

Reinvestigation of Dragon Field Philosophical Enlightenment of Wang Yangming

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Abstract: Initially, the history fact of Master Wang Yangming sought for philosophy enlightenment in Dragon Field when he lived in Guiyang of Guizhou Province was clear. However, it is now mounted with controversy following numerous interpretations and revisions by scholars over a very long time. We hope to re-investigate this history event, to accurately and clearly represent historical fact for better understanding of Wang Yangming and his developed philosophy of Yao Jiang.

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1 Introduction

Three years of living in Dragon Field of Master Wang Yangming is a fascinating historical timeline for Wang Yangming's philosophy researchers and enthusiasts worldwide. Regrettably, historical details of Dragon Field Philosophy Enlightenment had been interpreted and revised by generation and generation of scholars for over hundreds of years. The details had been becoming unclear time after time and too many controversies were contrived. In particular, some historical facts had been subjectively over-interpreted by scholars, and actual historical facts were precipitated with overwhelming personal subjective views. At such, real history is unconsciously concealed.

It is necessary for us to patiently and carefully re-

organize this historical event and to remove the weeds concealing it, to allow the historical event of Wang Yangming in Dragon Field to re-emerge with glory created by the sage in Guizhou Plateau.

In our study of history of Wang Yangming's philosophy enlightenment in Dragon Field, basic reference sources were mainly poems written by Wang Yangming himself, texts and historical materials about Wang Yangming. We also carried out rigorous field trip to Xiuwen area, to attempt restoring historical truths and exploring life and historical track of sagehood achievement of the sage.

2 Wang Yangming's plight when he first arrived in Dragon Field

There are many different statements with regard to timepoint of Master Wang Yangming's first arrival in Guizhou. Of which, the most common statement by academists is that Wang Yangming arrived in Dragon Field in the spring of 1508, i.e. the 3rd year of Zhengde Era. It was year of Dragon. Wang Yangming was 37 years old. Wang Yangming and his servants built a thatched house by themselves because dormitories in station of Dragon Field were no longer inhabitable. They lived a life closely similar to primitive people.

Wang Yangming's poem of "No Residence Place Upon Arrival in Dragon Field and End Up Live in Thatched House"^[1] recorded the situations that they built the thatched house. They cut woods to make beams and piled soil into stairblocks to block water flow. Then, thatch was used to cover the roof. They picked shrubs from the surroundings, briefly trimmed away thorns and used them as fences. This thatched house was not even as high as Wang Yangming's shoulders. It only allowed

them to rest on ground.

Winds came into from all directions of the thatched house. Sound of water flowing rapidly through sand rock could be heard at night. When the surrounding forest trekked into darkness of night, they slept well inside this borderless mountain range.

Everything in there was so primitive for Wang Yangming as if he had returned to the primitive period of Taikoo.

Miao and *yi* people in Dragon Field were very friendly and hospitable. The people gathered around Wang Yangming and his servants from the surrounding villages. They naively talked to Wang Yangming in *miao* and *yi* languages. They even brought over wine and rice. Everyone used clay wine set to drink wine, ate using clay bowls and got drunk together.

After Wang Yangming arrived in Dragon Field, living conditions were very difficult as the self-built thatched house was not suitable for living and they were lack of food source. At that time, tools and material conditions they owned only allowed them to build a thatched house. To improve their living conditions, they must learn to rely on the existing conditions nearby them and find for survival supplies in mountain.

Wang Yangming and his servants came from thousands of miles away. Along the journey, they endured cold fog, climbed cliffs and walked through summits of mountains. They endured hunger and thirst for many days. Their bodies were extremely exhausted. In traditional Chinese medicine, this is an illness due to deficiency of internal vital and overwork. At the same time, their feelings of depression and sorrow along the journey would also cause stagnation of liver *qi*. In addition, primitive forests in Guizhou often had subtropical infectious agent that could invade flesh and cause depletion of *yang* in body which could lead to severe *yin* illness. This is a typical illness due to depletion of *yang*, which is also a deadly disease. Therefore, by the time when servants of Wang Yangming fell into sickness upon arrival at Dragon Field station, it was a critical moment concerning life or death.

Wang Yangming had to collect firewood and collect water at mountain, decocted herbal medicine and cook porridge all by himself. It was not possible that they had beds in the thatched house, there was probably merely thatch covering the floor. Sick person would be directly affected by the dampness from ground when lying and resting on floor. Wang Yangming clearly knew that it

was absolutely dreadful to let the three servants who suffered from internal vital deficiency and depletion of *yang* to endure such dampness any longer. This would endanger their lives at all times. Therefore, searching for a suitable place to live and moving away from the thatched house had become the matter of top priority. Wang Yangming had to search for suitable living place in the vicinity of station of Dragon Field every day, so that they could move from the thatched house as soon as possible.

Of course, station of Dragon Field was not an entirely painful experience for Wang Yangming. Beauty of the plateau made him very delighted. During the spring in Dragon Field, vegetation on mountain was very luxuriant. There were verdant primitive forests throughout the land. Hundreds of flowers were blooming on grassland. In mountains, there were water streams flowing through sandstones and sound of birds humming amongst bushes in forest could be heard. Anyone immersed in these would be affected by the vitality of nature.

Wang Yangming was deeply attracted by the beauty of this place. He admired beauty of the mountains while searching for residence place in mountains. Not long after, he discovered “East Cave” in Eastern Summit. He subsequently changed the name of the cave to “Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave”. He made a poem “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave”^[2] to record his exploration process during that time.

The poem of “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave” was not included in “Wang Wencheng Public Book” edited by Qian Dehong. The “Complete Work of Wang Yangming” edited by Wu Guang et al. also did not record it. The poem was only recorded in the second volume of “Anthology of Living in Remote Place”.

“Block Printed Edition of the ‘Anthology of Living in Remote Place’ by Qiu Yanghao in the Third Year of Jiajing Era”^[3] was narrated and published by the magistrate of Yuyao county, Qiu Yanghao in April of the third year of Jiajing Era. That year, Master Wang Yangming happened to serve funeral etiquette in his hometown Yuyao. He conducted lectures and taught students there. The second volume of “Block Printed Edition of the ‘Anthology of Living in Remote Place’ by Qiu Yanghao in the Third Year of Jiajing Era” is the work written by Wang Yangming himself during his relegation in Guizhou. The first volume of appendix

records the prison poems he wrote in prison of capital and relegation poems he wrote during his relegation in Guizhou. The first volume is preface written by Qiu Yanghao and the final volume is postscript co-written by Han Dong and Xu Shan who were disciples of Wang Yangming.

The “Block Printed Edition of the ‘Anthology of Living in Remote Place’ by Qiu Yanghao in the Third Year of Jiaping Era” is one of the “Two types of Precious Manuscripts by Master Yangming”. “Two types of Precious Manuscripts by Master Yangming” includes two anthologies: “Block Printed Edition of the ‘Anthology of Living in Remote Place’ by Qiu Yanghao in the Third Year of Jiaping Era” and “Block Printed Biography by Nan Daji”.

The poem of “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave” is as follows:

Chain of mountains meet Dragon Field,
in the forms of halberd and wild bird.
Observatory views nearby,
but nothing in the far.

Dwell deep into forest and seek for water stream,
it means up to hill and down to damp soil.

Beautiful bushes and stones at East Summit,
travel alone till dusk of the day.

A cave on the cliff is covered with rattans,
slippery mosses and thorny shrubs shield the path.

Moonlight shines through opening of the cave,
in breeze a guest has entered.

Darkness of cave is in sight,
rapid flowing water stream is heard.

I am in love with this serene night,
immerse in sceneries and purpose of tour is forgotten.
Preying birds with shiny wings are wandering in the air,
insects in bushes are weeping.

Thought to swim in Yishui river with companions just
like Ceng Dian did,

I am just sighing just as Confucius did in Chendi.
Wander around and return for rest,
so that frost and dew will not reach out of me.

This poem recorded the process of Wang Yangming’s discovery of Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. When Wang Yangming stood on mountain and looked into far distance, he noticed that mountains around Dragon Field were guarding the flat and wide land of Dragon Field. It seemed like the land was waiting to welcome a sage. Shapes of the mountains were very strange, some of them looked like halberd and some looked like wild bird.

Some observatory scenes could be seen scattering in mountain jungles nearby, whereas places in far distance couldn’t be seen clearly.

Sometimes, Wang Yangming searched along small rivers in Dragon Field or mountain springs of mountain range in Dragon Field. Sometimes he explored in jungles. Sometimes he climbed up mountains. Sometimes he crossed wetlands at bottom of mountains. At such, he traveled through all mountains and water streams nearby Dragon Field within a short time.

Forests and mountain stones in East Summit of Dragon Field were very gorgeous. He was drawn by these beautiful sceneries and reached there alone by himself. He was immersed in the sceneries and forgot to return.

At dusk, he accidentally discovered a large stone cave at the mountainside of East Summit. Entrance of the cave was full of rattans. There was no proper path for access to this stone cave. There were thorns and shrubs along the way. Mosses on mountain rocks were very slippery.

He pushed away the old rattans surrounding the cave entrance and entered the cave. He looked up and checked for conditions in the cave, the cave was very dark. He then looked down to search for hidden spring in the cave, there was water stream heard and it sounded to be flowing very rapidly. Moonlight of the clear night sky shone on distant mountains, it was soothing. Sceneries inside and outside the cave were very picturesque.

Preying birds in the cave were alerted by Wang Yangming, a foreigner who intruded into the cave. They flew up and down in the cave, their feathers were glowing with glorious shine under the brilliance of moonlight. Insects in bushes inside and outside of the cave were mourning in a gloomy tone, as if they were weeping softly.

During day time, Wang Yangming had imagined that he could be wearing beautiful spring clothes and swimming in Yishui River accompanied by five or six youths, and six or seven teenagers in that spring season, just as student of Confucius, Ceng Dian did. To enjoy breeze on Stage of Wuyi and to sing while heading back home. However, situation of Wang Yangming at that time was similar to food supply shortage situation of Confucius in Chendi. The biggest problem in Dragon Field was food insufficiency and there was no place to buy things from even with money. The master and servants were worried and depressed due to inadequate

clothing and food supply. The servants fell into sickness in the thatched house and they were on the verge of death. Their conditions were miserable. They kept complaining that the place was horrible. In addition, there were often snakes, toads, centipedes, scorpions and other poisonous insects nearby the thatched house which terrified them.

“Travel alone till dusk of the day” shows that Wang Yangming was traveling alone. His servants couldn’t follow Wang Yanming because they were already fell into illness. “I am sighing just as Confucius did when he was in Chendi” shows that the situation of Wang Yangming at the time was similar to situation of Confucius in Chendi, where Confucius faced shortage of food supply. This should be the earliest time when Wang Yangming and his servants arrived in Dragon Field, which was also the most painful period for them. Master and servants should be dependent on each other when first arrived in a completely unfamiliar place. However, the servants fell into sickness and were on the verge of death. They were in unbearable pain. Even worst, they were short of food supply. They had been initially living lavish Ming Dynasty’s aristocratic lifestyle, but later fell into plight and lived like primitive people. They were on the brink of collapse and even complained openly.

Today, East Summit is renamed to Longgang Mountain. It is located in the northeast of Dragon Field. Local *miao* and *yi* people once called this cave “East Cave”. This cave can accommodate a lot of people but its location is quite remote. It appears to be very desolate and lonely quiet. It was just an deserted cave when Wang Yangming discovered it.

After Wang Yangming discovered the East Cave, he and his servants moved from thatched house to the cave together with all their luggages. They cleaned the cave together and planned for different functional areas. They carefully planned where to sleep, where to cook and where to dine. This cave had met their living needs. They were considered had found home in Dragon Field.

Wang Yangming also wrote a set of poems “Move to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave”^[4] to record the situations where he moved into the cave. Because “The Yearbook” did not record “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave”, this poem was mistakenly recorded as “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave”. The original poem of “Move to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave” is as follows:

(One)

Old cave hides amongst deserted mountains,
is God reserving it for me?
Push away weeds and walk along stone path,
how pleasant it is to move to this quiet cave.

Build a stove by rocks,
set up beds by rocks too.

Block out small mouse holes,
sprinkle water to clean stone frame.

Just let those books be stacked randomly,
and wipe those eating and drinking utensils well.

What is wrong with living in simple and ugly place?
Indifferent of fame is what I am pursuing and yearning
for.

Miss hometown very much,
yet I have no regrets about today.

(Two)

Young servants discuss among themselves,
it is not bad to live in this cave.

No manpower is needed,
God has made it ready.

There is clear spring water flowing right by stove,
fog in forest forms a green curtain.

Play and entertain every day,
even master himself is pleased.

Although have no glory surrounded by honor guards,
I stay far from those dullness and noise of world.
Only worry about condensed frost and snow in winter,
weather will be cold and our clothings will be thin.

(Three)

I smiled politely after hearing your words,
it is well-thought but myself is abashed.

Ancient people live in cave,
and drink sediment water in field.

Not much sun vital in secluded cave,
it is warmer only in winter.

Leopard hides to protect luster of its fur,
dragon hibernates to last a long life.

Can’t we ever feel warm,
if there is no house to live in and no cloth to wear?
Yan Hui lives in pleasure even he forages for food and
water,

this is the pursuit of my heart.

This poem depicts the basic conditions of Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. Wang Yangming and his servants liked this cave very much. Ground of the cave was surprisingly flat. Space inside the cave was very wide. It was fairly suitable for living and simply unable to be compared with the days when they lived like jungle

people in thatched house.

“Miss hometown very much, yet I have no regrets about today.”, “Leopard hides to protect luster of its fur, dragon hibernates to last a long life.” and “Yan Hui lives in pleasure even he forages for food and water, this is the pursuit of my heart”. From these verses, we can know that Wang Yangming had not yet achieved philosophical enlightenment at the time when the poem was written. Because he used metaphors of hiding leopard and hibernating dragon to describe his own situations. He also used the quote “In remote place, do what is in accordance to remote place. In adversity, do what is in accordance with adversity.” by late wiseman to comfort himself. He even used philosophy of bowl and ladle to encourage himself to follow right path. He was still far from reaching the state of benevolence of his Dragon Field Philosophical Enlightenment in which he was unified with God and everything in universe. At the time, his focus was still on his own situations. In the word of Buddhism, he had not broken through the phase of “self-attachment”. He still relied on using historical events of Huang Emperor, Tang Yan, Confucius, Yan Yuan and Zeng Zi to relief himself in coping with life difficulties at the moment. He reminded himself not to be pessimistic and disappointed and not to blame others. Since he was already at remote place and in the plight of shortage, he should move on life with the existing actual conditions to keep himself pleasant and calmful.

Some scholars believe that Wang Yangming first moved from thatched house to Shelter of Learning I-Ching and then further moved from Shelter of Learning I-Ching to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. This is not exactly in line with the situations at the time, because Dragon Field was really full of danger for foreign people from Central Mainland.

The “Journey to Burial” by Wang Yangming^[5] recorded that a civil servant from capital, his son and his servant died in just two days of arrival in Dragon Field.

In the book “Reply to Deputy Mao”^[6], Wang Yangming wrote: “Here, I live together with infectious bugs, poisonous insects and snakes. Ghosts, spirits and monsters are wandering around. One can die three times a day.” when he described the living environment of Dragon Field. Meaning of the latter verse states that there were three times of deadly danger in one day.

Servants of Wang Yangming fell into illness and collapsed in thatched house, they were struggling

between death and life. It was impossible for Wang Yangming to leave behind the servants and head to Shelter of Learning I-Ching to seek for enlightenment alone. That was complete disregard of other’s death! It was also impossible for Wang Yangming to bring the servants to Shelter of Learning I-Ching. It was an underground cave with very high humidity. It was totally dark, fingers couldn’t be seen even during day time. It was better to remain living in thatched house where there was at least sunlight. It was impossible for sick people who fell into deadly yin disease to live in such a place like Shelter of Learning I-Ching. If they did, they would be dead very soon.

Wang Yangming analyzed cause of death of the three civil people from capital in “Journey to Burial”. “You rushed against fog, climbed up cliffs, walked through summits of mountains, endured hunger and thirst, overwork and tired. Your flesh and bones were exhausted and sad emotion attacked you, how could you be not die?” Meanwhile, what was the difference between the situation of Wang Yangming’s servants and the three dead people described in the “Journey to Burial” at that time? So, when the servants were asked by Wang Yangming to bury the three dead civil people, they said: “Hey! You and me will be the same too!” The servants then shed tears.

Wang Yangming let his servants to move from thatched house to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. He then played them *yue* songs and told them jokes. This was equivalent to pulling them back from the brink of death!

Why did Wang Yangming play *yue* songs and tell jokes to his young servants? That was to resolve the depression within their hearts. This shows that Wang Yangming was very clear about their situations at the time. The first challenge he must break through was - survival.

When Wang Yangming first arrived in Dragon Field, his main goal was to strive for survival for the four person of master and servants. Another goal was to allow himself to achieve philosophical enlightenment amongst an extremely difficult environment. At that time, he did not have much energy to teach or to do other things. It was also impossible for him to have excessive energy to infer and deduce I-Ching.

3 What method did Wang Yangming use to achieve philosophical enlightenment?

In the poem of “Delegated, Shortage of Food, Learn

from Farmers, Plant Crops in Southern Mountain”^[7], Wang Yangming recorded their food supply shortage condition when they lived in Dragon Field. Servants kept complaining about the terrible poor place, they complained that it was so difficult to survive in such a remote place. Wang Yangming comforted the young servants and decided to plant crops in Southern Mountain.

Wang Yangming also wrote a poem “Observe Crops”^[8] and expressed that they spent a lot of time to solve their life problems during the period. They found that paddy fields at low terrains of Dragon Field were suitable for growing rice and soil lands at high terrains were suitable for planting grains. Lands with loose soil were suitable for growing vegetables, while lands with sufficient soil water content were suitable for growing sweet potatoes.

With the effort of Master Wang Yangming and his servants, they lived in Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave in Longgang Mountain. They cultivated crops by themselves. Their lives had gradually been settled down.

Even after their lives had been settled down, Wang Yangming was not relaxed, he needed to overcome his strong homesickness. Soon after they arrived in Dragon Field, Wang Yangming received a home letter from Yue Town. This triggered his strong emotion for his family. He missed his elderly grandmother and his father who had retired and returned to hometown. He wrote the poem “Plucking Ferns”^[9] to express his feeling of missing his family. He went to bottom of Western Mountain alone to pluck ferns. He kept climbing and reached the top of mountain. He looked far into the direction of his hometown. He saw clouds floating over mountain chain. Tears were streaming through his face silently. His heart felt like broken. Liu Jin’s power was still strong and solid at the time. If he caused any trouble more, that would only make his family in hometown be more worried.

During this period, Wang Yangming wrote a lot of poems expressing his homesickness feeling. For example, the poem “Splendor”^[10] is full of deep homesickness. The poem depicts the landscape of Dragon Field at that time. Bamboo forests along water streams were verdant and lush, pine forests on rocky hills were dense and green. Thick and straight pine tree trunks had just went through a winter season of snow and ice, and it seemed that flowing breeze had left traces between dense pine leaves. Pine trunk and pine leaves hoped to rely and support each other forever and

ever. Even shadow of white clouds casted at mountain bottom overlapped with shadow of valley casted at mountain bottom.

In the poem, Wang Yangming emotionally expressed: “Why do bamboos from the same shoot are divided and planted separately at two different places? This languishes them because they miss each other and can only sigh the sorrow of separation lonely. One in the west and one in the east. World is this unpredictable, just like horseweed on both sides of road. Now, they just adapt to years of spring and autumn separately. Although grow at different places, they have not really been separated yet!”

Wang Yangming’s poem “Southern Ocean”^[11] expressed his near heartbreaking homesickness. This poem used many metaphors that are not difficult to understand. Wang Yangming wrote that, “There is an auspicious bird at Southern Sea and a fairy bird at Eastern Sea. They drift and play in garden, and inhabit together in precious forest. However, good times always come to an end. Sudden change of weather and they are scattered apart in the midst of windy and stormy rain. They tweet desperately in the air. They can not find each other. Auspicious bird is trapped by net, fairy bird is injured and falls into deserted wild mountain. Why is this so unfortunate? The bird lost its partner, it wails while searching for its partner. But, its wings are injured and it can not fly again. World is so vast and there are so many birds in the forest! Hundreds of birds are flying around happily. And who will care about the heartbreaking bird at the moment?”

When Wang Yangming meditated in Yangming’s Cave at Kuaiji Mountain, he gave up half way through and descended the mountain because he missed his elderly grandmother and father. Likewise, he was also entangled with emotion at that time. He missed his beloved family very much. This was an insurmountable huge challenge for Wang Yangming. He was really upset but he couldn’t way tell others.

One day, he washed his hat tassel by river. His heart chilled when he saw white hair on his head. He wrote the poem “Stream Water” and “Southern Ocean” at about the same time. The former poem expresses very disappointed emotion. At that time, Wang Yangming even felt intense loneliness when he saw stone in stream, he felt that stream water was full of loneliness. He sat on stone, stroked the clear stream water and washed his hat tassel. Suddenly, he saw white hair on his head from the reflection of clear stream water. He

couldn't help but sighed the years that had passed. Life is short, merely one hundred of years. And he didn't know when would be the time that his great philosophy cultivation would be completed.

Wang Yangming was not a mystic. He and his disciples never mystify his Dragon Field Philosophical Enlightenment. Therefore, it is not appropriate to explicate Dragon Field Philosophical Enlightenment using mysticism. In other words, we can fully understand Dragon Field Philosophical Enlightenment based on common knowledge and common sense.

Is an army general with regular victory be good at war because he is brave? It's certainly not easy matter to win a war battle. The army general has to be good at managing soldiers, good at training soldiers, good at arranging troop formation and planning strategy, well versed in military methods and so on. Similarly, would Wang Yangming's philosophical enlightenment in Dragon Field be due to difficult condition of Dragon Field? Would it be because indigenous people of Dragon Field were simple and naive? Would it be because Dragon Field had certain specific external condition? Of course it was not. This was because Wang Yangming was good at breaking through the thieves in his own heart! During the 13th year of Zhengde Era in Ming Dynasty, Wang Yangming had written a letter "Letter to Yang Shide and Xue Shangqian" to his disciple Xue Kan before he propelled and attacked riot thief resort at Li Tou. "It is easy to break through thieves on mountain, but it is hard to break through thieves in heart." This letter was recorded in the "Complete Work of Wang Yangming", and this sentence has become a well-known quote.

The prerequisite for Wang Yangming to accomplish his own break-through of thieves in heart was to settle down in Dragon Field. He had to solve the problem of food supply shortage, solve the problem of living environment, solve the problem of treating illness of his young servants, and solve the problem of building up rapport with local officers in Guizhou. Only by then, he would not be entangled with petty matters of life and be able to sit on seat stone and seek for enlightenment with peace of mind without disruption.

Wang Yangming once gave his disciples a general explanation about breaking through the thieves in heart: "At the beginning of learning, mind diverges from heart, mind is not at peace, thoughts are going on, mostly are about human desire, so meditation must be learnt to calm mind. Later of time, mind is slightly

determined, mind is suspended and waits quietly, just like ashes of dead wood. At such, self-reflection and rectification must be learnt."^[12]

In this aspect, the statement of Wang Yangming is in great accordance with Classics of Confucianism. The opening chapter of "Great Learning" states: "The way of great learning, is to spark with bright demeanour that everyone possesses, to promote it so that others can accomplish their own, and to strive for retaining of perfection. Being able to remain at perfection, determination can be firm. With determination, heart can be calmed down. With calmness, peace can be acquired. With peace, careful thinking can be achieved. With careful thinking, the best can be obtained."^[13]

The process of Wang Yangming's philosophical enlightenment in Dragon Field is in fact the process of his own break-through of thieves in his heart, that he achieved calmness of heart. Confucianism states that only when body and mind are calmed down, awe-inspiring vital can be cultivated. Mencius said: "I am good at cultivating my awe-inspiring vital."^[14] Mencius also said: "This kind of vital is very vast and extremely powerful. If you cultivate it with open mind without harming it, it can fill up heaven and earth. Nevertheless, this kind of vital must be processed with righteousness and morality, else it will be destroyed. It can only be cultivated by someone with absolute righteousness. It can not be cultivated with occasional acts of righteousness. Once there is guilt in heart, it can also be destroyed. That's why I say Gaozi does not understand about righteousness, he sees righteousness as an external matter. We must constantly cultivate righteousness, and not to forget it and not to force it to grow."^[15]

Generations and generations of Confucian sages had been paying great emphasis on how to achieve mind calmness in people. In response to Zhang Zai, "Book of Behaviour Calmness" by Cheng Hao also discussed about methods to achieve inner peace and calmness. Cheng Hao: "External matter triggers inner mind, so why don't just clear the boundary between inner and external? When there is no boundary between inner and external, all worries will dismiss. When there is no worry, calmness can be acquired. When calmness is acquired, mind is clear. When mind is clear, is there any external matter that can affect you? Happiness of a sage, is happiness of external objects. Anger of a sage, is anger of external objects. Happiness and anger of a sage are not connected to his own heart but reflected in

external objects.”^[16]

At the same time, there is a common knowledge that we should understand. That is, meditation method advocated by Confucianism is very easy. It is nothing more than to find a stone, find a seat, or find a place not to be disturbed. Confucians often say: “Not to talk about eccentrics, violences, chaos and spirits.” They do not like to talk about Gods and ghosts, nor they never like to sophisticate way of enlightenment. The “Explication of Dao” by Confucian Ming Shanzi particularly mentioned about Confucian meditation method: “No single arrangement is needed for meditation. Just be usual and reach silence eventually.”^[17]

Enlightenment method of Wang Yangming recorded in the “The Yearbook” is very simple. He simply sat in silence and sought for calmness. Original text is as follows: “I live in pure silence for days and nights to seek for calmness. After sometime, I feel nothing in my chest.”^[18]

4 Time of Wang Yangming’s philosophical enlightenment and stone seat of Wang Yangming’s enlightenment

In academic sector, the more mainstream statement is that Wang Yangming arrived in Dragon Field in the spring of 3rd of Zhengde Era, and he left Guizhou at the year end of 5th year of Zhengde Era or at the beginning of 6th year of Zhengde Era. Many scholars believe that Wang Yangming lived in Guizhou for about 22 months.

“Pavilion of Helou” records: “Shouren was found guilty and relegated to detain in Dragon Field. Dragon Field is a remote place outside of ancient state of Cai. People thought that I must be disliking this place and can not live here because I am from capital city. However, I have been living here for *xun* months, and I am safe and happy. People in this remote area are rude and often swearing of others, but they are sincere and naive.”^[19]

There are two meanings for “*xun* months”. One of which means a month full, and the other means ten months. Based on all Wang Yangming’s timepoints in Guizhou, it is more reasonable that “*xun* months” means one full month here.

First, when a person from capital city or other developed area first arrived in Guizhou, local people would usually right away ask him “are you living alright in this rural area?”. It was unlikely that people only asked him “are you alright living here?” when he had lived in Guizhou for ten months. How can someone

be not alright when he had lived for almost a year? Therefore, when Wang Yangming said that “I have been living here for *xun* months, and I am safe and happy”, this should be referring to that Wang Yangming had been living in Dragon Field for a month.

In “Pavilion of Helou”, Wang Yangming recorded: “When I first arrived, there was no place to live. I lived between thorny shrubs, it was very gloomy. I moved to East Summit and stayed in cave, it was dark and damp.”^[20] East Summit is actually Longgang Mountain. Hereby, Wang Yangming indicated that they moved directly from thatched house to Yangming Cave. It was very unlikely for them to live in the thatched house for ten months. That was terrible. They definitely couldn’t endure that based on their physical conditions at that time. This report by Wang Yangming here was consistent with his records in “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave” and “Move to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave”.

In the 6th year of Longqing Era in Ming Dynasty, “The Yearbook” in “Wang Wencheng Public Book” published by Xie Tingjie also recorded: “Work on stone seat and I talk to myself ‘I am not killed, I must live well now on!’. I live in pure silence for days and nights to seek for calmness. After sometime, I feel nothing in my chest. All servants are ill, I cut woods, collect water and cook porridge for feeding them. Fear that they are depressed, I sing poetry. When they are sad, I sing yue songs. With laughter, they can forget about their illnesses and we can go through all tribulations at this remote place. With the thought of ‘if a real sage is here, what would he do?’, I suddenly understand the essence of principle of matters in the mid of the night. As if there is someone talk to me. I couldn’t help but jump and cheer with excitement, servants by my side are shocked.”^[21]

Here, “The Yearbook” recorded that Wang Yangming started to meditate on stone seat since his servants fell into illness. The “work on” in “work on stone seat” means “handling”. For example, work on politics, it means handling political affairs and political matters. Work on stone seat, means some handlings were done on the stone seat.

This means that Wang Yangming only lived in thatched house for a short period of time, and he moved to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave in the first month after arrived in Dragon Field station. Later, *miao* and *yi* tribe people in Dragon Field began to build Pavilion of Helou for Master Wang Yangming and his servants.

In “New Construction in Longgang”, Wang Yangming said that Pavilion of Helou was built in less than a month. That is to say, living condition of Master Wang Yangming and his servants completely improved after around two months they arrived in Dragon Field.^[22]

Based on the above, we can generally infer that Wang Yangming’s Dragon Field Philosophical Enlightenment should take place in the first month after he moved into Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. That is, before construction of Longgang Academy, i.e. construction of Hall of Yinbin, Pavilion of Helou, Hut of Junzi and Shelter of Learning I-Ching. During that time, Wang Yangming and his young servants had gotten rid of food supply shortage and bad living environment. Their lives in Dragon Field were considered settled down. During that time, Wang Yangming took care of the ill servants, meanwhile he was determined to seek for enlightenment. During free time, he would meditate by sitting on a huge stone seat near Longgang Mountain.

Wisdom of a person who achieves enlightenment is vast. It was impossible that he failed to take care of his own life and those around him. In particular, Confucianism emphasizes self-cultivation, building of home, ruling country, and creating peace for world. With wisdom and action capability of Wang Yangming, it was absolutely possible for him to settle down his life in Dragon Field within about one or two months.

Another huge controversy about Wang Yangming’s Dragon Field Enlightenment is about stone seat. “The Yearbook” clearly recorded that Wang Yangming was sitting on a huge stone seat when he achieved enlightenment. Square, round or flat large stones are generally called “stone seat”, whether it is in Guizhou dialect or Yuyao dialect. Wang Yangming himself did not have any article that directly records the process of his own enlightenment. He probably only told his disciples verbally. Based on dialects, “stone seat” will be the most possible word. Those terms like “stone bar” and “stone casket” are not in line with the relevant dialect speaking habits.

Some scholars self-modified “stone seat” in “The Yearbook” into “stone bar”, and even inferred the “stone bar” as “Shelter of learning I-Ching”. Not only that these statements are in discrepancy with the record in “The Yearbook”, but are also in discrepancy with stories in Dragon Field recorded by Wang Yangming himself.

In “Pavilion of Helou”, Wang Yangming recorded that they moved directly from thatched house to Yangming’s Cave. “The Yearbook” recorded that servants of Wang

Yangming were sick when Wang Yangming was sitting on “stone seat”. Every day, Wang Yangming had to collect firewood from mountain, collect water by himself, set up fire and cook porridge, read poetry to young servants, play *yue* songs of his hometown, and told the servants jokes to comfort their pain and homesickness. “Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave” recorded that Wang Yangming found Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave by himself alone. At that time, they faced shortage of food supply and the servants were complaining and blaming. This shows that Wang Yangming’s servants could not take care of Wang Yangming during the earliest stage when Wang Yangming and his servants arrived in Dragon Field. Instead, Wang Yangming took care of them. This indicated that life radius of Wang Yangming could only be revolving around Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. Very likely, he wouldn’t waste his time on meaningless round-trips. Shelter of Learning I-Ching was too far away from Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. Even if he had already found Shelter of Learning I-Ching in this period of time, Wang Yangming would not have enough time and energy to use the place.

There is another detail can be an evident proof. In his life, Wang Yangming wrote many poems and articles. When mentioning about cave, Wang Yangming would always clearly write as stone cave, mountain cave, celestial cave and etc. He never refer a cave as “stone bar”. Wang Yangming clearly called the Shelter of Learning I-Ching as a “shelter” in the article “Documentation of Shelter of Learning I-Ching”. He wrote: “I named the shelter as ‘Learning I-Ching’”. In addition, “bar” in Chinese also refers to city or outskirts of city, not does it refer to cave.

Some scholars believe that Wang Yiming achieved philosophical enlightenment in Shelter of Learning I-Ching because the place looked like an outer box of coffin. There are severe misunderstandings on this. Will anyone deliberately lie in coffin to seek for philosophical enlightenment since ancient times? Yes, there is. But, most of them are whom cultivate black magic and evil spirit. They need to absorb vital of extreme *yin*, so they particularly like eerie thing or tenebrous place such as cemetery, skeleton of dead body and coffin.

However, it is well recognized that the philosophical concept of Wang Yangming is path of sun, path to the highest vitality, path of brightness, path of auspiciousness, path of wisdom, and not evil path.

A sage with bright inner virtue like Wang Yangming would not like eerie places. He would not like cemetery and coffin. He liked goodness and brightness. What he pursued was divinity with the greatest righteous knowledge.

Perhaps some people may have doubt and ask, isn't it the legendary Quanzhen Taoist Wang Chongyang also practiced his philosophy in "tomb of living people"?

I paid a special investigation trip to "tomb of living people" of Wang Chongyang. Taoist guardians there told me that the place is in fact not even a graveyard, but a large and complex underground cave. It can be considered a huge underground city. So far, they dare not to go down and carry out investigation, because they do not know where the huge underground cave will lead them to.

It carries a very in-depth meaning that Wang Chongyang referred the underground cave where he practiced his own philosophical enlightenment as "tomb of living people". His implied meaning is completely different from what we can understand. All sages who achieve enlightenment will regard human beings in the world as living dead people. Living dead people refers to all unenlightened living beings.

Even Jesus Christ once said something similar. When a disciple asked Jesus that when should he bury his father, Jesus said to him: "Just follow me. Let the dead bury the dead!"^[23]

Some may still claim that some people will refer cave as "stone bar", but this argument is not logically sensible. Everyone has their own habit. Writing habit of others is totally irrelevant with study of Wang Yangming. What we need to study are writing characteristics and writing habits of Wang Yangming.

The article of "Wang Wencheng Public Book" edited by Qian Dehong comprises of two articles "Found East Cave and Changed Name to Yangming's Small Celestial Cave" and "Shelter of Learning I-Ching". That is to say, he clearly knew about Yangming's Small Celestial and Shelter of Learning I-Ching. In the context of these, he still recorded "stone seat" in "The Yearbook". This shows that the stone seat was neither Yangming's Small Celestial Cave nor Shelter of Learning I-Ching, but somewhere else.

The "stone seat" is very likely to be a boulderstone underneath the current Hut of Junzi. However, there is indeed no circumstantial evidence to prove this conjecture. Further search of more evidences is necessary. The original site of Hut of Junzi was not

at where it is today. It was relocated and built by later generations. In the opening chapter of "Hut of Junzi" : "Yangming, since you already built Pavilion of Helou, just go to the front of pavilion, erect pillars to build a hut, surround the hut with bamboos, and name it 'Junzi' (gentleman)."^[24] Here, "front" means the site where the pavilion facing to. The current location of Pavilion of Junzi does not match with this.

Throughout his life, Wang Yangming loved Yangming's Celestial Cave very much. There were three places where he personally named as Yangming's Cave. The first was Yangming's Celestial Cave in his hometown; the second was Yangming's Small Celestial Cave in Dragon Field in Guizhou; and another one was Yangming's Cave in Jade Mountain in County of Longnan County, Province of Jiangxi, Jiangxi.

It is necessary to clarify a concept, i.e. cave and celestial cave are not the same thing at all. Wang Yangming liked celestial cave but not mountain cave.

The concept of "celestial cave" originates from ancient Taoism in China. The concept of "celestial cave" is equivalent to *dojo* (meditation hall) in Buddhism. They all refer to holy place hosted by God or Buddha. In Taoism, Celestial Cave and Blessed Land hold the same concept, but they are at different levels. Whether it is the ten big celestial cave, the thirty-six small celestial cave or the seventy-two blessed land, they all refer to holy Taoist places in the world of human beings.

It carries holy sarced significance for Wang Yangming to name the cave in Longgang Mountain as "small celestial cave". He conferred the most sacred title to the cave in Longgang Mountain. Meanwhile, the stone cave at the bottom of mountain was merely called "shelter", indicating that it was just a place of expediency.

Many places can be called "shelter", such as shelter of pig, shelter of dog, and shelter of chicken. However, these places can not be addressed as "celestial cave". The name of "Shelter of Learning I-Ching" was not original nor it was named by others, it was named by Wang Yangming himself. A sage will never call the place of his own philosophical enlightenment as "shelter" while regarding an unimportant cave as "small celestial cave".

Moreover, Wang Yangming never mention that he achieved philosophical enlightenment in any mountain shelter.

Confucianism upholds "name" significantly. Modern scholars even refer Confucianism as "Religion of

Name”. This means that the worship of Confucianism on “name” has reached the level of religion. For example, houses in China have different names due to different social status of occupant. Place where emperors live in is called palace, place where nobleman and royal families live in is called official residence. Place where ordinary people live is merely called house. Worse house is simply called a shed.

Similarly, Taoism stringently divides Taoist Mountains into different grade and confers them different name. The highest level of Taoist mountain is called Celestial Cave, the next level is called Small Celestial Cave, the following level is called Blessed Land, the subsequent level is called Underwater World, the next level is called Cottage of Serenity, and the subsequent level is called Harness and so on.

Likewise, Wang Yangming used various nouns and titles very meticulously in his writing. Yangming Cave on the hillside of Wanwei Mountain in Yangming’s hometown originally existed. It was originally one of the famous Taoist celestial caves. For the cave in Longgang Mountain in Dragon Field in Guizhou, it was named by Wang Yangming himself. Wang Yangming humbly named it “small celestial cave”. For the Yangming’s Cave in Longnan in Jiangxi, Wang Yangming adored it very much. But he just passed by it in a hurry and there was nothing special about it, so he called it “cave”. A cave is a very ordinary title and it does not refer to a holy place.

Wang Yangming named the cave in Longgang Mountain as Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave. This carried a very profound meaning. Wang Yangming lived in seclusion in Yangming’s Celestial Cave located in Wanwei Mountain of Kuaiji Mountain area in his hometown Shaoxing of Shanyin to practice Tao and Zen. The cave in Longgang Mountain in Dragon Field was renamed to Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave by himself. First of all, he did so to express his feeling of homesickness. On the other hand, this shows that he regarded the place as a holy place for philosophical enlightenment to remind himself to continue seeking for enlightenment with firm belief in order to complete his unfinished pursue in Yangming’s Celestial Cave in his hometown and be thoroughly enlightened about heaven and earth.

The real personal name of Wang Yangming is Wang Shouren. Master Yangming is actually his courtesy name which is derived from Yangming’s Celestial Cave. Both the Yangming’s Celestial Cave in his hometown

and Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave in Dragon Field in Guizhou were the *dojo* used by him to seek for enlightenment. “Yangming, you will enter divinity in Yangming’s Celestial Cave”. In fact, this was indeed the truth. Wang Yangming had already reached the state of mind calmness and vaticination and was able to connect with God of Sun anytime when he was in Yangming’s Celestial Cave in his hometown. In Yangming’s Small Celestial Cave in Dragon Field of Guizhou, he completed his ultimate philosophical enlightenment.

Definition of “enlightenment” means awakening of one’s own heart and development of insight into nature of matter. The word “enlightenment” is made up of “heart” and “me”, which means to awaken the true selfness and be bright.

Wang Yangming achieved enlightenment in a midnight. He was half-sleeping. It seemed that someone was talking to him. He then suddenly achieved enlightenment. He jumped and cheered. The three young servants were very surprised to hear him cheering and shouting in his sleep. “The Yearbook” recorded that: “I suddenly understand the essence of principle of matters in the mid of the night. As if there is someone talk to me. I could’t help but jump and cheer with excitement, servants by my side are shocked. Servants by my side are shocked. Only then I understand the morality of sages. If the inner heart embraces self-supporting morality, there is no need to seek from others. I was wrong seeking for sagehood based on external objects and matters. I refer to statement in Five Classics to seek for proof, but it is not compatible at all. Thus, I write “Recollection of Five Classics”. As time passes, tribe people and their relatives come to visit. I live in patches of dampness. Woods are cut to build Longgang Academy and Hall of Yinbin, Pavilion of Helou, Hut of Junzi, and Shelter of Learning I-Ching.”^{25]}

Wang Yangming “jumped and cheered”. This shows that this cave had wider space for activities so as he could cheer and jump inside. At the same time, there must be plenty of space for him and his servants to sleep together. “It seems like someone is talking to me” means that there was other unknown people talked to him in the cave. All these indicated that space of the cave was quite wide.

“Patches” refers to water patches, “patches of dampness” means it was wet because of water patches. This shows that Wang Yangming had been getting along with the local miao and yi people for a long time. When

they saw that the cave Wang Yangming lived in had water patches and was too humid, they took turn to help him to build Longgang Academy and Hall of Yinbin, Pavilion of Helou, Hut of Junzi and Shelter of Learning I-Ching. This recorded that the miao and yi people not only built the Hall of Yinbin, Pavilion of Helou and Hut of Junzi, they also renovated Shelter of Learning I-Ching and improved the facilities inside. Thus, in “Shelter of Learning I-Ching”, Wang Yangming wrote that when he reached emotional pleasure when inferring and deducing I-Ching, he would breath relief of sigh for a few times.

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