ABSTRACT

Ever since Zhu Xi ( 南宋 朱熹 ) edited and grouped The Great Learning among the Four Books ( 四书 ), it has exerted a great influence over the Chinese philosophers. Indeed, this influence has been so strong that the development of Chinese thought for the past eight centuries may be said to have evolved within the pattern laid out by the so-called eight "minor integral patterns " ( 八条目 ) of The Great Learning.

Many of Zhu and Wang's Interpretations of The Great Learning are more rather than expressions of their own philosophical ideas. Yet, in the different interpreters of the book, Zhu Xi and Wang Yang Ming ( 明 王阳明 ) were of course the most influential. They either supplement the original teaching, or amplify it. The purpose of this thesis is first to point out the departure of Zhu Xi and Wang Yang Ming from the original text in their different interpretations, second to demonstrate that these interpretations, while their ideas have gradually ceased to mean just moral knowledge; it has attained a material aspect as well, third to trace the ideas of Ge-Wu ( investigation of things 格物 ) and Chi-Zhi ( extension of knowledge 致知 ) since the time of Zhu and Wang.

When Zhu Xi edited The Great Learning, he made a number of textual changes. The most important change made by him was the addition of the passage in which the relationship of Ge-Wu and Chi-Zhi was defined. To Zhu Xi, what Ge-Wu really means is not just the "investigation of things" but rather the "investigation of the li (principle 理 )."

Wang Yang Ming's departure from the original text is even more obvious. He picks up Chi-Zhi, the second item of the eight "minor
integral patterns" and transforms it into an all-embracing principle to which all the rest of the "minor integral patterns" are subordinated. What is more, Chi-Zhi becomes to him Chi-Liang-Zhi (致良知) that is "extension of knowledge" becomes "realization of good knowledge" The systematic sequence of the eight "minor integral patterns", each one leading to the nest, is thus completely neglected.

Many of Zhu and Wang's interpretations of The Great Learning are none rather than expressions of their own philosophical ideas. Yet, they still retain a good deal of the spirit of the original text. They either supplement the original teaching, or amplify it.

For both Zhu and Wang, knowledge is primarily moral in character. Since their time, however, the word 'Knowledge' has gradually ceased to mean just moral knowledge; it has attained a material aspect as well. Eminent China scholars, such as Yan Yuan (颜元) and Tai Chen (戴震), all had a hand in bringing about this important shift in the understanding of the word 'knowledge'. Toward the end of the Ching Dynasty, when China began to feel the strong impact of Western influence, the ideas of Ge-Wu and Chi-Zhi became almost exclusively associated with the attainment of modern scientific knowledge. Thereupon arose the problem of how to reconcile the notion of moral knowledge as represented by traditional Chinese thought with the notion of scientific knowledge as represented by the newly imported Western thought. The search for a satisfactory solution to this problem has engaged much attention of comtemporary Chinese scholars.