

Belongingness to the world and engagement: A Song dynasty dialogue on the *Zhongyong* between Zhu Xi (*Zhongyong zhangju*) and Chan Master Qisong (*Zhongyong jie*)

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This paper examines one of the main themes of the classic *Zhongyong*, i.e., “cultivating the way (*xiu dao* 修道).” In Zhu Xi’s view, this consists in bringing together the inner and outer realms, in a process of interaction between the heart-mind and the external things. Ordinarily, this interference generates a state of biased subjectivity, in which one is guided by one’s personal feelings, develops and generates biased responses when interacting with things. Cultivating the way is intended to empower one to block the way to this process, and recover a condition marked by belongingness to the world and engagement, in which one’s feelings and actions dovetail events and things. The latter is the neutral state *zhong*, which, in Zhu Xi’s view, is neither lack of interest nor intervention, because both are subordinated to the biased subjectivity of the moral agent, but a deep, equanimous and objective attention to each thing. Belongingness to the world and engagement is thus a state of impersonality in the sense of objectivity, in which the moral agent is able to follow, engage with, or respond to things and events namely without personal interest distorting them.

The study focuses on Zhu Xi’s interpretation of this training as “widening one’s heart-mind,” thus erasing the difference (the dividing line) between inside (self) and outside (other sentient beings and external reality), and becoming “one body” with the things of reality. It also builds a comparison between Zhu Xi’s and Qisong’s perceptions on belongingness to the world and engagement, within the framework of the *Zhongyong*, with the intent to highlight the complementarity between Neo-Confucian School of Principle and Chan Buddhism on this subject.