this path, you dared to seek life through the risk of death. If you could now turn from evil toward good, those who are “dead” to society would find a way to live. If you could apply the same desperation you used as bandits to break free from your dens, how could the government insist on your execution? If we were to kill you needlessly, we would suffer retribution in the afterlife, and disaster would befall our own future generations. Why should we be forced to such an end?”

For a few years, Wang Yangming, relying solely on his weak military strength, was assessed as a bandit who had been in trouble for decades and returned to the

local area in peace. In only a few years, despite relying on limited military resources, Wang Yangming successfully pacified groups of bandits that had plagued the region for decades. Through his leadership, peace was restored to the local area.

In addition, he became a saint renowned for embodying commitment, contribution, and moral cultivation—achieved through educating others, suppressing bandits, delivering lectures, and quelling rebellions. Morals through education, banditry suppression, lectures, and suppressing the rebellion. He fulfilled the mission of Zhang Zai (a philosopher, educator, and one of the founders of Neo Confucianism in the Northern Song Dynasty): “To establish the mind for Heaven and Earth, to establish the mission for the people, to inherit the unique teachings from the sages, and to create peace for all generations.” (Zhang, 2012)

Centuries after its emergence, Xinxue profoundly influenced the social and cultural development of Japan and the Korean Peninsula, while also indirectly contributing to Japan’s Meiji Restoration.

In 1510, An Kuei-wu, a Japanese Zen monk, traveled to China at the age of 83 on the order of Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa to meet Wang Yangming. Before An’s departure, Wang wrote a preface to bid him farewell. Upon returning to Japan, however, An Kuei-wu—then nearly 87—did not immediately spread Wang’s philosophy.

Nakae Tōju (1608-1648), known as the “Founder of Japanese Yangming studies.” delved into Wang Yangming’s philosophy of mind and turned toward the doctrines of “Mind is principle.” and “Unity of Knowledge and Doing.” He established the Tōju Shoin (Nakae Academy) in Ōmi, localized Yangming studies, and emphasized moral practice and inner consciousness. A famous line from his work states, “My body comes from the void, and my mind is like Heaven.” It embodies the spirit of integrating mind cultivation with the Way of Heaven (Inoue, 1974).

Saigō Takamori (1828-1877), one of the three great heroes of the Meiji Restoration, integrated the spirit of Yangming, Buddhism, and Bushido into his concept of “Revering heaven and loving others” emphasizing the guidance of actions by inner conscience. The practical power of “Unity of Knowledge and Action” was reflected in his role in the anti-shogunate movement and subsequent reforms (Takase, 2001).

Ōshio Heihachirō (1793-1837), an official and scholar at the Osaka cho Administration, wrote “Notes on the Washhole Cave”. Integrating the spirit of the Yangming School and Bushido, advocating the application of “Reaching conscience” in social reform, he is regarded as an “Action-oriented Yangming scholar”. Symbolizing the practical spirit of resisting injustice with “Conscience”, its behavior and spirit have influenced later reformers. In his work Notes on the Washhole Cave, he advocated for the application of “Knowledge” to social reform. Regarded as an “Action-oriented” scholar, he symbolized the practical spirit of resisting injustice through one’s “Conscience” profoundly influencing later reformers (Unno, 2003).

Yoshida Shōin (1830-1859), a key ideologue of the Meiji Restoration and

founder of the Shōin Village School (Matsushita Village School), was deeply influenced by Satō Ichii. He advocated “Unity of Knowledge and Action” and upheld the principle that “The way of a gentleman lies in his deeds” merging Yang-ming’s thought with the ideology of “Revering the emperor and expelling the barbarians.” Among his disciples were reformist leaders such as Takasugi Shinsaku and Itō Hirobumi. A famous saying of his reads, “To know but not act is not truly to know.” (Noguchi, 2000)

It can be said that the starting point of modern Japan’s development was the study of Xinxue.

The famous Chinese scholar Liang Qichao noted: “The Meiji Restoration in Japan was rooted in the study of Xinxue.”

Beyond Japan, the philosophy also deeply influenced major historical figures such as the Ming Dynasty Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng, the Korean Confucian scholar Yi I (Yulgok), the Japanese Admiral Togo Heihachiro, the modern entrepreneur Kazuo Inamori, and the Qing Dynasty statesman Zeng Guofan (Wang, 2011).

## 5. Conclusion

The Xinxue system, structured in three tiers—“Mind is Principle.” (Tao), “Reaching Conscience” (Morals), and “Unity of Knowledge and Action” (Doing)—embodies both universal applicability and logical coherence. Organized as “Tao No. 1, Morals No. 2, Doing No. 3” of a complete philosophical system.

Its universality and logicity apply to all social activities and are characterized by systematic attributes.

The significance of Xinxue stems from its core tenet: the mind is the determinant of “artificial products”—encompassing both material and spiritual wealth. From this perspective, the theory occupies a pinnacle in philosophical thought, solidifying Wang Yangming’s legacy as a Sage for the Ages.

In short, the three tiers form a cohesive whole: “Mind is Principle.” (Tao) is the source of all potentialities; “Reaching Conscience” (Morals) is the strategy for actualizing that potential; “Unity of Knowledge and Action” (Doing) is the process of translating potential into action to produce results.

This echoes the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu’s observation: “The Tao produces one, one produces two, two produces three, and three produces all things.” Here, “all things” refers to artificial products—including material artifacts and spiritual wealth—all of which originate from the Tao, i.e., “Mind Is Principle.”

Wang Yangming’s final words on his deathbed serve as the ultimate testament to his philosophy: “My mind is full of light; What more is there to say?” (Wang, 2011)

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