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Autor: Gallinaro, Ludovica
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Ludovica Gallinaro*

The Formation of Zhou Dunyi's Role in the *Daoxue*: A Critical Analysis of Biographical Sources

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Abstract: This study presents a critical investigation on the biographical sources of the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073), recognized as a pioneer of the tradition of Learning of the Way (*Daoxue*), also translated as Neo-Confucianism. Through a relevant translation and analysis of two textual typologies, namely the biographical chronology (*nianpu*) and the official biography (*liezhuan*) of Zhou Dunyi, according to their different uses of historiographical materials and epistemological assumptions, we aim to provide a portrayal of Zhou Dunyi in relation to the context of *Daoxue*. Zhou Dunyi's individuality is established by an integration of two conceptual frameworks: one focuses on the historical representation, the other stresses the value of his Neo-Confucian personality. In both cases, there is a dynamics of legitimization of Zhou Dunyi's role in order to create a Neo-Confucian philosophical and moral paradigm: this paper is an attempt to explain this process of formation and legitimization.

Keywords: Zhou Dunyi, biography, Neo-Confucianism, *Daoxue*, Zhu Xi

1 Introduction

As mentioned by Wm. Theodore De Bary, the term “Neo-Confucianism” refers to a distinctive epistemological background, because it is “a term coined by early Western observers who noticed new developments in Sung Confucian thought which were not simply reducible to their classical antecedents.”¹ Moreover, the term is legitimate and useful because it can “point to basic factors of both continuity and change in the tradition. Rather than specifying any one aspect of the new development as crucial, it allows for the possibility that several new

1 De Bary 1981: xiv.

*Corresponding author: Ludovica Gallinaro, Department of Philosophy, School of Humanities, Tsinghua University, Xinzhai Building, Zhishan Road, Haidian District 100084, Beijing (PRC).
E-mail: ludovica.gallinaro@gmail.com

trends combined to generate this most creative movement in the later history of Chinese thought.”² But, at the same time, the epistemological nature of the term “Neo-Confucianism” reveals a kind of ambivalence. When we explain a contextual issue included in the sphere of Neo-Confucianism, the intellectual legitimacy of this term is not questioned, due to the fact that it is a concept coined in a foreign and contemporary context; it does not translate to a single corresponding Chinese word. So, this term has a lexical legitimacy but it does not include a critical examination of its connection with different historical trends and notions. In this sense, Hoyt Tillman stresses the elusiveness of term “Neo-Confucianism” and advocates a deeper awareness of the historical context and its heterogeneous trends, focusing on individual thinkers and different intellectual groups and favoring a synchronic approach to the intellectual realities of “Neo-Confucianism.”³

For example, a crucial issue is the relation between the terms “*Daoxue* 道學” (Learning of the Way) and “Neo-Confucianism.” This connection involves the development of the intellectual and philosophical context of the *Daoxue* starting from the Song dynasty⁴ and the univocal definition of Neo-Confucianism. As a premise of this study, we underline the need for reassessment of the use of these terms, as well as a critical review of the epistemological process of legitimization of these notions.

Neo-Confucianism refers to a heterogeneous philosophical category and includes the different intellectual trends that established the *Daoxue*, and, most importantly, the Song 宋 dynasty thinker (960–1279) Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073). Zhou Dunyi has been recognized as one of the most representative thinkers of Neo-Confucianism, so it goes without saying that it is essential to examine the process of legitimization of Zhou Dunyi’s role in the Neo-Confucian context. It is evident that the development of the intellectual and textual framework of *Daoxue* is a crucial starting point to review Zhou Dunyi’s role related to this context.

Within the sphere of Chinese philosophy, Zhou Dunyi plays a significant but, at the same time, marginal role.⁵ Scholars recognize Zhou Dunyi as one of the founders of the Neo-Confucian movement and his contribution consists of two short works, *Tongshu* 通書 (“Penetrating the Book of Changes”) and *Taijitu shuo* 太極圖說 (“Discussion of the Supreme Polarity Diagram”): these works play a fundamental role in the metaphysical framework of Neo-Confucian thought developed by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200).

² De Bary 1981: xiv.

³ Tillman 1992a: 455–474; 1994: 135–142.

⁴ Cf. Chen 2009: 5–11.

⁵ Chen 2007: 13.

Our proposal focuses on biographical compilation as a process of description and legitimization Zhou Dunyi's intellectual figure. As pointed out, the Neo-Confucian designation can relate to the intellectual and political context of the *Daoxue*, where different dynamics contribute to outline and portray Zhou Dunyi's personality. In the first part of this study, we introduce and explain the connection between historiography and biography, proposing a critical methodology to analyze the semantic patterns that create the intelligibility of a biographical text. Then, we give a short presentation of the biographical texts on Zhou Dunyi. The second and third parts provide a translation and an analysis of the relevant passages of the biographical texts, namely the biographical chronology and the official biography. In particular, through the investigation presented in the central part of this research, we would like to show how the lexical and conceptual patterns define the legitimacy and the intellectual value of Zhou Dunyi within the context of *Daoxue*. Lastly, in the fourth and final part, we discuss our conclusions.

2 Between historiography and biography: a methodology

In the tenth chapter of the third book of his most famous work, Michel de Montaigne writes:

The historians, however, are my true men; for they are pleasant and easy; where immediately man in general, the knowledge of whom I hunt after, appears more lively and entire than any where besides: the variety and truth of his internal qualities, in gross and piecemeal, the diversity of means by which he is united and knit, and the accidents that threaten him. [...] For I am equally curious to know the lives and fortunes of the great instructors of the world, as to know the diversities of their doctrines and opinions.⁶

As Montaigne points out, a full understanding of the value of a great man entails the study of his works and thought, but another crucial point is the analysis of his biographical experience, in order to obtain a complete overview of his nature. By integrating the rule of the historiographical reconstruction with the selection of historical contents, the historian works towards a homogeneous and balanced text, working actively on the “bare facts of history”. The aim of the historiographical compilation is a holistic reconstruction: a rewritten text that, through the criterion of plausibility and consistency in its content, shows a kind

⁶ De Montaigne 1842: 190.

of organic structure. In this sense, through the cohesion and the organic structure of a historiographical composition, the biographical element shows its essential role in the whole reconstruction. The educational value and the fundamental role of the historian, through the integration of the historiographical rewriting process and the use of biographical content, are crucial elements in the Chinese context.

In China, the first historiographical evidence is the chronological record of events: the term that defines the historian is *shi* 史, which initially indicates someone who has the task of historiographical compilation as an archivist.⁷ Precisely, his assignment was to report the words and events in order to keep the example of the past alive and useful for the present. The annalistic work of the historian is crucial because it reflects the need to record and categorize reality in order to put the human events in accordance with the order of the cosmos. In this sense, the value of historiography played a key role in the Confucian tradition, starting from the hermeneutical use of history in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (“Spring and Autumn Annals”)⁸ and *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (“Zuo’s Tradition”) to the importance of history in the *Lunyu* 論語 (“The Analects”).

The moral value of the interpretation of historical fact characterizes the Chinese hermeneutical tradition, and in particular, this point of view is emphasized in the work *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (“The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons”), one of the first examples of literary criticism dating back to the second half of the sixth century and written by Liu Xie 劉勰 (466?–539?).⁹ This work aims to explain the nature of literary production: the text (as object) is analyzed in its diversity: the intrinsic value of culture *wen* 文, namely the strength of the written sign related to the whole Chinese tradition, is expressed through an interconnected textual analysis that attempts to show the peculiarities of the literature in a broad sense. Specifically, the analytical and didactic trend is evident in the sixteenth chapter, entitled “*Shizhuan* 史傳” (“Historical Writings”). Here, the didactic function of history is directly connected to the metaphor of the mirror already presented in works such as *Shijing* 詩經 (“The Book of Odes”) and *Guoyu* 國語 (“Sayings of the States”),¹⁰ where the

7 Yü 2002: 158. Cf. Ng/Wang 2005: ch.1.

8 Wang 2000: 155–172. For a study on the intellectual context of the *Chunqiu* cf.: Pines 2002: ch.1. On the relations between the *Chunqiu* text and commentaries cf. Schaberg 2001: 1–21; 163–191.

9 For a study on the textual context of *Wenxin diaolong* cf. Cai 2001.

10 The use of the metaphor of a mirror is a *topos* of classical Chinese literature, as we can see from the ode 255 of the *Shijing* and the *Jiu Tang Shu* 舊唐書 (“The Old Book of Tang Dynasty”). Moreover, during the Song dynasty, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and Zhu Xi used this metaphor in their works, respectively *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (“General Mirror for the Aid of

understanding of the present historical dynamics implies the analysis of the facts of the past. The logic and consistency of the past become intelligible when we consider their functionality and usefulness for proper historical conduct in the present. The recording of historical events is based on a thorough study of the sources and clarifies how the rewriting of the past is useful for the interpretation of the present historical reality, thus stressing the value and the crucial role of the historian's work.

The connection between past and present is, hence, the object of historians' work: when historians look at and record the past, they must pay attention to the validity of the facts and their context. So, Liu Xie claims: "as a matter of fact, when in doubt, do not record, because it is essential to have reliable historical records. However, people in general love what is strange, and pay no attention either to facts or to what ought to be."¹¹ But, when historians have to focus on present events, they must choose a balanced point of view relevant to the historical reality and, at the same time, connected to the correctness of the criteria established by the Classics. The work of historians, therefore, is based on the proper use they make of the available historical material: through the balance between the correct selection of sources and stylistic rendering legitimized by references to the Classics, they can express the right paradigm of "making" history. Referring to these criteria of accuracy and plausibility, the works of historians displays their legitimacy, showing a distinctive method and a peculiar stylistic and literary structure. Moreover, the ability of the historian refers to a balanced analysis between respecting the truthfulness of the facts and a correspondence to a "historical" model: so, a historian's work requires an honest and balanced perspective, which aims to clarify the didactic feature of history according to the moral model of the Classics. The guiding principle, recalls Liu Xie, is to stick to a certain degree of accuracy and honesty; at the same time, the historian must refer to legitimate moral teachings, following the sages' example, thereby understanding the value of the tradition. The assumption is, therefore, a certain type of correctness, expressed in the chapter of *Wenxin diaolong* by the term *zheng* 正. In order to clarify our point of view, we analyze two textual passages where this term has a relevant meaning. In these passages, Liu Xie asserts that in order "to be able to give a rational account of a matter and

Government") and *Zizhi tongjian gangmu* 資治通鑑綱目 ("Summary of the Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid of Government"), where the historiographical record of events serves as a touchstone for correct political action. On this topic, cf. Murray 2007; Durrant 1995; Schirokauer 1993: 193–220.

11 *Wenxin diaolong* 16, Original in Liu 1983, trans. Shih 1983: 181.

keep rigidly to *what is right*, one has to have an unbiased mind”¹² and “if one follows his private prejudices and omits *what is right*, that is the graveyard of his writing [emphasis added].”¹³ Liu Xie emphasizes the honest attitude of the historian. Through his sincere and “unbiased” mind, he can see where the right principle is and understand its value in order to properly write about the historical reality. In addition, Liu Xie warns historians not to be misled by the instability of the emotions or personal opinions (*qing* 情), otherwise they will lose the guiding principle of correctness and this will adversely affect their work.

In both cases, the term *zheng* 正 does not indicate absolute objectivity, but refers instead to a “guiding principle”, such as correspondence to a valid norm; the correctness is derived from being in accordance with what is legitimate. The historical model of the Classics shows the right method of “making history”, and thus establishes the legitimacy of the principle that guides the work of the historian. Concerning the historian’s work, what is “correct” and “true” corresponds to the paradigm of rightness established by the Classics. According to Liu Xie, historians’ main duty is to highlight the didactic function of history, showing the historical accuracy of the facts: they have to evaluate the conformity to reality, and, at the same time, consider the rightness in relation to the historiographical paradigm of the *Chunqiu* and *Zuozhuan*.

A deeper analysis of historiography’s role and the use of historical sources is also the object of Liu Zhiji’s work *Shitong* 史通 (“Comprehensive Perspectives on Historiography”), compiled in 710 CE. The author Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) presents the first systematic study on “critical historiography” (*pipan shixue* 批判史學).¹⁴ Liu Zhiji criticizes the methods of the official collective historiography and denounces the restrictions imposed by the bureaucratic division of tasks. But, mostly, he complains about the lack of objectivity and the loss of clear editorial criteria in the historical work carried out by the historians directly appointed by the relevant bureau. These shortcomings show the historian’s poor quality, while, according to Liu Zhiji, the good historian must possess three basic requirements: *cai* 才 “talent”, *xue* 學 “knowledge” and *shi* 識 “insight.” These qualities can truly define a historian’s expertise and value. Moreover, good historians should report the facts paying attention to different types of historical sources, as well as the temporal and geographical particularities of the object they want to study. Historians’ methods should apply strict criteria of

12 析理居正，唯素心乎。Wenxin diaolong 16. Original in Liu 1983: 187, trans. Shih 1983: 182–183, slightly modified.

13 若任情失正，文其殆哉。Wenxin diaolong 16. Original in Liu 1983: 187, trans. Shih 1983: 182–183, slightly modified.

14 Cf. Ng/Wang 2005: 121–128; Pulleyblank 1961: 135–161; 1964: 143–164.

evaluation of the historical material, and it is necessary to write a text characterized by conciseness and clarity. Liu Zhiji then explores the connection between an objective historiographical record and the moral responsibility of the historian. If the didactic function of history is crucial, the historian must then examine through which methods and principles this function can be understood. In other words, he has to mediate between the principle of correctness connected to the paradigm of the Classics and the standard of objectivity and impartiality of facts transcribed in the sources. In this sense, the historian's main task is to establish the coherence and legitimacy of a historiographical rewriting by working on the historical material in order to correspond to a certain type of historiographical model. At the same time, the historian should respect the truthfulness of the historical reality and follow the sources. The didactic function of history and the civic and moral responsibility of a historian involve the promotion of a legitimate historiographical compilation that is as objective as possible: historians have "to write as it essentially was," creating an objective historiography, as claimed by Liu Zhiji, through the concept of *zhishu* 直書 (straight writing) and *shilu* 實錄 (veritable recording).¹⁵ Recalling the metaphor of the mirror and its impartial and crystalline nature, Liu Zhiji writes, "When a clear mirror reflects objects, beauty and ugliness are bound to be revealed. Should [the beauty] Mao Qiang have a blemish on her face, the reflection is not stopped."¹⁶

If we examine and compare the meaning of the term *zhi* (straight, direct) in this context with the meaning of *zheng* (correct, right) in our analysis of Liu Xie's contribution, then we can recognize a semantic connection useful to explain the historiographical value of the biographical sources in our study on Zhou Dunyi's historical role. While *zheng* indicates correctness and conformity to a model considered right and legitimate, *zhi* refers to a principle of objective accuracy. The focus is on the crucial and didactic role of the historiographical reconstruction, and these principles establish a paradigm: one in terms of correct correspondence and the other in terms of objectivity. They are valid and useful to understand historical reality through a different selection of materials and different text structures. These different approaches are useful to evaluate the historiographical rewriting process. In this sense, it is important to analyze the problematic issues related to the textual context and the historical reality described and interpreted in it. In particular, we should focus on the fundamental role of historical biography in the context of Chinese historiography,

¹⁵ Ng/Wang 2005: 124.

¹⁶ *Shitong*, transl. De Bary/Bloom 2013: 654.

investigating the close connection between biographical material and the methods of historiographical compilation.

This analysis clarifies not only the role and the historical value of important personalities in the Chinese context, but also explains the inner semantic dynamics through which the historical importance of a character is established. This framework is then useful for our attempt to analyze the figure of the Neo-Confucian thinker Zhou Dunyi. By studying the biographical materials at our disposal, we will display the textual, lexical, and the cultural dynamics that have made Zhou Dunyi a prominent thinker in the Neo-Confucian movement.

2.1 The biographical texts on Zhou Dunyi

The origin of the biographical compilation is connected to the will to preserve the words, teachings, and values of the individual personality which were already the subject of various types of funeral elegies.¹⁷ The criterion we highlighted for the historiographical work is also valid in the biographical compilation: it embodies a kind of didactic purpose. In this sense, historians must therefore clarify the criteria and methods of their work, such as the guidelines for defining a biography worthy of being reported, the elements and anecdotes to be selected, how to set the structure of the biographical rewriting and, indirectly, how to investigate the relationship between the official biographical composition and unofficial sources. In the official biography (or, literally, “arranged biography” *liezhuan* 列傳), the legitimacy of the biographical text is based on the adherence to the abovementioned principle of correctness (*zheng*) related to the value of the historical fact and the semantic connection with the Classics. Thus, the biography’s contents are described through a textual structure linked to a reference pattern that sets their legitimacy. Starting from the official histories during the Tang dynasty, and especially with the example of the *Songshi* 宋史 (“Official History of the Song Dynasty”), the inclusion or exclusion of a particular exemplary biography is based primarily on the possession of legitimate moral requirements, in accordance with a particular ethical model, embodied by a social group or socio-political class. In this sense, the connection between the example of individual morality and the values of the group or category is clear and direct. But, at the same time, the study of an official biography emphasizes another issue, or the need to evaluate alternative biographical texts. A significant example

¹⁷ Cf. Gardner 1970; Han 1955; Pulleyblank 1964: 143–164; Moloughney 1992: 1–30; Twitchett 1961: 96–114.

is provided by so-called *nianpu* 年譜 (biographical chronology). During the first Song period, the *nianpu* became a historiographical category (known as “annalistic biography”) thanks to the new interest developed by the members of the cultural and social reality of that time.¹⁸ The compilation of the facts through a chronological structure is relevant in order to obtain an overall understanding of exemplary personalities.

From a hermeneutic point of view, the biographical chronology gives expression to the criterion of accuracy (*zhi*) which plays a crucial role in this kind of textual compilation in order to present a precise and rigorous historiographical report. If compared with the *liezhuan* textual structure, in the *nianpu* we can see that the principle of objective accuracy in a certain way provides further references: the frame of biographical chronology is more schematic than the text selection of the exemplary biography, so it can be a different source of historical information. Like this the biographical chronology assumes the role of a legitimate source useful to compare with the official biography.

Therefore, our analysis will focus on these biographical accounts of Neo-Confucian thinker Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073). We will consider two types of text that describe, in different ways, the context and the formation of Neo-Confucian thought. More precisely, the notion of “Neo-Confucian” in our analysis refers to the political and intellectual notion of *Daoxue* (“Learning of the Way”), in which different dynamics combine to form a complex portrait of the philosopher. We will examine the relevant sections of the biographical chronology compiled around 1220, and the section of an official biography dedicated to Zhou Dunyi as a pioneer of *Daoxue* in the *Songshi*, dating between 1343 and 1345. These texts, through different semantic patterns, reflect the intellectual and political importance of *Daoxue*, later codified as Neo-Confucianism. Zhou Dunyi's main role has been established within this epistemological sphere. Through a dual interpretation of Zhou Dunyi's unique portrait, we will show how Zhou Dunyi is described through extensive historical reconstruction in a biographical chronology text aimed at legitimizing his moral value; a little over a century later, in the *Songshi*, Zhou Dunyi is fully recognized as the pioneer of a specific movement of thought, and the biography uses historical evidence in a purely functional way in order to express an “ideal” example.

By comparing the use of anecdotes reported in the two texts, the exemplary biography and biographical chronology, it is possible to provide a more comprehensive and complete portrait of Zhou Dunyi. Our analysis clarifies and connects two different paradigms. The first is the intelligibility of Zhou Dunyi

18 Wu 1994: 129–143. Cang/Chen 2001: 57–64. Chang 2012: 51–55.

as a historical figure. The other is the functionality and the value of his Neo-Confucian personality.

Analyzing the textual context and the semantic structure of the biographical compilation, we will highlight a comparison between the historical experience and the intellectual role of Zhou Dunyi. We can understand the meaning of the historical figure and the value of Zhou Dunyi's personality considering the biographical chronology as an objective and schematic compilation of the events of his life; then, we can evaluate the accurate and functional selection of the biographical content reported in the section of *Songshi*. In this sense, the biographical reconstruction of Zhou Dunyi here proposed offers a study of the different sources to clarify the functionality of his intellectual figure.

3 Zhou Dunyi's biographical chronology: life in detail

Many biographical dictionaries provide precise accounts on the historical figure of Zhou Dunyi,¹⁹ and studies in the field of sinology, both in Western and Asiatic languages, offer collective surveys on Zhou Dunyi's life²⁰ in relation to his philosophical contribution.²¹ In most of these works, the biographical information is only an informative support to the main subject of the research on Zhou Dunyi's philosophical works. Here, on the contrary, the primary focus is Zhou Dunyi's individuality in relation to his intellectual and historical role, analyzing the textual structure of the biographical rewriting process. Through a preliminary presentation of the biographical chronology and the comparison with other biographical works, we clarify the process of legitimization developed from Zhou Dunyi's historical figure to his value as a Neo-Confucian personality, evaluating the formation of Zhou Dunyi's role as a pioneer of Neo-Confucian thought. The objective information provided by the biographical chronology is significant because it gives us a comprehensive description of the life of Zhou Dunyi. In addition, it is useful because we can examine the lexical and anecdotal selection that contributes to the creation of the value of the philosopher.

As stated above, the life of Zhou Dunyi has been the subject of several compilations in the form of the biographical chronology, included both in

¹⁹ Aoyama 1968: 72; Chang 1988 [1977]: 8234; Wu 1995: 103; Wang 1979: 54.

²⁰ Zenker 1932: 434; Feng 1953: 434–435; Chan 1963: 460–463; Huang 1999: 19–20; Forke 1964: 45–56; Franke 1976: 277–281.

²¹ De Gall 1894: 12; Bruce 1974 (1923): 17–22; Eichhorn 1936: 17–36; Chow 1954: 5–28.

anthologies of writings by Zhou Dunyi, and in the compilation of local gazettes (*fangzhi* 方志)²² related to Zhou Dunyi's native province.

Among the most important biographical chronologies, there is the *Song Zhou Lianxi xiansheng nianpu* 宋周濂溪先生年譜 (“Biographical chronology of the Song Dynasty Master Zhou Lianxi”),²³ included in the *Zhou Lianxi ji* 周濂溪集 (“Collected writings of Zhou Lianxi”) in the anthology *Zheng yi tang quan shu* 正誼堂全書 (“Library of Zhengyi Hall”) edited by Zhang Boxing 張伯行 (1652–1725) for the 1708 edition of *Zhou Lianxi ji* 周濂溪集.²⁴ In addition, there is the *Zhouzi nianpu* 周子年譜 (“Biographical chronology of Master Zhou”), compiled by Dong Rong 董榕 (1711–1760) in the 1756 edition of *Zhouzi quanshu* 周子全書 (“Complete works of Master Zhou”). For a textual comparison between different sources and editions, the contribution of Xu Yufeng 許毓峯 is also useful.²⁵ Regarding the content, in the National Library of China there are two versions of a biographical chronology included in two anthologies of Zhou Dunyi's works, one of which dates back to the period after 1255, while the other is dated between 1270 and 1275.²⁶ Our study will examine one of the first systematic and synthetic compilations completed in 1221²⁷ by Du Zheng 度正 (1166–1235). For the translation here proposed, we will refer to the biographical chronology compiled by Du Zheng published in the most recent edition of the *Zhou Dunyi ji* 周敦頤集 (“Collected works of Zhou Dunyi”), based on an edition compiled by He Ruilin 賀瑞麟 (1824–1893).

The text written by Du Zheng can be divided into a chronological and structured sequence, covering the entire period of the life of Zhou Dunyi. In his compilation, Du Zheng uses many different sources: he often quotes these materials alongside the text and all this information plays a key role in the biographical framework. For example, Du Zheng reports poems and short prose texts, like letters (*shu* 書), essays (*wen* 文), or commemorative inscriptions (*timing* 題名), and two important epitaphs written by Pan Xinsi 潘興嗣 (1023–1100) and Pu Zongmeng 蒲宗孟 (1022–1088) for Zhou Dunyi. The final section of the compilation also contains general considerations on the contribution and the value of Zhou Dunyi's works, brief remarks on his heirs' achievements in the field of official career related to government appointments, and a brief description of

²² Wang 2011: 121–124.

²³ Zhou Dunyi named his study at his Mount Lu residence after the stream Lianxi (Stream of Waterfalls), hence came his courtesy name Lianxi and his posthumous honorific title Master Lianxi. Cf. Hon 2010: 1.

²⁴ Zhang 1978: 109–142.

²⁵ Cf. Xu 1986.

²⁶ Xie 1992: 154; Wang 2012: 19; Su 2010: 62.

²⁷ Li/Lu 1996: 969.

the transmission of his teachings. Lastly, Du Zheng explains why he wants to write a biographical chronology of Zhou Dunyi: the initial admiration of the philosopher's thought was possible thanks to the role and support carried out by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085). Du Zheng started his research first in the local archives, but he was unable to examine the documents because they were destroyed by floods. Later, he obtained and analyzed different works based on the materials of people who had contacts with Zhou Dunyi during his life, like Li Dalin 李大臨 (1010–1086), Lü Dajun 呂大鈞, Fu Qi 傅耆 and the above-mentioned Pu Zongmeng. In Chengdu, Du Zheng met Yang Qixian 楊齊賢 (1181–1269), who wrote an outline of Zhou Dunyi's biographical chronology. Du Zheng, however, claimed that Yang's version was inaccurate and marred by errors, so he decided to write a more accurate version. According to Du Zheng, the degree of accuracy and attention to details was crucial. In fact, he recalled a conversation with a student named Fan: Du Zheng, having some vision problems and unable to write down the content of the biography himself, was dictating the text to the student. The student expressed his doubts about the usefulness of such a precise anecdotal recording, provoking the reaction of Du Zheng, who answered:

[...] Every little thing that concerns the wise man, like the polished rice, the meat cut into thin pieces, the remains of filleted fish, the amaranth and purple decorations of the clothes, the robes red or purple, as well as the garment of fine or coarse linen in the hottest time of the year: all these things have been fully described in the *Xiangdang* section of *Lunyu*, and are still studied today. If we read it today, then we feel like we would live thousand years ago, and sit in the same hall as Confucius. Who could then ignore it?²⁸

Following this principle of completeness, Du Zheng reports precise anecdotes for every year of Zhou Dunyi's life, and the main body of biographical chronology ends with the last year of Zhou Dunyi's life. The largest part of the chronology presents recorded details in a schematic structure; the description provides the objective conditions, or the historical facts, and lays the foundation for the conceptual system which defines the personality of Zhou Dunyi and the legitimacy of his historical figure. The chronology covers the facts of his life through a logic underlying the legitimacy of a paradigm that will be relevant in the official biography. Evidence of these dynamics of legitimization is clear in the final section of the biographical chronology. Here, the compiler expresses his aim more directly in order to clarify the position and the intellectual value of Zhou Dunyi.

28 [...] 此固哲人細事，如食之精，膾之細，魚之鰕，紺繖之飾、紅紫之服，當暑之絺綌，鄉黨皆備書之，今讀之，如生於千載之前，同堂合席也，豈可忽乎？*Zhou Dunyi nianpu*. Original in Zhou (hereafter ZDYJ) 2010: 116.

The final part of the biographical chronology provides the key to understanding the structural legitimacy through the historical details, by ensuring that the contents of the biographical reconstruction are correct and intelligible. For this, Du Zheng suggests two interesting elements. He first mentions the debate on the transmission of Zhou Dunyi's *Taijitu* 太極圖 ("Diagram of Supreme Polarity"), and then he discusses the historical and intellectual relation between Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers, as well as the philosophical legitimacy that derives from this relation. These factors establish formal legitimacy, which will be the basis of the formation of Neo-Confucian personality described through a historical model in the biographical section dedicated to *Daoxue* in the *Songshi*. In order to stress this intellectual relation, Du Zheng writes:

Among those who have fully understood the teachings of Zhou Dunyi, no one is like Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi. Cheng Hao said: "Among those gathered at Mount Ling, all have attained enlightenment, but we can rightly affirm that not a single one has reached such an understanding. If indeed there were one who had understood the truth, then at the point of death he would certainly have required a piece of cloth to wrap his head." So, it is said that Zengzi considered contrary to the rites that the body of an officer die on the mat of a High Officer: so he replaced the mat, and only then he died.²⁹ Those who have shaved heads, when dying they cannot return their bodies intact and they can not grasp what is essential: it is clear that this is not what Zhou Dunyi did. Someone could say that Zhou Dunyi in the past asked some questions to them, and so it is argued that his teachings derived from them: this is a serious mistake. In the past, Confucius asked Lao Dan about rites and Changhong about the music. So, can we assert that Confucius had already knowledge on rites and he never asked Lao Dan and Changhong? No, we cannot affirm that; but, [given that Confucius asked them about these topics] then can we imply that the teachings of Confucius derived from Lao Dan and Changhong? [...] Clearly, we cannot.³⁰

²⁹ Alluding to *Liji* ("Book of Rites): "Zengzi was lying in his chamber very ill. Yuezheng Zichun was sitting by the side of the couch; Zeng Yuan and Zeng Shen were sitting at (their father's) feet; and there was a lad sitting in a corner holding a torch, who said, 'How beautifully coloured and bright! Is it not the mat of a Great officer?' Zichun (tried to) stop him, but Zengzi had heard him, and in a tone of alarm called him, when he repeated what he had said. 'Yes', said Zengzi, 'it was the gift of Jisun, and I have not been able to change it. Get up, Yuan, and change the mat.' Zeng Yuan said, 'Your illness is extreme. It cannot now be changed. If you happily survive till the morning, I will ask your leave and reverently change it!'. Zengzi said, 'Your love of me is not equal to his. A superior man loves another on grounds of virtue; a little man's love of another is seen in his indulgence of him. What do I seek for? I want for nothing but to die in the correct way.' They then raised him up, and changed the mat. When he was replaced on the new one, before he could compose himself, he expired." *Liji* II.18, trans. Legge 1885: 128–129.

³⁰ 先生之學，得之者莫如明道、伊川。明道嘗云：「靈山會下若干人皆悟道，某敢道無一人悟者。若果有一人悟道，臨死時須求一尺帛裹頭。」因謂曾子以士之身死於大夫之簀為非禮，必易之而後已。彼斷髮之人不能全而歸之，本之則無，知先生之所不取也。今以先生嘗請問於

In this passage, Du Zheng provides a unique neo-Confucian portrait of Zhou Dunyi, aiming to highlight Zhou Dunyi's role within the intellectual sphere represented by Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao. In this sense, Du Zheng clarifies the exclusion of the philosopher by any explicit intellectual involvement in the area of Buddhism. The argument is based primarily on the meeting between the Cheng brothers and Zhou Dunyi, which is reported in the central part of the biographical chronology. This meeting happened between 1046 and 1047, and the historical evidence of this relation is crucial because it can support the affinity between Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers' thought related to their position against the Buddhism here asserted. Concerning this issue, there is a significant passage that quotes the same example of Zengzi in the collective sayings of the Cheng brothers:

In the past I asked a scholar of Buddhism: "The work [*Jingde*] *Chuan deng lu* ["Annals on the transmission of the lamp during the Jingde era"]³¹ counts how many members?" He replied: "A thousand and seven hundred". And then: "But among these thousand and seven hundred men there is no one who is truly wise, isn't that true? If there were someone who could be counted among the wise men, then he would be like 'who hears the Way in the morning, and it won't matter if he dies that evening.'³² In line with the right conduct of Zengzi, who changed the mat on his deathbed, in that moment they would have sought a piece of cloth to wrap their heads, refusing to die with shaved heads wearing those inappropriate robes. Clearly, there is no one that can be defined wise."³³

This testifies the affinity between the three Neo-Confucian philosophers, a crucial matter in Du Zheng's compilation in order to justify the role of Zhou Dunyi in the Neo-Confucian context. A further piece of evidence, quoted by Du Zheng, shows that Zhou Dunyi expressed his opinion on the value of Buddhist doctrines through some poetic verses mentioning Han Yu. The biographical chronology reports that, in 1071, Zhou Dunyi was in Chaozhou 潮州. This place was the background for a past episode related to Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), often cited with his courtesy name Tuizhi 退之, and the Buddhist monk and master Baotong 寶通,

此二人者，即謂其學本出於此二人者，失之遠矣。昔孔子問禮於老聃，訪樂於萇洪，謂孔子生知，未嘗師問老聃、萇洪者固不可；謂孔子之學本出於老出走、萇洪者，可乎？[...] 知其必不然耳。ZDYJ 2010: 113, my trans.

31 The work *Jingde Chuan deng lu* 景德傳燈錄 ("Annals on the transmission of the lamp during the Jingde era"), compiled between 1004 and 1007 by Shi Daoyuan 釋道原, is a biographical anthology which collects anecdotes of some monks of Chan Buddhism.

32 *Lunyu* IV.8, Confucius 2007: 33, trans. by B. Watson.

33 舊嘗問學佛者『《傳燈錄》幾人？』云『千七百人』。某曰：『敢道此千七百人無一人達者。果有一人見得聖人，「朝聞道夕死可矣」。與曾子易簣之理，臨死須尋一尺布帛裹頭而死，必不肯削髮胡服而終。是誠無一人達者。』*Er Cheng ji*, Cheng/Cheng 1981: 3, my trans.

also known by the name of Da Dian 大顛 (732–824).³⁴ It is reported that the Confucian scholar Han Yu criticized Buddhism, and in particular he disapproved the cult of relics of the Buddha supported by the emperor of the Tang 唐 dynasty, Xianzong 憲宗. For this reason, Han Yu was exiled to Chaozhou, where, in a local temple, he met the master Da Dian. Han Yu then gave him some clothes as a gift.³⁵ When Zhou Dunyi arrived in Chaozhou, he reported the story of Han Yu writing a poem about it and speaking ironically about a possible involvement of Han Yu in the Buddhist intellectual context:

Tuizhi [Han Yu] considers himself like Confucius: in his work *Yuandao* [“Essentials of the Moral Way”] he denounces the crimes of Buddhists and Huang Lao! But why he does not recognize that Da Dian is like them? Instead, he spends words on praising and he even gives clothes as a present.³⁶

Many studies claim that this reference should be read in a more ironic key rather than within an explicit framework of condemnation. In this regard, it is also worth noting that some studies do not recognize that element of contrast or criticism expressed by Zhou Dunyi against Buddhism. Rather, without stating any kind of affiliation, they admit the cultural coexistence: “Chou Tun-yi (1017–1073), the forerunner of Neo-Confucian thought [...] among the orthodox Neo-Confucianists[,] he alone did not participate in any refutation of Buddhist thought.”³⁷ However, according to Du Zheng, this poem and the position of Zhou Dunyi, in line with the thought of the Cheng brothers, clearly demonstrate Zhou Dunyi's legitimate and unique intellectual position contrary to Buddhism. This statement is also supported through a logical refutation: Confucius had contacts with Lao Dan 老聃 and Chang Hong 萇洪,³⁸ but this assumption does not allow us to infer necessarily that the teachings of Confucius originate from the thought of Lao Dan and Chang Hong. So, it is then possible to refute the logical conclusion that sees any contacts between Zhou Dunyi and the promoters of the Buddhist teachings as a necessary condition for an intellectual debt of Zhou Dunyi's teachings to Buddhist thought.

In this sense, it is possible to recognize that Du Zheng lays the foundation for a clear and legitimate intellectual role of Zhou Dunyi. He uses the historical

³⁴ Soothill/Hodous 1970: 96.

³⁵ Cf. Yan 1997: 50; Faure 1994: 146.

³⁶ 退之自謂如夫子，原道 深排佛老非。不識大顛何似者？數書珍重更留衣。ZDYJ 2010: 67, my trans.

³⁷ Fu 1973: 375.

³⁸ Alluding to *Kongzi shijia* 孔子世家 (“The Hereditary House of Kongzi”), chapter 47 of the *Shiji*. Cf. Sima 1959: 1905.

reference, such as the contacts between the philosopher and the Cheng brothers, and a precise logical argumentation, in order to give support to his project, then deriving an intellectual affiliation from historical facts.

In the next passage of the biographical chronology, the argumentation aims to emphasize the second crucial point, which is the inclusion of Zhou Dunyi in an intellectual context through historical and philosophical transmission. The legitimacy of this transmission is expressed through a chain starting from the Cheng brothers to Zhang Shi and Zhu Xi. This argumentation describes the inner logic that is the basis for the concept of *Daotong* (Succession of the Way) developed thanks to Zhu Xi's crucial contribution. This concept is strictly selective: “‘*Daotong*’, is conventionally translated as ‘tradition of the Way’. But this translation is misleading since *Daotong* does not signify a *tradition* as such, but rather a filiative lineage of sages who were regarded as the sole transmitters of the true Confucian Way.”³⁹ The idea of a legitimate and unique intellectual transmission expressed by the concept of “*Daotong*” is directly related to the context and the definition of the term “*Daoxue*” (Learning of the Way). As Hoyt Cleveland Tillman states, the Learning of the Way indicates the participation in a movement of thought that progressively became a “community fellowship”, and then an “institution of thought”: “*Tao-hsüeh* (True Way Learning) Confucianism was the fellowship to which Chu Hsi belonged. The original diversity of this *Tao-hsüeh* Confucianism became so obscured, as orthodoxy grew ever more entrenched [...]. By “fellowship” I mean that they had a network of social relations and a sense of community with shared tradition that distinguished them from other Confucians.”⁴⁰ In the initial phase, before the foundation of an exclusive identity, *Daoxue* indicates an intellectual context where thinkers and intellectual groups share a historical common ground. There are different but not divergent philosophical theories. The historical evolution of the term then uniquely refers to the Neo-Confucian movement legitimized by Zhu Xi's systematization, as “one particular group of the Song Confucians in the twelfth century whose writings form the basis of state orthodoxy [...]”⁴¹

In the following passage of the biographical chronology, there is no explicit mention of the term “*Daoxue*”, but there are the names of the *Daoxue* representatives. Here, the context indicates a process of selection and legitimization through the “genealogical” connection among the members of a precisely defined school of thought. The formation of the *Daoxue* framework here described shows the historical and intellectual legitimization of a precise philosophical movement, as well as the definition of a representative group: the logic behind this legitimacy is

³⁹ Wilson 1994: 6.

⁴⁰ Tillman 1992b: 2–3.

⁴¹ Hon 2005: 12.

precisely to use the historical evidence, rewriting the objective facts as a sign of the validity of an intellectual model. In this sense, the historical and intellectual value of Zhou Dunyi can be clearly recognized. The rightness of his biographical description can be interpreted thanks to the adherence to an intellectual model exemplified by the Cheng brothers, their students, and their philosophical movement. From an epistemological perspective, we could affirm that in the analyzed section of the biographical chronology, the biographical material reported and recorded in detail (the accurate and objective historical facts expressed by the concept of *zhi* 直) is intelligible and legitimate because it corresponds to a correct intellectual paradigm (*zheng* 正). The passage reads as follows:

Many students and disciples followed the teachings of Zhou Dunyi, but only Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao were able to transmit them. The Cheng brothers also have many students and disciples, but only Xie Shangcai [Xie Liangzuo], Yang Guishan [Yang Shi], You Dingfu [You Zuo], Zhang Sishu [Zhang Yi], Hou Shisheng [Hou Zhongliang], Yin Yanming [Yin Tun] were able to transmit their knowledge. Yang Shi went on to transmit the teachings to Luo Zhongsu [Luo Congyan], then to Li Yanping [Li Tong] and Li Yanping transmitted them to Hui'an [Zhu Xi]. Shangcai [Xie Liangzuo] and Shisheng [Hou Zhongliang] transmitted them to Hu Wending [Hu Anguo], and he transmitted to Wufeng [Hu Hong]. Wufeng transmitted them to Zhang Jingfu [Zhang Shi]. Zhang Jingfu and then Hui'an gradually were inspired by these, and they promoted the teachings of Zhou Dunyi. They instituted sacrificial temples dedicated to Zhou Dunyi where he had taught in order to promote them and increase the number of scholars. Then they provided an explanation of *Taijitu shuo* and *Tongshu*, correcting the erroneous interpretations of scholars and clarifying the guidelines and methods of Zhou Dunyi in order to educate the future generations. By doing this, a scholar eager to obtain and study the writings of Zhou Dunyi, even after a hundred generations, can easily do it as if he receives the teachings directly from Zhou Dunyi. The teachings and examples of the sages can be studied, and the teachings of Confucius and Mengzi continue to be transmitted: this is indeed true. So, it is necessary to grasp the inner meaning of things and preserve what we have learned in silence, and only then we can say that we can really understand in an authentic way.⁴²

All the mentioned names, except Hou Zhongliang, are reported in a *liezhuan*-section of the *Songshi* and catalogued as belonging to the *Daoxue* movement.⁴³

42 先生之學，門人弟子多矣，而二程為能傳之。二程之學，門人弟子亦多矣，而謝上蔡、楊龜山、游定夫、張思叔、侯師聖、尹彥明為能聞之。龜山傳之羅仲素，仲素傳之李延平，延平傳之晦庵先生。上蔡及師聖傳之胡文定，文定傳之五峰，五峰傳之張敬夫。敬夫及晦庵相繼稍被召用，推明先生之學，所在祠先生於學宮，以興起學者。而又解釋《太極圖說》及《通書》，正學者之差謬，明其心法，以詔後世，使百世之下，有志之士，得其書而讀之，如親授於先生。聖賢事業，可學而能，孔孟之學，可繼而續，豈誣也哉！然必嘗從事於此，心通默識，然後為能真知之矣。ZDYJ 2010: 114, my trans.

43 Most of these philosophers are here quoted with their posthumous or courtesy name, as reported in their biographical accounts in the chapter 435 of the *Songshi*. Cf. Tuotuo 1977: 12909–12910.

In the text there are the names of Yang Shi 楊時, Xie Liangzuo 謝良佐, You Zuo 游酢 and Yin Tun 尹焞, defined in the historical sources as the best students of the Cheng brothers. Between 1173 and 1178, Zhu Xi edited two of his works,⁴⁴ the *Yiluo yuanyuan lu* 伊洛淵源錄 (“Records of the Origins of the School of the Chengs”) and *Jinsi lu* 近思錄 (“Reflections on Things at Hand”). These developed the concept of legitimate transmission codified as “*Daotong*”. In these works, Zhu Xi already selected many of these thinkers as representatives through which lay the foundations for a legitimate intellectual Neo-Confucian current. The thinkers are therefore the legitimate representatives of the Neo-Confucian category described above. Among these, it is worth mentioning the example of Hu Anguo 胡安國 in the year 1137. He showed the merits of scholars such as Xie Liangzuo and Yang Shi; he defended the legitimate value of the teachings of the Cheng brothers. As the following historiographical source testifies, in 1137 the conditions were right for the recognition of their thinking directly related to Confucius and Mengzi. This factor highlights the essential validity of the thought of the Cheng brothers in the precise intellectual framework of *Daotong*, where Zhou Dunyi’s contribution is crucial. The text is from the *Songshi jishi benmo* 宋史紀事本末 (“Historical events of the Song period in their entirety”)⁴⁵ compiled by Chen Bangzhan 陳邦瞻 (d. 1623) and reads as follows:

During the seventh year of the Shaoxing era [1137], Hu Anguo heard Chen Gongfu asking the ban of Cheng Yi’s teachings, so he presented a memorial to the court, saying: “The *Dao* of Confucius and Mengzi has not be transmitted for a long time: only thanks to the clarification of Cheng Yi and his brother Cheng Hao it is possible to fully understand it. Recently some officials aim that scholars follow the example of Confucius and Mengzi, but they forbid to follow the teachings of Cheng Yi. This is [absurd, equal to] want to get into the house without going through the door [...]”⁴⁶

Our analysis pointed out two crucial points of this textual section. The first element, using a historical reference and a logical argumentation, shows legitimate support for the intellectual validity of Zhou Dunyi as belonging to a precise paradigm. The second element validates this thesis by expanding the historical perspective and giving the historical and intellectual connections

44 Tillman 1992b: 114–116.

45 The so-called *jishi benmo lei* 紀事本末類類 (types of historical events in their entirety) is a sub-category to the literary category of historiography (*shibu* 史部) included in the collective work of *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書. This type of history reports particular historic events in an annalistic style, from their beginning to the end.

46 七年 (丁巳、一一三七) 五月[...] 安國聞陳公輔請禁程頤之學，乃上疏曰：「孔、孟之道不傳久矣，自頤兄弟始發明之，然後知其可學而至。今使學者師孔、孟而禁從頤學，是入室而不由戶也 [...]」 *Songshi jishi benmo*, Chen 1977: 868, my trans.

further legitimacy. The contribution and philosophical value of Zhou Dunyi are recognizable and legitimate precisely because they are linked and explained within this context, which includes the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi.

Lastly, we would like to report further historical evidence from the biographical chronology concerning the value of the intellectual contribution of Zhou Dunyi, where the chronological reference is very important. The text discusses the issue raised by Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁 (1178–1237) in relation with the bestowal of the posthumous title Yuangong 元公 (Duke of Yuan) to Zhou Dunyi in 1220. On this chronological reference, there is no coincidence: it indicates the phase of rebirth and consolidation of the *Daoxue* current, which became essential in the political sphere after suffering the attacks and a ban between 1196 and 1202.⁴⁷ Around the year 1130, there were the first signs of a heated debate between the intellectuals of that time, questioning the legitimacy of what deserves the title of “*Daoxue*” and the right to be the only legitimate representatives of this thought. Shortly after the death of Zhu Xi in 1200, there was a gradual stabilization, mainly in order to calm the political tension and the anti-intellectual trends. Between 1209 and 1210, Zhu Xi obtained the honorific posthumous title of Wengong 文公 (Duke of Culture), a first sign of rehabilitation. In 1211 there is the urgent need to restore the teachings of Zhu Xi:

In the past, ministers with their political authorities agreed to ban his teachings. For over ten years, scholars became more and more indolent, their arguments have become unproductive day by day, and the atmosphere between them increasingly heavy. [...] To understand something and put it into practice is impossible without the study. If so, then the study and the practice of what we have learned are the fundamental ability of man: is not this kind of commitment that now it is more urgent to support? I pray Your Highness to enact an enlightening edict that recovers those teachings and recognizes the error of the previous ban.⁴⁸

In addition, in 1223 there was a formal request to establish official ceremonies in Confucian temples for the “masters”. These requests were fully granted in 1241, a date which marks the total rehabilitation of the *Daoxue* movement, showing the formation of the Neo-Confucian paradigm:

In 1241 [...] the edict reported that, after Mengzi, no one transmitted the Confucian *Dao*. In the Song dynasty, Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi truly realized it by

⁴⁷ Adler 2014: 59.

⁴⁸ 往者權臣顧以此學為禁，十數年間，士氣日衰，士論日卑，士風日壞，[...] 知而行之，非學不可。然則學術成人才，非今日最要之務乎。臣願陛下特出明詔，崇尚此學，指言前日所禁之誤。 *Songshi jishi benmo*, Chen 1977: 877–878, my trans.

learning in the sphere of authentic wisdom, restoring what had been lost for a thousand years. After the rebirth of the Song dynasty, Zhu Xi took care of the details and refined the thought, making a clear synthesis and editing the Four Books: thanks to them we can reach a full understanding [of the *Dao*]. So the *Dao* of Confucius rises again and shines in these generations.⁴⁹

Hence, as Du Zheng reports, in 1217 Wei Liaoweng presented a memorial to the court, stressing the need to rightly recognize the “masters” like as Zhou Dunyi by giving them a proper posthumous title. In this context, Du Zheng inserted further proof of the value of Zhou Dunyi, showing on the one hand his moral value and, on the other hand, his intellectual legitimacy. As we stated before, these elements will play a crucial role in the biographical reconstruction in the *Songshi*, following new parameters and using this intellectual legitimacy in order to propose a further portrait of Zhou Dunyi in terms of Confucian personality:

In recent years, those who have promoted the teachings of Zhou Dunyi and supported the practical initiatives are more and more numerous. Wei Liaoweng, whose courtesy name was Huaifu, came from Linqiong. His task was to amend the laws of Tongchuan, so he wanted to learn what was a priority concerning the decrees and decisions of the civil government. Du Zheng reports as follows: “When Master Lianxi served as official in our humble village, before any new assignment, he often sent some money as a gift. In his registration duties, as well as in telling his instructions, he had the attitude and the ability to educate others”. Wei Liaoweng thought about how to express it, and then he presented the request for an honorific title. [...] [Zhou Dunyi] was then honored with the posthumous name of [the Duke of] Yuan. This request was granted the twenty-second day of the sixth month, the thirteenth year of the Jiading era [1220].⁵⁰

3 Zhou Dunyi’s official biography: life as example

As claimed at the beginning of this paper, we highlight how a methodological orientation that operates between the different textual structures related to a biographical compilation can provide a complete picture of Zhou Dunyi’s

49 淳祐元年 [...] 詔曰 “朕惟孔子之道，自孟軻後不得其傳，至我朝周敦頤、張載、程顥、程頤，真見實踐，深探聖域，千載絕學，始有指歸。中興以來，又得朱熹，精思明辨，折衷融會，使《大學》、《論》、《孟》、《中庸》之旨本末洞徹，孔子之道益以大明於世。 *Songshi jishi benmo*, Chen 1977: 880, my trans.

50 近年以來，世之推行其學，講明其踐修者益眾，臨邛魏華父了翁，除潼川憲，下問政令所當先者，正謂之曰：「濂溪先生幸仕敝鄉，下車之初，宜遣祝幣，委簽判或教官告之，以導學者趨嚮。」既而華父更思所以表顯之者，遂有易名之請 [...] 賜諡曰元。實嘉定十三年六月二十二日也。 ZDYJ 2010: 114, my trans.

personality and clarify the value of his philosophical contribution. As in the *nianpu*, the analysis of the biographical reconstruction in the official histories is also fundamental. Hence, our analysis focuses on the textual structure and the criteria by which the figure and the role of the philosopher are described.

The study of the biographical content, and the argumentation that aims to create a precise conceptual framework, plays a primary role. Biographical chronology, as we pointed out, is concerned with the importance of the historical detail in a precise intellectual framework, or the philosophical model, which explains the correctness and the value of that historical content. Through the biographical chronology, it has been possible to analyze the conditions and the foundation of historical and intellectual legitimacy of the figure of Zhou Dunyi. The process of legitimization has developed through the sequential and complete description of historical facts. At the same time, it corresponds to a paradigm whose correctness is grounded in the evidence of those very facts.

In the biographical compilation of the official histories, the text also relates to the connection between historical detail and the interpretation of its meaning, focusing on the legitimacy of Zhou Dunyi's role, but there is a different conceptual use and argumentation. The text aims to provide a broader framework of philosophical legitimacy, also stressing its political value. There is an accurate selection of historical references. The aim of this biography is to explain Zhou Dunyi's moral and intellectual example through precise judgments about the reported historical events.

While in the biographical chronology the argumentation aims to describe the inner dynamics that will establish a historical and intellectual legitimacy reached with the institutionalization of Neo-Confucian movement in 1241, in the analyzed section the *Songshi*, we can find a more direct and explicit lexical structure, whose primary purpose is to show the genealogical transmission connected to the concept of *Daotong* and the political legitimacy of the *Daoxue* movement.

The *Songshi* has been compiled between 1343 and 1345 by a team of historians directed by Toqto'a (Chinese name Tuotuo 脱脱), a senior official of the court.⁵¹ This work presents a didactic purpose: the composition of the official history uses a selection of historical events, performing a functional investigation of the past useful to the understanding of the present time. Within this framework, the Neo-Confucian thought of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi becomes the foundation of the institutional education and, therefore, a political

51 Cf. Yang 1961: 44–59; Ng/Wang 2005: 189–192.

and intellectual instrument. The intellectual contribution of *Daoxue* thus becomes the criterion of correctness and the theoretical basis for the review and interpretation of the historical material, as well as the framework with which the historian can express his judgment about historical events and characters. Here, therefore, the historian can create an “exemplary Neo-Confucian personality.”

The official recognition of the patronage of the *Daoxue* teachings in the Northern area under non-Han domination, after the displacement of the Song court in Hangzhou in 1127, dated around the year 1235. Some historiographical sources report that the transmission of *Daoxue* in the Northern area started in 1235 with the contribution of a Neo-Confucian scholar named Zhao Fu 趙復 (1200–1277),⁵² but Western sinologists claim that there was an intellectual continuity between the North and the South, as Tillman stated, “Recent research shows that the *Tao-hsüeh* had been developing in the North since the early 1190s.”⁵³ Starting from the first half of the thirteenth century, there is the desire to assert a strong and legitimate cultural identity. These historical and political trends lay the foundation for the formation of the Neo-Confucian “orthodox” intellectual transmission, and they define the ideology at the base of state power.

In the *liezhuan* section dedicated to Zhou Dunyi, there is a relevant reconstruction of the *Daoxue* transmission. The text cites the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi and there is a direct intent of foundation and legitimization since it describes the philosophical origin of *Daoxue*. The text reads as follows:

In the ancient times, the term “*Daoxue*” did not exist. During the period of the Three Dynasties, the Son of Heaven through the *Dao* performed his political function and practiced what he had learned, while for ministers and officials was what allowed them to carry out their duties. In every village school, the *Dao* was the basis for the study of teachers and students, and everywhere the people every day referred to it in their activities, even without being aware of it. This is because in every place between heaven and earth, the *Dao* permeates everything, and thanks to it everything obtains full realization. Therefore, in our time it has been established for it the name of “*Daoxue*.”

After the death of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, Confucius possessed the virtue but had no official assignments, and it was, therefore, impossible for him to make the *Dao* spread among those generations. He retired, and with his students he established a right paradigm for the rites and music, he followed the examples [of Wen and Wu], he edited the number of the Odes, compiled the Annals of Spring and Autumn, introduced the thought and the emblems of the Book of Changes,⁵⁴ he discussed what was written at the time of

⁵² Cf. Hu 1990: 26.

⁵³ Cf. Tillman 1992b: 232–233.

⁵⁴ Similar in *Kongzi shijia*, chapter 47 of the *Shiji*. Cf. Sima 1959: 1905.

the Three August Ones and Five Emperors,⁵⁵ because he wanted that the *Dao* of those sages shines without limits. Hence it is said: "The wisdom of the Master exceeded that of Yao and Shun." After the death of Confucius, this *Dao* was transmitted only to Zengzi, then to Zisi and again to Mencius. With the death of Mencius, the transmission ended. Then, during the Han dynasties, Confucian scholars examined and discussed the issue of the *Dao*: they examined the object but they missed the essential principle, they debated for a long time without clarifying the details. Then unorthodox doctrines and erroneous talks aroused and prevailed over the *Dao*, almost causing its loss.

After over a thousand years, in the Song period, Zhou Dunyi was born in Chongling and restored the teachings that great and wise men had failed to spread. He wrote the *Taijitu shuo* and *Tongshu*, he explained the principles of the Five Phases and *yin* and *yang*, [as well as he clarified] that fate is what is given from heaven and human nature is what pertains to man: everything was then intelligible and clear.

[...] In the early years of the Mingdao era, during the reign of Renzong, Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi were born. They were students of Zhou Dunyi, and they later examined in depth what they have learned, officially presenting the works *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* with the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi*. [These teachings spread] from the darkness among sovereigns and emperors and reached those who, in their first steps of study, prepared to cross the threshold of virtue. Thanks to their contribution, everyone was able to grasp the inner meanings and master what had learned, and with such complete and comprehensive understanding, there was no more ambiguity.

During the first years of the Southern Song period, Zhu Xi retrieved the legitimate transmission of the teachings of the Cheng brothers, examining in depth the details and facilitating the understanding. All works such as the Odes, the Book of Documents and the Six Classics, together with the teachings transmitted by Confucius and Mengzi, were destroyed during the Qin book burning, scattered because of the Confucian literati of the Han Dynasty and forgotten during the Wei, the Jin, and the Six Dynasties.

In the Song period, those teachings were recovered, and each one obtained a legitimate recognition. This was the merit of Confucian scholars of the Song period, surpassing even the merits of the past scholars. Their teachings, thus, inherited the Mengzi legacy. [...] So, the *Daoxue* flourished during the Song period, but the Song scholars did not examine how to put it into practice: they even banished it. The emperors of later ages wanted to rule according to right principles, recovering a government in accordance with the political practice of the enlightened rulers and following the cosmic virtue of Heaven: they thus recovered and chose the *Dao* as the practical guiding principle.⁵⁶

55 The terms *fen* 墳 and *dian* 典 refer to the "*sanfen* 三墳 and *wudian* 五典" period, or the era of the Three August Ones (Fu Xi 伏羲, Shen Nong 神農 and Huangdi 黃帝) and Five Emperors (Shao Hao 少昊, Zhuan Xu 顓頊, Di Ku 帝嚳, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜).

56 道學之名，古無是也。三代盛時，天子以是道為政教，大臣百官有司以是道為職業，黨、庠、術、序師弟子以是道為講習，四方百姓日用是道而不知。是故盈覆載之間，無一民一物不被是道之澤，以遂其性。于斯時也，道學之名，何自而立哉。文王、周公既沒，孔子有德無位，既不能使是道之用漸被斯世，退而與其徒定禮樂，明憲章，刪《詩》，修《春秋》，贊《易象》，討論《墳》、《典》，期使五三聖人之道昭明於無窮。故曰：「夫子賢于堯、舜遠矣。」

In this first part of the *liezhuan*, it is evident how fundamental Zhou Dunyi's contribution is without the teachings and the wisdom of Zhou Dunyi, the Cheng Brothers could not restore the Confucian *Dao* and recover the right principle for the rulers during the Yuan dynasty. In this sense, the historian inserts Zhou Dunyi in a complex legitimating structure, providing a precise role for him.

Moreover, the official biography also offers a portrait of Zhou Dunyi through a structured paradigm. The historical reference is relevant because it describes Zhou Dunyi's moral value and his personality as the exemplary Neo-Confucian philosopher. Zhou Dunyi represents the example of an honest official who follows his ethical path but, at the same time, can equally manage the practical duties of the civil service. The official biography highlights this balanced attitude between commitment and self-cultivation through the words of Cheng Yi. The last part of the official biography formalizes the connection between Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers, not only based on the historical evidence of their meeting, but also as an intellectual relation between teacher and students legitimated through a direct philosophical filiation:

While in Nan'an, the Prefectural Supervisor [with auxiliary appointment for military matters] Cheng Xiang was impressed by the refined attitude of Zhou Dunyi: he spoke with him, and he recognized that Zhou Dunyi dedicated himself to the study of the *Dao*. They became friends, and his sons Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi became Zhou Dunyi's students. Zhou Dunyi constantly told them to seek for what Confucius and Yan Hui enjoyed. How to realize such a state of full satisfaction and joy: this is the point from which begins the study of Cheng brothers. Cheng Yi then stated: "After meeting Zhou Maoshu, his verses⁵⁷ dictated by an honest and pure attitude pleased and guided me, and for me, it is like when Confucius said: 'I'm with Dian!'"⁵⁸ Hou Shisheng [Hou Zhongliang] studied with Cheng Yi, but he wasn't able to fully understand his teachings. So he went to Zhou Dunyi for advice, but Zhou Dunyi told him: "I am old, I will dwell on details in my

孔子沒，曾子獨得其傳，傳之子思，以及孟子，孟子沒而無傳。兩漢而下，儒者之論大道，察焉而弗精，語焉而弗詳，異端邪說起而乘之，幾至大壞。千有餘載，至宋中葉，周敦頤出於舂陵，乃得聖賢不傳之學，作《太極圖說》、《通書》，推明陰陽五行之理，命於天而性於人者，瞭若指掌。[...] 仁宗明道初年，程顥及弟頤寔生，及長，受業周氏，已乃擴大其所聞，表章《大學》、《中庸》二篇，與《語》、《孟》並行，於是上自帝王傳心之奧，下至初學入德之門。融會貫通，無複餘蘊。迄宋南渡，新安朱熹得程氏正傳，其學加親切焉。[...] 凡《詩》、《書》，六藝之文，與夫孔、孟之遺言，顛錯于秦火，支離於漢儒，幽沉于魏、晉、六朝者，至是皆煥然而大明，秩然而各得其所。此宋儒之學所以度越諸子，而上接孟氏者歟。[...] 道學盛于宋，宋弗究於用，甚至有厲禁焉。後之時君世主，欲複天德王道之治，必來此取法矣。 *Songshi*, chapter 427. Cf. Tuotuo 1977: 12709–12713.

⁵⁷ Literally, "sang of the wind and moon". Cf. Adler 2014: 33.

⁵⁸ Alluding to *Lunyu* XI.26, Confucius 2007: 77, trans. by B. Watson.

explanation...". Hou Shisheng stayed there and prepared his bed, and they talked during the night. After three days, [Hou Zhongliang] returned to Cheng Yi. Cheng Yi was pleasantly surprised by Hou Shisheng's improvements, so he said: "You certainly come from Zhou Dunyi [Maoshu], aren't you?". This testifies Zhou Dunyi's great ability to educate and act as a guide for others.⁵⁹

As the text clearly states, the philosophical discussion on the notion of joy (*le* 樂), described as a condition of awareness and pleasure developed particularly by Cheng Yi, starts with the input provided by Zhou Dunyi. *Le* is a common topic in the Song dynasty poetical production. For example, in Zhou Dunyi we can recognize two meanings of *le*, firstly explained as a peaceful mind condition, and then as moral composure and contentment. Both meanings highlight the need and ways to become aware of the proper moral quest, a kind of inquiry that from Cheng Yi on became the foundation of Neo-Confucian systematic reflection. This investigation, known as *Kong Yan le chu* 孔顏樂處 ("What does the pleasure of Confucius and Yan Hui consist of?"), is related to the Confucian question "is it possible to be a sage?". In fact, Yan Hui 顏回 (521–490 BCE) is mentioned in the *Lunyu* as one of Confucius's favorite disciples, thanks to his reverent composure and thanks to his commitment to learning and searching for the *Dao*. Zhou Dunyi tries to answer these questions relating the moral model of Yan Hui to his moral experience. The core of Zhou Dunyi's philosophical effort is how to put into practice the moral self-cultivation, how to experience this moral activity, and how to live as a worthy man. At the same time, by devoting himself to learning as Yan Hui did, Zhou Dunyi focuses on the path to morality, a kind of practical experience towards moral fulfillment. This practice is performed by Zhou Dunyi through his honesty and composure in the civil service, and through his ability as a teacher: this epitomizes the individuality of Zhou Dunyi as the perfect Confucian model. These elements then characterize Zhou Dunyi as a perfect example of balance between "outer kingliness" (*waiwang* 外王) and "inner sageliness" (*neisheng* 內聖). The official biography gives us a portrait of a philosopher engaged in ethical self-cultivation and an official dedicated to civil and moral practice. These features, and the connection with the Cheng brothers, are a testimony to Zhou Dunyi's paradigmatic role in the context of *Daoxue*.

59 據南安時，程珦通判軍事，視其氣貌非常人，與語，知其為學知道，因與為友，使二子顥、頤往受業焉。敦頤每令尋孔、顏樂處，所樂何事，二程之學源流乎此矣。故顥之言曰：『自再見周茂叔後，吟風弄月以歸，有「吾與點也」之意。』侯師聖學于程頤，未悟，訪敦頤，敦頤曰：「吾老矣，說不可不詳。」留對榻夜談，越三日乃還。頤驚異之，曰：「非從周茂叔來耶？」其善開發人類此。 *Songshi*, chapter 427. Cf. Tuotuo 1977: 12709–12713.

4 Conclusion

In this correlative analysis of the biographical chronology and official biography, we have pointed out how the process of legitimization provides a standard description of Zhou Dunyi. In other words, it is possible to discover a different rewriting process. This process offers a different description of Zhou Dunyi in a context of further political and intellectual legitimacy. Based on the use of biographical material, these different texts have displayed a portrait of Zhou Dunyi firstly through a descriptive model, and then through a normative model. In this sense, the use and the intelligibility of historical materials reflect the descriptive dynamics and semantic conformity in the biographical chronology, while we can find functional dynamics and semantic dependence in the official biography.

In the biographical chronology, the moral value of Zhou Dunyi is described through an accurate and complete reconstruction, where the evidence of the historical fact testifies to Zhou Dunyi's morality and honesty; the textual and lexical structure, in this sense, portrays Zhou Dunyi as a historical figure and, at the same time, includes an inner dynamics of legitimization of Zhou Dunyi as an intellectual figure and Neo-Confucian thinker. The legitimacy and moral exemplarity became a paradigm of Zhou Dunyi in the official biography section in the *Songshi*: here the historical fact is purely functional in order to represent a precise model or example. In the reconstruction of his official biography, Zhou Dunyi is depicted through a moral paradigm within the evident conceptual and semantic framework of *Daoxue*. Because the morality of Zhou Dunyi refers to and can be understood in the context of *Daoxue*, his individuality becomes an example of a personality connected to a specific ethical model. It is important to notice that these legitimating dynamics do not coincide with a construction of a stereotype. Zhou Dunyi's value is not inserted in an impersonal and empty pattern. Rather, there is a definition of a multi-layered concept of individuality.

Concerning this concept of "individuality", Wright claims that within the Chinese epistemological framework, there is no notion of a contextual biography which could provide a "whole-length portrait" of a personality.⁶⁰ He states that this concept could clarify and better explain more features of a biographical individuality. In our textual comparison, thus, we have shown a different connotation of the term "individuality". If "individual" denotes the concept of qualities which differentiate the individual from the group, it is also true that the differentiation operates on a logical assumption of shared recognition.

⁶⁰ Wright 1962: 4. Cf. Twitchett 1962: 25–39.

A personality is not reducible to a subjective element, but refers also to a shared conceptual sphere to be defined. Singular events or the sum of historical anecdotes do not fully designate what could be recognized as the concept of “individual,” but, instead, we can understand their meaning in relation to a shared paradigm. In this sense, we can highlight Zhou Dunyi's biography in terms of “individuality”, and, in particular, as “Neo-Confucian individuality.” The analysis of textual typologies, their different uses of historiographical material and heterogeneous epistemological patterns presented two biographical points of view related to Zhou Dunyi's character focusing on his historical description and philosophical representation. The legitimacy and the value of Zhou Dunyi's individuality, in terms of epistemological assumptions, are established by an integration of these conceptual frameworks.

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