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LI ZHI (1527-1602):
A CONFUCIAN FEMINIST OF LATE-MING CHINA

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
AND THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Pauline Chen Lee
August 2002

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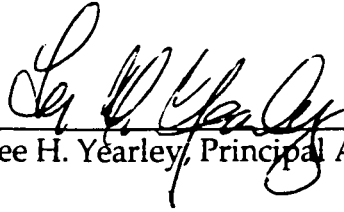
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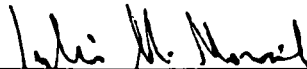
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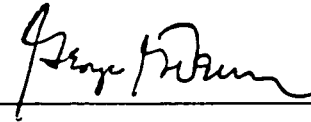
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Abstract

The dissertation describes and analyzes the thought of a Chinese literatus, Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), who I argue is one of the earliest Confucians to offer substantive arguments for equality between the genders. Li insists that opportunities for self cultivation, a project central to Confucianism and one that was traditionally open only to men, must also be made available to women. His particular vision of self cultivation involves reading classical texts, writing poetry, engaging in discourse and debate, and meditating for the purpose of enhancing one's innate moral, intellectual, and spiritual sensibilities. Not only is Li historically interesting, but his ideas are also philosophically important. I show how an understanding of Li's arguments for gender equality enables us to productively problematize concepts, such as the distinction between private and public and between thinking and feeling, that are common to contemporary western feminist theory. Li's ideas differ in both subtle and overt ways from those of western thinkers discussed in this dissertation, namely John McDowell, John Stuart Mill, Catherine MacKinnon, and Mary Daly. Despite Li's considerable role within Chinese Confucianism, at present there exist but a handful of articles on him in the English language. While the primary aim of the dissertation is to reveal ways in which Confucian feminism as found in Li comes into fruitful dialogue with contemporary western feminisms, the dissertation also sets this feminism in context by providing a description and analysis of Li's influential views on the mind, morality, and government. In the appendix, I include selected annotated translations of Li's writings.

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I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to P.J. Ivanhoe. His passion for studying and living the good life inspired me to begin this intellectual journey many years ago when I was an undergraduate, and since that time he has remained steadfast in his guidance and support. I am grateful for much, among which is the patience and wisdom he has generously given that has been instrumental in helping me find a path of my own.

Finally and always, I am indebted to my parents, Margaret and Joseph Lee. I dedicate this work to them, with love.

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Chapter One **Introduction**

In the last decade, a growing body of literature has emerged exploring the intersection of Confucian and feminist thought. The scholarship can be seen as falling into two schools. In one school, scholars have sought to recover particular voices and demonstrate that at certain periods during Chinese history women were more liberated than is conventionally thought.¹ In some forms, the argument turns to the insistence that while later Confucianism is oppressive toward women, Confucianism as found in antiquity did not discriminate as severely between men and women. This first project has proven to be quite productive.

In another school, scholars have sought to defend Confucianism against the charge of being irrecoverably oppressive toward women by identifying familiar concepts within the Confucian tradition that can be construed as liberating for women.² An example of this approach identifies a resonance between the works of a number of cultural feminists who speak of the virtue of care, such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings,³ and a certain branch of Confucian thought, specifically the ideas of the major Confucian thinker Mengzi

¹ See, for example, social histories such as Ko (1994) and Mann (1997). Also see studies of intellectual history such as Goldin (2000) and Raphals (1998).

² For example, see Tu (1998) and Chenyang Li (1994).

³ See Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1985).

(391-308 BCE).⁴ For such scholars, feminism is part of the Mencian branch of Confucianism in that virtues, in particular caring, that are defended by some contemporary feminists are central to Mencian Confucianism. However, in articulating the similarities between care ethics and Mencian Confucianism, such scholars have neglected to ask whether an ethic that esteems care is directly correlated with the socio-political liberation of women. There appears to be no conceptual or necessary link between care and the liberation of women, and the Mencian school of Confucianism offers a clear historical example of a case where these two concerns are not in any way connected.

My dissertation benefits from both these projects, but takes a different tack than either. I borrow from the comparative and philosophical methods used in the latter project and apply these in light of an understanding of the history of women's social and intellectual lives in Ming China that has been recovered from the first project. In addition to providing an accurate description and analysis of Li Zhi's ideas, I seek to explore the implications of his views and their potential contributions to contemporary debates in the field of feminist ethics. In the following paragraphs I will explain some of the central questions motivating my dissertation and the primary methods I employ to pursue these.

In a recently edited book exploring the subject of Confucianism and feminism, the focal question articulated is, "Can Confucianism come to terms

⁴ For an example of such scholarship, see, for example, Chenyang Li (1994).

with feminism?"⁵ While such a question has yielded productive results, it is also problematic in that it forecloses the possibility of the existence of a feminism distinctive to Confucianism. In contemporary feminist scholarship there exist a diversity of schools of which liberal, Marxist, existentialist, and psychoanalytic feminisms are but a few. These various approaches, for the most part, arise from intellectual traditions which throughout their histories have voiced ideas that serve to subjugate women. To give one example, psychoanalytic feminism finds its origins in the works of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), a thinker well-known in popular culture for his dismissive and rather unflattering views on women. Woman, according to Freud at his worst, is nothing more than a morally, intellectually, and physically castrated version of man. Despite the oppressive vision of women threading through these various intellectual traditions, feminists nevertheless have recognized the wealth of intellectual resources within them. These feminists have chosen to construct upon, reformulate, and contest the ideas within a given tradition in order to fashion effective and even formidable tools for undermining the systematic subjugation of women. However, while there is an extensive corpus of secondary literature describing and analyzing the history of these numerous forms of feminist thinking, one finds little if any scholarship on the history of Confucian feminism.

In the dissertation, I describe the conception of women articulated by the Ming dynasty, Neo-Confucian thinker Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602). I see this

⁵ See Chenyang Li (2000), p. 1.

particular task as part of a larger project illustrating the existence of a Confucian feminism of which Li's is but one form. I argue that Confucianism has its own distinctive expression of feminism which takes as one of its primary foci the project of self cultivation. Generally speaking, while liberal feminists view legal reform as the most effective tool for overcoming gender inequality, and Marxist feminists conceive of the subversion of capitalist social structures as the prime method for overturning the subjugation of women, Li Zhi, a Confucian feminist, understands the process of *self cultivation* to be the most effective strategy for addressing the problem of patriarchy. Briefly put, Li's conception of self cultivation involves reading classical texts, writing poetry, engaging in discourse and debate, and meditating for the purpose of enhancing one's innate moral, intellectual, and spiritual sensibilities. Unlike Confucian thinkers before him, Li insists that opportunities for self cultivation ought to be accessible to both men and women.

Despite Li's considerable role in Chinese thought, at present there exist but a handful of articles on him in the English language. While the primary aim of the dissertation is to reveal ways in which Confucian feminism as found in Li comes into fruitful dialogue with contemporary western feminisms, the dissertation also sets this feminism in context by providing a description and analysis of Li's influential views on the mind, morality, and government. I use historical and sinological methods in an effort to understand and describe the ideas of Li Zhi, and comparative and philosophical methods to further highlight

the unique aspects of Li's feminism. In chapter two, "Historical Background to Li Zhi," I offer an introduction to Li Zhi by describing his intellectual biography and introducing Li's most important works. In chapter three, "Li Zhi's Conception of the Mind," I provide an overview of Li Zhi's body of thought by offering a discussion of what I argue is the central concept underlying Li's views, the child-mind. I first discuss Li's conception of the mind within the context of a sustained discourse in Confucian thought on the subject of self cultivation. Following, I describe Li's conception of the mind using vocabulary borrowed from contemporary western thinkers, namely that of a group of scholars in the field of virtue ethics. I conclude by countering contemporary interpretations of Li Zhi as a "moral relativist" who believes there exists no normative standard with which one could condemn actions such as women's subjugation.⁶ Instead, I argue that Li is a "particularist." That is to say, Li is an ethical realist who believes that moral knowledge is accessible to anyone who works to achieve it, but that ethical judgments are not in any strong sense codifiable. Each and every moral judgment is *particular* to its specific conditions and time.

With chapter four, I begin a discussion of Li's views on women and introduce Li Zhi as a thinker who attacks the traditional notion of women as inferior to men. I first describe two different conceptions of gender relations as found in the early Chinese classic the *Book of Changes*. I refer to these two conceptions as "hierarchical" and "complementary" views of gender relations. I

⁶ See, for example, Peterson (1998).

then argue that Li at times puts forth a version of the complementary conception, and at times another view that I refer to as an “identical” vision of gender. By identical, I mean that Li conceives of men and women as possessing the same intellectual and spiritual talents as do men. I conclude with questions raised by the fact that Li presents disparate views of his conception of women. We might speculate that the difference is due to a change in views in his later life, or a difference in the audience he is addressing. Perhaps the explanation lies in a difference of concerns: Li’s radical views on specific issues might be distinct from his carefully considered theoretical views.

In Chapter Five “Gender and Social Space,” I am motivated by the question, What, if anything, is unique to Li’s views on women’s liberation? To answer this question, I begin by describing the centrality of the “public” and “private” distinction in western feminist analyses of gender oppression. Most particularly, I examine the ideas of the liberal feminist John Stuart Mill. Throughout Chinese history, social space has consistently been conceived of as divided between the “inner” 內 *nei* and the “outer” 外 *wai*. In contrast to the private/public paradigm which can be characterized as impermeable and categorical, the inner/outer model is one that is permeable and graduated. After reviewing the concepts of private and of public, I show how a number of prominent Chinese scholars have contributed to the misunderstanding of the Chinese conception of social space, by translating the terms *nei* and *wai* as “private” and “public.”

Having set up the conceptual framework for the chapter, I then go on to argue that an imposition of the concepts “private” and “public” onto the ideas of Li Zhi only serves to obscure our ability to see what is truly unique to Li’s vision of gender equality. By understanding Li Zhi’s ideas on gender within the context of a society as divided between an “inner” and “outer” sphere, we then are able to see that the Confucian project of self cultivation is one of the most central features of Li’s feminism. Li insists that at birth women have every bit as much potential as men for intellectual and spiritual development. Opportunities for self cultivation must be opened up not simply to men of all social strata, but also, Li asserts, to women. I conclude by identifying Li’s feminism as a form of “inclusive revisionism.” Li never speaks of a need for structural changes in society that would enable women to participate alongside men in the project of self cultivation. However, he does insist that certain resources for such a project, such as access to teachers and texts, ought to be available to women.

In Chapter Six “Feminism as Self and Social Transformation,” I am concerned with the question, Does Li’s strategy of self cultivation have the ability to transform the socio-political world? I begin by describing two different conceptions of self cultivation, one as primarily a spiritual project, and the other as centered on transforming the political world. In describing these two visions of self cultivation, I take as a model cultural feminist Mary Daly’s idea of “exorcising,” and Catharine MacKinnon’s idea of “consciousness raising,” respectively. With these two types of self cultivation in mind, I turn to a

discussion of Li Zhi and show that Li assumes a social world where the spiritual and the political life are inextricably linked. He operates with categories different than that of MacKinnon's and Daly's. An understanding of this different conception of the social world enables one better to perceive Li's vision of self cultivation as involving both spiritual and political transformation.

In Chapter Seven, I point to two possible paths for future research, one that involves examining conceptions of gender in early China and studying how such ideas inform feminism as it develops in China. A second idea is that of the study of contemporary Chinese feminism, and more particularly feminist voices during the May Fourth era (1915-1925). In describing this second project I suggest starting from the question, What problems, issues, and strategies for women's liberation are obscured or rendered invisible when we read a western project onto Chinese traditions? With both projects, I am interested in identifying indigenous Chinese feminisms. Following the conclusion I have included an appendix of annotated translations of Li Zhi's writings. The essays selected are ones that are central to his work or speak to the subject of gender.

The Term "Feminism"

At least one clarification needs to be addressed at this point in terms of the use of terminology. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term feminist in different contexts and most often in reference to Li Zhi. Throughout history there have existed voices and campaigns arguing for the liberation of women.

However, the common understanding among scholars of feminism is that literature and political action on behalf of women's emancipation did not appear as a sustained dialogue until the end of the 18th century in Europe. The term feminism was coined a century after the emergence of this movement. At the end of the 19th century, the term *la féminisme* began to circulate in France, and soon thereafter, was translated in America into the term "feminism."

In China, a sustained discourse on women's liberation first emerged during the May Fourth era. The common perception of Chinese women as socially and politically victimized was claimed by progressive Chinese intellectuals as a symbol for China's lack of modernization, and both situations were blamed on a conception of Chinese culture, and in particular Confucianism, as impermeable to change. During this time, Euro-American feminist writings circulated in China through translations of Japanese renderings of these original texts. The terms commonly used as translation for feminism were "female-ism" 女子主義 *nuzizhuyi*, "womanism" 婦女主義 *funuzhuyi*, "the -ism of women's rights" 女權主義 *nuquan zhuyi*, and the transliteration of feminism, 弗彌蓮士姆 *fuminieshimu*. By the time of Maoist China, the Communist Chinese Party approved of but a single rendering of the western term "feminism," that of "the -ism of women's rights" *nuquanzhuyi*, and censured the concept as being "bourgeois" because it narrowly referred to the promotion of women's power rather than the wholesale overturning of capitalistic structures. Since the time of Mao, western feminist issues have regained some popularity under the more

commonly used term “female-ism” *nuxingzhuyi* which has become the most commonly used translation.⁷ The recent adoption of the term *nuxingzhuyi* in mainland China very possibly was inspired by its use in Taiwan, where it has been the common currency for several decades.

I use the term “feminism” to refer to Li Zhi fully aware that it is in some sense anachronistic. The term emerged from a diverse but nevertheless coherent body of literature addressing the problem of women’s oppression within a particular historical period and a distinct set of cultural circumstances. Li’s discourse is not historically tied to this body of literature. As I mentioned earlier, my aim throughout the dissertation is to point to ways in which Li Zhi’s views on gender come into dialogue with contemporary discourse on gender. In this effort, I strive to use terms that already exist and are familiar to those who work within western feminist discourse when the use of such terms, even if historically problematic, is for the most part illuminating and productive. The use of “feminism” in reference to Li Zhi’s writings is a clear example of the application of this principle. I remove the term feminism from its historical-cultural context and use it to describe a thinker, Li Zhi, who articulates a clear vision of intellectual and spiritual equality between men and women, and whose ideas are one small part of a larger on-going discourse in China on women’s

⁷ For a fuller discussion on the translation of “feminism” in China, see Zheng Wang (1999), pp. 1-66.

liberation.⁸ The use of the term “feminist” to identify Li Zhi also opens the possibility of broadening the meaning of the term to include a Confucian conception of gender equality. In speaking of feminism in this project, I mean the notion that women ought not be socially disadvantaged because of their sex. It is the notion that women ought to be given the same opportunities as men do to pursue a fulfilling life.

Textual Conventions and Citation of Texts

In romanizing the Chinese, I have chosen to use the *pinyin* system because it is currently most widely accepted. Two exceptions to my use of *pinyin* are with proper names and published works that have become commonly known under another romanization system. When quoting translations by other scholars, I have romanized the Chinese terms in *pinyin* for the sake of consistency. When I have modified a translation, I indicate that the translation has been “adapted.”

While there are two published English translations of a few of Li Zhi’s essays, there is as yet no substantial collection of his writings available in any western language.⁹ Therefore, I have included in my dissertation an appendix of

⁸ See contemporary discussions on Li Zhi’s views on women such as Xu (1984), Sun (1984), Xian Women’s Federation (1975), and People’s Liberation Army Hospital Group (1975).

⁹ See Owen (1996), pp. 808-811, and DeBary’s translations of portions of selected essays in DeBary and Bloom (1999), pp. 865-873.

selected annotated translations of Li Zhi's writings. In translating these writings I have relied on the following texts in light of their accuracy and availability:

Fenshu 焚書 [*A Book to Burn*], (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961).

Xufenshu 續焚書 [*An Addendum to A Book to Burn*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961.

Cangshu 藏書 [*A Book to Hide*], (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961).

Xu Cangshu 續藏書 [*An Addendum to A Book to Hide*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961.

Chutan Ji 初潭集 [*Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974.

All translations of Li's writings in this dissertation are my own. When referencing the translations, I will cite the title of the essay from which the quotation is drawn. The full essay in translation and references to the original Chinese text can be found in the appendix.

Chapter Two

Historical Background to Li Zhi

Li Zhi, commonly known under his cognomen Li Zhuowu 李卓吾,¹ was born on October 3, 1527 in Quanzhou, Fujian province. He spent the first decade and a half of his life in this southern China port city. Like most young men from the literati class, his early schooling involved rigorous tutoring in the Confucian classics, history, and literature. Around 1548, he was married to a woman surnamed Huang 黃 (1533-1588 CE), and through the years he and his wife had seven children, three boys and four daughters. Only the eldest daughter was to survive into adulthood. In 1552 Li passed the provincial examinations and throughout the next twenty-five years he served in a number of posts as a minor government official. The highest position he held was prefect of Yaoan at which he served from 1577-1580. His other positions included: director of Confucian studies at the county level (for three years), instructor at the Imperial University in Nanjing (for two years), manager of business office of the Ministry of Rites (for five years), and vice director at the Ministry of Justice at Nanjing (for almost five years).² In his letters he expressed little satisfaction with serving in these

¹ Li's original name is Lin Zaizhi 林載贇. He is also known under a number of other names. His most common style is Hongfu 宏父 and his cognomen is Zhuowu 卓吾. For further discussion on this topic, see Goodrich and Fang (1976), pp. 807-810.

² For further discussion of Li's bureaucratic career, see Goodrich and Fang (1976), pp. 807-810.

positions, and often complained about the poor pay and the constricting nature of the work. In contrast, Li's intellectual career, to which he devoted himself after retiring from political life, earned him a national reputation and was, in his words, deeply gratifying.

In his mid-fifties, we find Li making certain choices that radically alter his circumstances. In 1588 he left his wife and one surviving daughter, had them escorted back to Quanzhou, and thereupon adopted the Buddhist tonsure. This action may indicate that Li had chosen to identify with a certain Buddhist world view. Li himself dismisses such a notion and writes in a number of his essays that his decision was an act enabling him to free himself from consuming obligations to his extended family. As a moderately successful official, had he returned to his hometown, he would have been entangled in responding to requests from even remote family relations. Li's relationship with his wife reveals a tension between his respect for a traditional and a more progressive conception of the ideal woman. On the one hand, Li praises his wife for her virtue and ability to sacrifice herself for others. And yet, on the other hand, we find him arguing for the merits of a spousal relationship based on intellectual and spiritual equality.³ In chapter four we will discuss in some depth Li's

³ As we will see, Li was deeply influenced by Buddhism. It would not be too far fetched to imagine, then, that he saw resonances between his decision to sever himself from his family, and the story of Shakyamuni leaving his wife and child upon deciding to seek enlightenment.

abandonment of his wife and daughter, and the problematic nature of such actions for his feminist thinking.

In letters to friends around the late 1580s, Li wrote that his world was transformed by reading works of the great Ming Confucian thinker Wang Yangming and Buddhist texts such as the *Diamond Sutra*.⁴ Increasingly beginning in his mid-fifties, Li Zhi sought intellectual stimulation through engagement with a diverse set of texts, schools of thought, and conversation partners. In the 1580s Li studied and wrote a commentary on the seminal Chinese Daoist texts, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*.⁵ Li also met a number of times and exchanged letters and poems with the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci.⁶ In the late 1500s Li became deeply influenced by and close friends with several thinkers of the Taizhou school, a branch of Neo-Confucian thought drawing its intellectual resources from Wang Yangming. Li's closest intellectual friends were thinkers such as

⁴ For an English translation of this text, see Conze (1958). Also, for a discussion of the role of Buddhism in Wang Yangming's thought, see Wing-tsit Chan (1962).

⁵ See Li's 老莊解 *Lao Zhuang Jie*, undated Ming block-print. For further information see Hok-lam Chan (1980), p. 171. Also, see 李卓吾遺書十二種 *Li Zhuowu Yishu Shier Zhong*, Ming block-print edition, located at National Beijing University library. For further information see Hok-lam Chan (1980), p. 166.

⁶ See Franke (1939). Also, for a letter by Li on Ricci, see Li Zhi, "Yu Youren Shu" 與友人書 [Letter to a Friend], *An Addendum to A Book to Burn*, p. 35.

Wang Ji 王畿,⁷ and members of the Taizhou school such as the brothers Geng

⁷ Wang Ji (May 26, 1498-July 25, 1583), also known as Ruzhong 汝中 or Longxi 龍谿, is considered by many scholars to be one of the most original thinkers among Wang Yangming's disciples. The influential Qing scholar Huang Zhongxi describes Wang Ji as Wang Yangming's spiritual heir. Wang Ji's son, Wang Pi, also became an accomplished and influential scholar. One of Wang Ji's most interesting contributions is what has come to be referred to as his "Doctrine of the Ready-Made Liangzhi" 良知現成論 *liang zhi xiancheng lun*. Wang Ji believed that all humans were born with an obscured, but nevertheless fully developed and sagely mind. In other words, all people are born with fully developed *liang zhi*. One simply needs to be awakened to this fact. Among Wang Ji's writings is the *Longxi Yulu* 龍谿語錄, which includes a preface by Li Zhi. For further discussion, see Goodrich and Fang (1976), pp. 1351-1355.

Dingxiang 耿定向⁸ and Geng Dingli 耿定理,⁹ Jiao Hong 焦竑,¹⁰ and Lo Rufang 羅汝芳.¹¹ His relationships with Geng Dingli and with Jiao Hong were particularly

⁸ Geng Dingxiang (1524-1596), cognomen Zailun 在倫, is the elder of the two famous Geng brothers. He was an influential thinker in his time, identifying himself with the Tai Zhou school. His numerous published writings include two historical works 先進遺風 *Xianjing Yifeng* and 碩輔寶鑑 *Shifu Baojian*. He also enjoyed a successful official career, rising to such high offices as governor of Fujian and minister of Revenue. As with Wang Ji, Geng held that *liangzhi* was present wholly in all humans. While people's sagely nature was obscured at birth, nevertheless, the sagely mind was fully developed and present upon birth. Clarifying one's muddled good nature involved the deceptively simple task of realization that one was born a sage. Geng Dingxiang and Li Zhi had a close but difficult relationship. Geng criticized Li for being too Buddhist in his thinking. Li, on his part, censured Geng for not intervening in his capacity as an official to save a mutual friend and influential intellectual Ho Xinyin.

⁹ Geng Dingli (1534-84), cognomen Ziyong 子庸, was considered the more contemplative of the two well-known Geng brothers. He never took office, and though he had students, rarely gave formal lectures. He was deeply influenced by Buddhism, and was a close friend of Li Zhi's. See Huang Zhongxi's *Mingshi Xuean* for a Qing dynasty biography of Geng. For English translation of this text, see Ching (1987), pp. 194-196. For further discussion on Li Zhi's relationship with the two Geng brothers, see Jin Jiang (2001).

¹⁰ Jiao Hong 焦竑 (~1541-1620 CE), also known as Rohou and Danyuan, was an influential thinker of the Taizhou school and an effective bureaucrat. He was one of Geng Dingxiang's most favored students, and Li Zhi's closest friend. For further discussion on Jiao's life and works, see Edward T. Ch'ien's *Chiao Hung and the Restructuring of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹¹ Luo Rufang (July 13, 1515-October 21, 1588), also known as Weide 惟德 and Jinxi 近谿, was a well-known scholar of the Taizhou school. Throughout his life he exhibited an unquenchable desire for learning, first delving into the methods of assiduous study as advocated by the school of Chengyi (1033-1107 C.E.) and Zhu Xi (1130-1200 C.E.), and then turning to the Tai Zhou branch of the Wang Yangming school. He was one of the most scholarly of the thinkers identified with the Tai Zhou school. Two of his ideas are particularly interesting. First, he believed there was a unity to all things. The Dao pervaded the universe and

intimate. Describing his relationship with Jiao Hong, Li wrote, "...our minds intimately coincide like the halves of a tally."¹²

The lower Yangzi valley of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a place of relative economic and cultural prosperity with a great deal of upward mobility. Thinkers from the Taizhou school came from all walks of life. Some were well-educated and came from the elite ruling class, while others were woodcutters, potters, or farmers. The school was led by Wang Gen 王艮 (ca. 1483-1540 CE), a man of little former education and a salt merchant by profession, and is named for his hometown, Taizhou, in modern Jiangsu province.¹³ The Taizhou school of Wang Yangming's followers has been described as the "Wild Chan," "radical," or "left-wing" branch. Thinkers of the Taizhou school were considered by both themselves and others as "wild" or

united all people past and present. This Dao is found not in words and texts, but in freeing one's mind from preoccupations. Luo was also deeply interested in the idea of a "infant mind" which we will discuss later in this chapter. For further discussion of Luo, see Goodrich and Fang, v. 1, pages 975-978.

¹² I borrow this translation from Ch'ien (1986), p. 39. For the original Chinese, see Li Zhi, *An Addendum to A Book to Burn*, 2:56.

¹³ For further discussion on Wang Gen, see Carson Chang (1957), v. 2, pp. 25-27, 113-118, and also DeBary (1970), pp. 157-178. Also, see Goodrich and Fang (1976), v. 2, pp. 1382-1385.

“mad” 狂 *kuang*.¹⁴ Among the members of the school, Li was conceived of by his friends and critics as one of the “madder” representatives. Generally speaking, thinkers of the Taizhou school deeply valued the intuitions of the individual over the teachings of texts and tradition, exalted the natural intelligence and morality of the common person, and rallied for revolutionary social change. The emphasis on intuition and spontaneity can be seen in marked contrast to the emphasis on philology and methodical scholarship found in the “evidential research” school of learning that flourished in the Qing (1644-1911 CE).

In Li’s time and in the centuries following, there have existed a wide range of views as to the merits of the ideas put forward by those from the Taizhou school. Some, such as the famous Chinese scholar Liang Qichao (1873-1929), found them morally bankrupt. Liang writes, “.....there was a group in the Ming known as the *kuang chan* (“wild Chan”) [who thought] that ‘every street is full of sages’ and that ‘wine, women, wealth, and passion do not block the road to enlightenment’. Their ethics hit rock bottom.”¹⁵ Yet others found thinkers from the Taizhou school to be compelling, passionate, and a much needed dose of spontaneity and individual expression. While thinkers from this school were

¹⁴ Julia Ching translates the term as “mad ardor,” and describes Wang Yangming as valuing “mad ardor” as a means to attaining sagehood. See Ching (1976), pp. 26, 49-50, 53, 224. In the *Analects*, one also finds Confucius speaking of 狂 as noble flaw in individuals. For example, see *Analects* 18.5.

¹⁵ See Liang (1959), p. 28.

considered in general by literati of the time as at the margins of traditional Confucian thought,¹⁶ nevertheless their ideas were deeply influential in late Ming society.

Before turning to a discussion on Li's writings, we should note that Li is best known for his pioneering literary theory and his marked influence on the late-Ming Gong'an 公安 school of literary thought. He is credited with being the personal teacher of the famous Yuan brothers, Yuan Zongdao (1560-1600), Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610), and Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1623), who were at the forefront of the Gong'an school, which defended the idea that the best of literature emerges in moments of spontaneity and is marked by the unique characteristics of the individual artist.¹⁷ In contrast to traditional literary theories which, generally speaking, established a meritocratic hierarchy between various genres and valued particular literary devices, Li insisted that all forms of literature are equally valuable as long as the writings are passionately felt expressions of the particular individual.

While Li studied and wrote throughout much of his life, the majority of his written works were produced from his fifties until his death at the age of 75. Throughout this period, Li was a prolific and controversial writer, and proved to

¹⁶ For a Ming period classification of the various Confucian schools of the late Ming period, see Tsung-hsi Huang (1987).

¹⁷ For a discussion on the Gong'an school, see Chih-P'ing Chou (1988) and Hung (1974).

be remarkably astute at getting his works published and circulated.¹⁸ His extant books number fifty and include a wide range of works: letters to friends, poems, critiques of plays and novels, and essays on philosophy and social criticism. Li himself was widely read by the literati of his time. Although many of his works were banned by the state in the late Ming and Qing periods,¹⁹ one Sichuan provincial censor wrote to the emperor in 1625, "and yet, even though [Li's works are] prohibited, many gentry enjoy his books and have hidden them away, so that even today they have not been exterminated."²⁰ In Li's time, men customarily wore jackets with wide sleeves. One scholar of Li's time commented that in every scholar's jacket sleeves, one could find hidden a copy of one of Li's books.

Li Zhi's Writings

Li Zhi's two most famous writings are: *A Book to Burn* 焚書 *Fen Shu*, a volume of Li's letters, prefaces, poems, and short essays which was published in

¹⁸ For an annotated bibliography on Li's extant works, see Hok-lam Chan 1980: 161-182. For a bibliography on extant versions of Li's *A Book to Hide* and *A Book to Burn*, see pages 163-165, and 167-169, respectively.

¹⁹ *A Book to Hide* was banned in 1602 and again in 1625, though ineffectively as the book was sometimes published under a different title or inserted within other texts to avoid official proscription. It was also banned during the Qing period, along with *A Book to Burn*, *An Addendum to A Book to Burn*, and *An Addendum to A Book to Hide*. For further discussion on the banning of Li's books, see Goodrich (1966).

²⁰ See Gu (1834), 18.31b. I borrow this translation from Brook (1998), p. 171.

1590, and *A Book to Hide* 藏書 *Cang Shu*,²¹ consisting of Li's commentaries on history, which was published in 1600. With *A Book to Burn*, we find Li at his most vitriolic and trenchant, criticizing the contemporary preoccupation with abstract metaphysical systems and the hypocrisy of the Neo-Confucian elite. For example, we find short essays satirizing the stuffy Confucian bureaucrat who can recite the Confucian classics line and verse and give orations on the virtues of benevolence and sincerity, but in truth simply covets material gain and social status. We also find letters where Li criticizes the ruling elite's fixation with metaphysical theories at the cost of serious inquiry into problems of feeding the people or creating a strong military to protect the people. In a number of essays, Li puts forth the notion that what he terms "selfishness" 私 *si* is what makes society operate efficiently and smoothly.²² When ample rewards are given, farmers will devote all their energies to reaping large crops and merchants will do their best to make money. When people are given the opportunity to do what they choose, they will do it with all their energies and most likely do it well. Li argues against the traditional view that the loftiest of professions is that of a scholar-official. Rather, he insists that each profession has its particular merits.

Among Li's other heterodox theories are his views on women, which we will examine at length beginning in chapter four. In brief, Li insists that

²¹ For Li's synopsis of *A Book to Hide*, see the appendix, "Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in the *Cangshu*."

²² For example, see the appendix, "An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar Officials."

intellectually and spiritually, women are no different than men. In a culture where lengthy conversations between men and women who were not related by blood was frowned upon, he writes letters to his female pupils on subjects such as the meaning of emptiness in Chan Buddhism. In short, in *A Book to Burn* we see Li standing up for values such as sincerity, the congruity of word and action, a certain degree of selfishness, and a deep appreciation for diverse approaches to life.²³ Li values what traditionally has been devalued. Amidst controversy, Li insists on the equality of women with men, views the work of a merchant to be as valuable if not more so than that of a scholar-official, and transvalues traditional vices such as selfishness into virtues.

In *A Book to Hide* Li takes on a similarly vitriolic tone but criticizes social values and contemporary philosophical thought through a different medium, that of historical biographies. Through the medium of presenting and commenting on historical biographies from the Spring and Autumn period (772-481 BCE) through the Yuan (1206-1368 CE), Li mercilessly criticizes certain traditional Confucian values and again, creates a heterodox version of morality. The structure of *A Book to Hide* echoes that of Sima Qian's (145-90 BCE) famous

²³ Indeed, throughout Li's works is an appreciation for diverse ways of life. To appreciate the endless variety of well lived lives is a central virtue to Li. Philip J. Ivanhoe sees Zhuangzi as promoting such a virtue, and refers to it as "ethical promiscuity." For further discussion on "ethical promiscuity", see Philip J. Ivanhoe "Was Zhuangzi a Relativist" in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996): 208, 210, 213.

historical work *Records of the Grand Historian*,²⁴ Sima's history is not the first in Chinese history, predating the *Records* was, for example, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of the state of Lu and the *Bamboo Annals*. However, unlike these earlier histories which were arranged chronologically, Sima was the first to present history primarily in the form of biographies.²⁵

Li's *A Book to Hide* mirrors Sima's *Records of the Grand Historian* in yet a second significant way. One underlying notion running through Chinese thought is the idea that history is cyclical in nature with periods of prosperity inevitably followed by periods of disorder.²⁶ While Sima was not the first to articulate such a view of history, his is one of the most influential accounts of history that does present history in such a manner. For the past two millennia both the structure, underlying philosophical assumptions, and the succinct style of Sima Qian's work has been considered the model for well-written history. For example, such prominent works as the twenty-four "Official" or "Standard" Histories, imperially sponsored official histories of China from the Han through the Ming period, present history through the vehicle of a series of biographies.

²⁴ For an English translation, see Watson (1961). For a brief introduction on the *Records of the Historian*, see Loewe (1993).

²⁵ The *Records of the Grand Historian* is divided into five sections: basic annals, chronological tables, treatises, hereditary houses, and biographies. Central to the 130 chapters of the book are 70 chapters devoted to biographies.

²⁶ For further discussion of Chinese theories of history, see Ivanhoe (1998), pp. 446-452.

While Li's work is transparently similar in structure to that of Sima's, there are also clear and significant differences between the two works. For example, through a difference in tone, Li expresses a markedly different conception of truth. In Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* he writes,

When I have truly completed this work, I shall
deposit it in the Famous Mountain Archives. If it
may be handed down to men who will appreciate
it, and penetrate to the villages and great cities,
then though I should suffer a thousand mutilations,
what regret should I have?²⁷

In contrast, Li insists in *A Book to Burn*,

This book is for my own pleasure. I have entitled it *A Book to Hide*. What meaning does this title, *A Book to Hide*, hold? The title refers to the fact that it can only be read for my own pleasure and should not be shown to others....But what am I to do if a few meddlesome friends insistently ask to borrow this book....I only say as a warning, if you read this, judge it based on your own opinions. As long as you do not use Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* to

²⁷ For the original passage, see chapter 130 of the *Records of the Grand Historian*. This passage is also found in the biography on Sima Qian in the *Official History of the Han*. I borrow this translation from Watson (1961), p. xii.

[judge the characters in my book and] dispense of
punishments and rewards, then it will be fine.²⁸

As we described above, in its structure, Li's book reflects that of Sima's. However, the content of Li's work can be seen in strong tension with the structure of Li's *A Book to Hide*. In contrast to Sima who urgently desires to promote his work to all the "villages and great cities," Li writes that *A Book to Hide* is "for my own pleasure." Sima sees his judgement of history as true trans-temporally. In contrast, Li wishes his readers to understand what is true is context-dependent. The only reliable judge of right and wrong is one's own self, or more particularly, what Li refers to as the "child-mind," a concept we will describe in detail in the following chapter. Throughout Li's work, he challenges people to think for themselves and to think locally. He urges people to "...judge it based on your own opinions" and to think in terms of context rather than apply given rules universally. He writes, "...do not use Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* to...dispense of punishments and rewards...." By borrowing a form of historical writing made famous by Sima's *Records of the Grand Historian* and later, the Official Histories, we can read Li as allying himself with these cultural classics and conveying the message that his work is of much significance. And yet, throughout his *A Book to Hide* one of Li's central efforts is the undermining of authority.

²⁸ See the appendix, "Introduction to the Table Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in the *Cangshu*."

Tensions and apparent contradictions abound in Li's writings. Thus far we have alluded to the disparity between Li's thought and his practice in regard to women. In the following pages we will see another apparent contradiction in Li's thought. On the one hand, Li praises the virtues of one of the most authoritarian rulers in Chinese history, Qin Shi Huangdi. On the other hand, I will show in the following chapter that most central to Li's philosophy is what he refers to as the "child-mind," an inner self that is found in all people and is innately good. Scholars of Li Zhi have often pointed to his writings as flawed by contradictions. However, in this dissertation I suggest that in fact, Li's most innovative ideas are found at these points of tension and contradiction.

To return to the topic of Li's *A Book to Hide*, throughout the text Li undermines authoritative commentaries on historical figures and transforms traditional long-standing cultural values. For example, while history has most commonly judged Qin Shi Huangdi to be a man of great cruelty, Li argues that Qin Shi Huangdi was a remarkable and admirable ruler.²⁹ Two well-known incidents ordered by Qin Shi Huangdi are the Burning of the Books in 213 BCE and the Burying of the Scholars in the following year. Believing that vibrant

²⁹ Qin Shi Huangdi ruled the state of Qin from 246-221 BCE, conquered and unified China, and declared himself the first universal emperor in 221 BCE ruling from 221-210 BCE. See *Cangshu*, pages 13-16. While Li's views were certainly novel for his time, note that he was not the first to hold sympathetic views toward Qin Shi Huangdi. The famous Ming Confucian Wang Yangming, though he did not admire Qin Shi Huangdi in the same way as did Li Zhi, did think well of Qin Shi Huangdi's burning of the books. For further discussion on Wang Yangming's views on this topic, see Ivanhoe (2002).

philosophical discourse would destabilize the country and also divert people from serving efficiently as soldiers and farmers, Qin Shi Huangdi ordered the burning of thousands of books and the execution of an estimated 460 scholars.

Despite such cruelties, Li judges well of Qin Shi Huangdi. For Li, morality is context-dependent on factors such as time and place, and one's position in society. Those who are responsible to a few should be held to different standards than those public figures such as great statesmen who must act in the best interest of a large population. In Li's eyes, to focus one's attention on Qin Shi Huangdi's cruelties is to overlook his larger and even magnificent achievements which brought forth benefits immeasurably enhancing the lives of ordinary people for centuries to come. Li highlights Qin Shi Huangdi's achievements such as the unification of warring feudal states into a single China, systematization of disparate systems of weights, and the establishment of infrastructures of roads. As we mentioned earlier, Li's endorsement of the notion that certain ends, those that bring about the greater good, justify means that sometimes are oppressive of individuals can be seen as at least in tension with his valuing of each individual's innate child-mind.

While Li's most well-known and influential publications are *A Book to Burn* and *A Book to Hide*, in highlighting his works on women, we should also mention his book *Collection of Essays First Begun at the Lake* 初潭集 *Chutanji*. The precise year of publication for this book is unknown, though we do know he wrote it sometime during the period between 1585-1588. The work is a commentary on

the biographical figures detailed in two books. The first is the famous *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世說新語 *Shishuo Xinyu*, written by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444 CE) and put together by his staff in 430 CE. The book depicts admirable characters from the 2nd through the 4th century CE. The second is *Mr. Jiao's Collection of Works* 焦氏類林 *Jiaoshi Leilin* (1587), written by Li Zhi's close friend Jiao Hong. The book imitates the structure of *A New Account of Tales of the World* while covering a greater breadth of time, the pre-Qin through the Yuan period. Li brings the biographies from these two books together, reclassifies them, and interpolates commentary detailing the virtues and vices of different personalities. The book is important to Li's collection of works in that it serves as a precursor to his *A Book to Hide*. For our purposes in the study of Li's views on women, the book is important in that it provides a number of Li's commentaries on women in history.

In 1600 after the publication of *A Book To Hide*, a mob hired by local officials burned down Li's residence, the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha.³⁰ For the next two years he lived his life as a house guest, generously supported by his gentry friends. In his last twenty years of life he had written prolifically and spoken fiercely. His works were widely read by intellectuals and some found him refreshing and exhilaratingly imaginative, while others, especially those in power, considered him a heretical rebel. In 1601, the Chief Ministry of

³⁰ For a discussion on the persecution of Li Zhi, see Jin Jiang (2001).

Rites presented before the emperor an indictment against Li Zhi. Li was accused of immoral conduct and attempts to misguide the people with his heterodox teachings. At the age of 75, Li was arrested and imprisoned near Beijing, to be sent back to his native province and tried for his crimes. As with Li's writings, the narrative of Li's death is also infused with ambiguity. The facts, as bare as can be presented, are that one day while in prison he requested a razor presumably in order to shave. He then cut his own throat and died two days later.³¹

Why did Li commit suicide? Many Li Zhi scholars have taken this act to be symbolic of his intellectual life as whole. Some have considered his suicide as a courageous choice made on behalf of principled convictions. Others have painted Li Zhi as a talented but frustrated thinker, a victim of his time when dissident voices were heavily suppressed by the disintegrating Ming state.³² His suicide, in the minds of such scholars, is driven by such frustration, and the value of his writings is as a record of the intellectual milieu during his time. With little agreement through the centuries, Li Zhi scholars have debated the legacy of Li's work. As we saw earlier in this chapter, some thinkers waxed rhapsodic about Li's writings and gave evidence of his immense popularity by pointing to the image of scholars everywhere running around with a copy of Li's works in their sleeves. In contrast, scholars such as the Qing intellectual Liang Qichao

³¹ See Yuan Hongdao's forward "Li Wenlin Zhuan" in *A Book to Burn*, pp. 4-5.

³² For such a view of Li Zhi, see, for example, Huang (1981), p. 221.

condemned Li's defense of spontaneity and naturalness as a product of an indolent mind and lax morals. In chapters four, five, and six, I examine an understudied subject in Li's works, that of gender, and argue that with regard to his views on gender, Li offers a well developed, philosophically valuable, and for his time, indisputably radical view of gender relations. These views on gender are scattered throughout his works as sentence long comments on historical narratives, letters and poems both short and long, and in the way he lived his life. When one puts together these writings and comments and stories of his life, one realizes that before one lays a clear, distinct, and progressive vision of gender relations.

Through a discussion of Li's views on gender, my suggestion is that Li's ideas as a whole are similar to his views on gender in at least one way. As with Li's views on gender, Li's ideas as a whole come in bits and pieces. He aims at a single target, but presents his views through various tones and genres. At times he is satirical, at times rhetorical, and at other times he is deeply mournful. When one stands back and considers the larger picture, it becomes clear that Li is a man with deep convictions. While clear in its vision, his writings do not present a picture that is systematic in its details. However, his writings do reveal to us the recordings of an imaginative man who wrestled honestly with the

complexities of difficult issues. Having given a brief introduction to Li Zhi's intellectual life and works, let us now provide a framework for understanding Li's views on gender by turning to an introduction to one of the central concepts in his works, that of the child-mind.

Chapter Three

Li Zhi's Concept of the Mind

In this chapter, I would like to examine a concept that I argue underlies Li's entire body of work. That is, his innovative conception of the mind. An introduction to this concept provides an important foundation for which to understand Li's work as a whole, and of particular relevance to the following chapters, Li's vision of gender equality. An example will help illustrate the fundamental nature of Li's conception of the mind to his work. Among contemporary interpretations of Li Zhi, Willard Peterson argues that relativism is the central concept with which to understand Li.¹ Peterson writes that as a "relativist...[Li] did not see a need to hold settled views."² However, through a discussion of Li's conception of the mind, we will see that it is not the case for Li that anything goes, either aesthetically or ethically. For example, Li vehemently argues against the cloistering of women within the domestic sphere, the moral prohibition against widow remarriage, and the subordination of women in general. For Li, the mind lies at the foundation of all that is true.

I begin examining Li's conception of mind within the context of the theme of self cultivation, a subject prominent in Confucian thought. Following, by way of comparing Li's conception of the mind with the views of three scholars

¹ See Peterson (1998).

² See Peterson (1998), p. 746.

working in the area of virtue ethics—R. Jay Wallace, Jonathan Dancy, and John McDowell—I will attempt to further illuminate Li’s concept of the mind. Let us now turn to a discussion of self cultivation as conceived by a number of the most influential Confucian thinkers from antiquity through the time of Li Zhi, and then focus our attention on describing self cultivation as reformulated by Li.

Self Cultivation and Li Zhi’s Conception of the Mind

The topic of self cultivation runs throughout all of the Confucian tradition and from antiquity through the present has been envisioned in various nuanced ways by different thinkers.³ For example, the two great interpreters in ancient China of Confucius’ thought, Mengzi (391-308 BCE) and Xunzi (310-219 BCE), conceived of self cultivation in significantly different terms. Mengzi believes that self cultivation is a process that involves nurturing and *developing* nascent moral inclinations. This process requires intuition, reflection, and study. In contrast, Xunzi argues against Mengzi and claims that humans are born with various passions, and that part of being human is learning to *re-form* these passions. Self cultivation, then, involves reigning in and channelling innate inclinations. Since there is little that is innately morally good about humans, intuition plays no role—at least in the initial stages of self cultivation—in Xunzi’s program and reflection in general is much less emphasized in comparison to diligent study of

³ For a detailed discussion of this subject see Ivanhoe (2000b); and also, Ivanhoe (1990), pp. 473-493.

the proper texts and with the proper teachers. Another significant contrast in conceptions of self cultivation in the Confucian tradition arises between ancient Confucian thinkers such as Mengzi (ca. 379-289 BCE) and Xunzi (298-238 BCE), and Neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE) and Wang Yangming (1479-1529 CE) who, influenced by Buddhist thinking, articulate a *discovery*⁴ model of self cultivation. For these Neo-Confucians, we all are born with a fully developed moral mind which is obscured by murky selfish desires. The project of self cultivation involves dissipating these desires. As we will see, for Zhu Xi, discovery of this fully developed moral mind is an arduous task that involves, among other things, diligent study of classical texts, practice of traditional rituals, and a regimen of “quiet sitting” meditation. In contrast, Wang Yangming sees the discovery of one’s innate good nature as involving an inward reflection on one’s own nature in the course of one’s daily life.

By the time of Zhu Xi, methods of self cultivation begin to be referred to with particular terms of art. Commonly found in Neo-Confucian texts are the terms “honoring one’s moral nature” 尊德性 *zun de xing* and “pursuing inquiry and study” 道問學 *dao wen xue*.⁵ Much of Neo-Confucian thought can be viewed as a conversation regarding the meaning of these two methods of self

⁴ I borrow this distinction among a *development*, *discovery*, and *re-form* model of self cultivation from the works of Philip J. Ivanhoe and Lee Yearley. See Ivanhoe (2000b), and Yearley (1990), pp. 53-111.

⁵ These two terms find their original source in the 27th chapter of the *Zhongyong*. For Chinese source and English translation, see James Legge, tr. *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960): 103.

cultivation, and the relative importance of each. Neo-Confucian thought is commonly seen as divided into two schools, with Cheng Yichuan (1033-1107 CE) and Zhu Xi seen as forging “the school of principle” 理學 *lixue*, and Lu Xiangshan (1139-1193 CE) and Wang Yangming as pioneering “the school of the mind” 心學 *xinxue*.⁶ Both pursuing inquiry and study, and honoring one’s moral nature play significant roles in Zhu’s and Wang’s respective views on self cultivation. However, each emphasizes a different aspect of self cultivation. To Zhu Xi, pursuing inquiry and study is the more important. Throughout his voluminous works, we repeatedly find him advocating the “extension of knowledge” 致知 *zhi zhi* through studying and examining Confucian classics and the physical world. Zhu Xi writes, “There is no other way to investigate principle to the utmost than to pay attention to everything in our daily reading of books and handling of affairs.”⁷ While Zhu emphasizes investigation of the external world through pursuing inquiry and study, Wang vocally opposes the most extreme, over-intellectualized expressions of this form of self cultivation.⁸ Learning and inquiry are important to Wang, but even more so is honoring one’s moral nature. What is most vital to the process of self cultivation is observing and

⁶ For a discussion on the historical development of and the philosophical differences between these two schools of thought, see Carsun Chang, v. 1 (1957), pp. 185-354.

⁷ See Wing-tsit Chan (1963), p. 610.

⁸ For further discussion on this topic, see Ivanhoe (2000a), pp. 67-71.

assessing the appropriateness of one's *reactions* to events. Wang differs from Zhu, then, in that relatively speaking, what is central to his thought is the mind rather than the external world. Li Zhi, deeply influenced by Wang's ideas, also places emphasis on inward reflection over study of the external world. In order to better understand Li, let us first turn to a discussion on Wang's conception of the mind.

Like most if not all Neo-Confucians, Wang is deeply influenced by Buddhist metaphysical ideas. He too believes the reason that people are immoral is because their true self, more specifically their true mind, is obscured by selfish desires. Wang commonly uses metaphors such as the sun obscured by clouds,⁹ or the eye obscured by a piece of gold to describe the deluded mind. Wang conceives of the mind as composed of 理 *li*. *Li* is found in everything, from a rock to a human being. When the material world is divided into its smallest possible parts, within each part is a full allotment of *li*. The quantity and quality of *li* in each thing is the same. While the *li* in all things is the same, what makes a thing a rock rather than a human being are differences in the quality of 氣 *qi*. Inanimate objects such as rocks are composed of the murkiest and densest types of *qi*. Humans are also endowed with different qualities of *qi*. Those who attain moral enlightenment relatively easily are endowed with clearer *qi* than those who must struggle long and hard to become moral.

Things in the world possess material form only because they are endowed

⁹ See Wing-tsit Chan (1963b), sections 21, 62, 76, 167, 171.

with *qi*. The aim of self cultivation is not to rid oneself of *qi*, but to clarify one's natural endowment of muddied *qi*. In humans, muddied *qi* manifests itself as selfishness. Central to Wang's thinking is the concept of "pure knowing" 良知 *liangzhi*, the human mind in its aware and active mode. *Liangzhi* is a moral faculty which is always aware and always capable of motivating action. While all are born with the same quality of *liangzhi*, individuals are born with varying qualities of *qi*.¹⁰ It is by exercising one's *liangzhi* in the proper way, to reflect on one's own reactions to events and actions in everyday life, that one's *qi* can be clarified. This project is not unlike that of the sun burning away the clouds obscuring it. If one does not exercise one's *liangzhi*, it is because one's *qi* is cloudy due to selfish thoughts and material desires. The act of getting oneself to exercise one's *liangzhi* is an act of willing, where willing is conceived of primarily as a form of attention. One just has to do it. It is only when one's *qi* is clear, or one's selfish thoughts have been dissipated, that one's *li* can shine through. The enlightened sage is one whose actions are guided by *li* that shines through strong and clear. Unlike, for example, Buddhists who offer *karma* as an answer to the question of why different things are given different lots in life, Wang, however, offers no answer as to why certain things are endowed with clearer and others with murkier *qi*.

¹⁰ There are a number of references in Neo-Confucian writings regarding the varying *qi* of different non-human objects in the world. However, these discussions, as far as I know, are extremely few. Unlike, for example, Daoists or Buddhists, for Confucians, humans are the center of philosophical discourse.

As we can see, Wang's moral theory focuses on the individual and even more so, the individual's mind. In contrast, Zhu Xi is more concerned with texts, teachers, rituals, and the exterior world in general. In Wang's view, one's individual *liangzhi* or pure knowing, comprised of *li* as is the pure knowing of all humans, itself possesses the power to know the difference between what is moral and immoral. For Wang, there indeed exist absolute rights and wrongs in the world and these moral truths can be readily grasped by one's pure knowing. With the idea of pure knowing in hand, Wang is able to offer an alternative to the traditional Confucian view that truth is primarily located in classical texts. For Wang, truth is entirely context-dependent and pure knowing is the capacity that is able to grasp these radically context-sensitive truths. Wang's view of the mind places great faith in the individual. Li Zhi was deeply influenced by the ideas of Wang Yangming, and his conception of the mind further develops Wang's ideas of context-sensitivity and faith in the individual.

In addition to Wang, another intellectual resource for Li's conception of the child-mind is Luo Rufang's concept of the "heart of the infant" 赤子之心 *chi zi zhi xin*.¹¹ Luo saw himself as responding to the notion that sagehood necessitates repression of one's spontaneous feelings and thoughts. As a disciple of the Wang Yangming school, Luo studied Wang's idea of "pure knowing" and was particularly interested in the notion that this function was innate though obstructed at birth. He offered his own vision by articulating a conception of

¹¹ This expression finds its locus classicus in *Mengzi* 4B12.

humans as born with a full capacity for morality that, if preserved or if wholly recovered, would naturally enable one to become a full moral being. Luo's emphasis was on the spontaneity and naturalness that one attributes to the actions of an infant. All people are born with this infant heart, and a sage simply is one who has preserved this heart that is filled with "the principle of Heaven" 天理 *tian li*. While Luo, in his discussions of the heart of the infant, is primarily concerned with morality, Li Zhi sees his conception of the child-mind as intimately related to all spheres of life whether the aesthetic, political, or ethical.

Li offers his own particular terminology with his innovative expression the "child-mind" 童心 *tong xin*. One of Li's most illuminating discussions on this concept is his famous letter "Views on the Child-mind."¹² Li Zhi believes that the true mind is the child-mind. All humans are born with this child-mind, a mind that is untainted by the moralisms and conventions of the social world. Li Zhi describes the innocence of this inborn child-like mind when he writes, "As for the child-mind, free of all falsehood and entirely genuine, it is the original mind¹³ at the very beginning of the first thought. Losing the child-mind is losing

¹² See the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind." For a published translation of this letter, see Owen (1996), pp. 808-811. Also, see Meyer-Fong (n.d.).

¹³ The concept of *benxin* 本心 "original mind" finds its *locus classicus* in the *Mengzi* 6A10: "This is a case of what is called—'Losing the proper nature of one's mind'". 此之謂失其本心。 For Chinese version and English translation of this text, see Legge (1960), v.1, p. 144.

the genuine self.”¹⁴ Li puts forward the child-mind as a metaphor for a pure and innocent mind that is ripe with creativity and unstifled by social conventions. Li was particularly critical of the hypocrisy and excessive conformity that he saw in late Ming China, and the idea of a child-mind native to all humans provided a foundation for his philosophy of spontaneity and individual expression.

In studying Li’s conception of the child-mind, one might ask, what causes one to lose one’s child-mind? Li responds it is largely contact with the alluring stimulation and corrupting hypocrisy of the external world that causes us to lose our birthright of sagehood. He speaks of the obstruction of one’s child-mind when he writes,

From the beginning, aural and visual impressions enter in through the ears and eyes. When one allows them to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-mind is lost. As one grows older, one hears and sees the Principles of the Way [i.e., moral teachings]. When one takes these to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-mind is lost.¹⁵

While similar, in many ways, Li Zhi’s conception of the mind also differs from that of earlier Neo-Confucians. As we alluded to above, Li draws from Wang Yangming’s conception of the mind as *liangzhi* or “pure knowing,” and

¹⁴ See the appendix, “Views on the Child-mind.”

¹⁵ See the appendix, “Views on the Child-mind.”

pushes this conception of moral intuitionism to an even more radical degree.

One of Li's fundamental beliefs is the innate goodness of all people. Unlike most Neo-Confucians, Li's model of self cultivation is not a *discovery* model but rather, a *preservation* model which holds preservation of the "child-mind" as the key to intellectual, moral, and spiritual self cultivation.

In order to preserve one's child-mind, Li insists on the necessity of focusing on one's own thoughts. While much of what the physical and social world offers only serves to deaden the senses of the child-mind, Li believes that certain texts and teachers can help protect one's original mind and also, withdrawal from the physical world can shield one's child-mind from these harmful influences. Books that aid in preserving one's original mind are those that are the spontaneous, natural products of a child-mind. Li dispenses with the traditional canon of classics and judges literature by his own yardstick, that of sincerity. Wearing the hat of a bold iconoclast, Li exhorts in "Views on the Child-mind,"

Therefore, I am drawn to the spontaneous writings of those with a child-mind. What need is there to speak of the *Six Classics*! Why speak of the *Analects* and the *Mengzi*! Now, as for [the words one finds in] the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi*, if they are not excessive praise and reverence by official historians, then they are the inordinate praises of royal subjects.

If they are neither of the above, then they are what
inexperienced followers and dimwitted disciples have
written down of their teacher's sayings.¹⁶

Li also believes that physical withdrawal from the social world can help protect one's original mind from the obscuring influences of hypocritical social life. Li himself chose this route of self cultivation when late in life he retreated into the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha, a monastery that he had built for himself.¹⁷

Regarding self cultivation, Li's chief concern not only in literature but in all aspects of life is with genuineness and sincerity. Li's sage is one whose actions and words are the natural outpourings of the child-mind, and Li's greatest foe is hypocrisy. In a thinly veiled critique of the artifice and hypocrisy of the aristocracy Li exclaims,

From this, we can see that if one speaks fake words
with a fake person, then the fake person will be
pleased. If one speaks of fake affairs with a fake
person, then a fake person will be pleased. If one
discusses fake literature with a fake person, then a
fake person will be pleased. When everything is fake,
then nowhere will there be anyone who is

¹⁶ See the appendix, "Views On the Child-mind."

¹⁷ For an essay that Li wrote on this temple, the appendix, "Commenting on Confucius' Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha."

displeased.¹⁸

As we discussed earlier, Li holds that all humans are born with a pure and fully developed moral, intellectual, and spiritual mind. Excessive attention to proper social form only serves to obscure the natural virtues of the child-mind.

Thus far we have offered an introductory glimpse into Li's ideas by examining his conception of the mind, and placing his views within the context of a long-standing Confucian discourse on the theme of self cultivation. We have also explored the ways in which Li's ideas benefit from the writings of a number of thinkers, namely those of Wang Yangming and Luo Rufang. In the second part of this chapter, we will continue to discuss Li's concept of the mind by engaging in a comparative analysis of Li's ideas with three scholars working in the field of contemporary virtue ethics. The ideas I wish to call on are John McDowell's concept of "uncodifiability,"¹⁹ R. Jay Wallace's ideas of "rational intuitionism" and "connoisseurship,"²⁰ and Jonathan Dancy's concept of "particularism."²¹ I argue that Li's conception of the mind can be best

¹⁸ See the appendix, "Views On the Child-mind."

¹⁹ In describing McDowell's idea of "uncodifiability", I will be relying on his article "Virtue and Reason" in his book *Mind, Value, and Reality*. See McDowell (1998). This essay can also be found under the same title in *The Monist*, v. 62 (1979): 331-50.

²⁰ See Wallace (1991).

²¹ See Dancy (1993). In my understanding of uncodifiability and my descriptions of these three thinkers, I have benefitted greatly from Eric L. Hutton's *Virtue and Reason in Xunzi*. See Hutton (2001). See in particular chapter two, "Virtue Ethics

understood within the context of virtue ethics. While scholars of Li Zhi have identified him as a “relativist,” “Marxist,” and “humanist individualist,” for example, I show that Li is in fact best understood as a “particularist.” I will begin by describing “particularism” as defined in the works of McDowell, Wallace, and Dancy. With this description in hand, I will identify Li Zhi’s thinking as that of a uncodifiabilist of the particularist form, and then describe one dissimilarity between McDowell and Li Zhi’s versions of uncodifiability. Let us begin with an examination of McDowell’s work.

Ethics as Uncodifiable

In “Virtue and Reason,” McDowell sets out to defend an Aristotelian version of virtue ethics as a more desirable alternative to rule-based ethical theories such as consequentialism or Kantianism. One of the central ideas in his work is the idea of “uncodifiability.” In one of McDowell’s oft-quoted summaries of this concept he writes,

...to an unprejudiced eye it should seem quite implausible that any reasonably adult moral outlook admits of any such codification. As Aristotle says, the best generalizations about how one should behave hold only for the most part. If one attempted to reduce one’s conception of what virtue requires to a

and Moral Connoisseurship,” pp. 13-98.

set of rules, then, however subtle and thoughtful one was in drawing up the code, cases would inevitably turn up in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong—and not necessarily because one had changed one's mind; rather one's mind on the matter was not susceptible of capture in any universal formula.²²

McDowell's concept of *uncodifiability* can helpfully be illuminated by contrasting it to *fallibalism*. Upon first glance, the notion that we are unable to derive universal laws to explain ethics—the notion of uncodifiability—may seem to overlap with the idea that humans are often in error in their judgements—the idea of fallibalism. In fact, though, the two concepts are distinctly different. Fallibalism is an epistemological problem. Because of imperfections in our faculties of knowing, we sometimes or often are in error in our thinking about the world. Uncodifiability, on the other hand, is a commentary on metaphysics. An uncodifiabilist believes that there are no universal laws that explain, in McDowell's case, ethics. Right and wrong action is to be found through an understanding of the entire context surrounding each particular case. The opposite of uncodifiability would be codifiability. A codifiabilist would argue that one can construct codes that satisfyingly explain ethics. Codifiability and fallibalism can be compatible philosophical positions. One can without

²² See McDowell (1998), p. 58.

contradiction believe that right and wrong can be determined by universal laws and at the same time believe that one can be in error in one's construction or application of these universal laws. Similarly, it is also logically consistent to be an uncodifiabilist and believe that we humans possess the ability to know the world perfectly.

Before further proceeding in our discussion of uncodifiability, we should note one important distinction in the application of ethical theory whether one be an uncodifiabilist, consequentialist, or Kantian ethicist. Ethical theory can be applied in *deliberating* about what ought to be done, or in *justifying* what has been done. Criteria for deliberation enable an agent to weigh morally salient factors to arrive at the proper course of action. Criteria for justification offer a theoretical explication for why a certain response is or is not virtuous. To the extent that McDowell distinguishes between deliberation and justification, he is more concerned with the former.

One question that may arise is, How does an uncodifiabilist of McDowell's sort make ethical decisions if not through the application of rules? McDowell is ambiguous in answering this question. Throughout his article he alludes to the notion that humans possess a moral faculty that is in many ways analogous to our faculty of vision. This moral faculty allows the virtuous person to simply see what she ought to do in a particular situation in a similar way that a person with perfectly functioning visual capacities is able to see whatever is before her eyes.

Repeatedly McDowell speaks of a “perceptual capacity,” a “reliable sensitivity.”²³ At one point he seems to be saying that the virtuous agent simply needs to look and she will know what to do. He writes, “...nothing over and above the unclouded deliverances of the sensitivity is needed to explain the actions that manifest virtue.”²⁴ McDowell does not say too much more about this faculty of moral perception aside from the fact that virtuous people possess this faculty in its fullest flourishing and that this faculty is one that allows those who possess it to perceive the morally salient features of a situation. McDowell does not address the question of how one comes to develop such a faculty. Nor does he discuss whether reasons can be given to justify a virtuous agent’s actions or if what makes the actions virtuous is simply inexplicable.

One thinker who does speak more to McDowell’s idea of a moral faculty akin to that of visual perception is R. Jay Wallace in his article “Virtue, Reason, and Principle.” Wallace offers two models of uncodifiabilism, what he refers to as *rational intuitionism* and *connoisseurship*.²⁵ In his article, Wallace develops these two models and defends the latter over the former. In speaking of practical reason, Wallace, as with McDowell, is primarily interested in deliberation rather than justification. Let us begin with rational intuitionism. Rational intuitionists,

²³ See, for example, McDowell (1998), pp. 51, 52, 56.

²⁴ See McDowell (1998), p. 54.

²⁵ See Wallace (1991), p. 471.

as defined by Wallace, believe that an action is virtuous if it is performed by a virtuous agent. No other reason can be given to explain the virtue of the action aside from the fact that the virtuous agent perceived the action to be virtuous. An uncodifiabilist who is a rational intuitionist, then, does not have much to say as an ethical theorist. Wallace clearly and succinctly describes rational intuitionism when he writes, "...moral reasoning would be construed as involving an element of quasi-perceptual intuition, where the virtuous agent's intuitive responses are taken to be constitutively rational ones."²⁶

In contrast, an uncodifiabilist of the connoisseurship model is able to offer reasons for or against a certain action. According to the connoisseurship model, one cannot derive procedures or principles, as one is able to with rule-based ethics, that will enable an agent to deliberate about moral actions. However, one is able to articulate reasons for why a particular action in that particular situation is or is not virtuous. Wallace describes the connoisseurship model well when he writes, "...the perceptual sensitivity precisely discloses to the virtuous agent the particular reasons or justifications in favor of doing what virtue requires, occasion by occasion."²⁷ Wallace does not distinguish further between types of moral connoisseurs. However, one fruitful distinction to be made is the following. A moral connoisseur might be able to perceive the relevant moral factors, but still need to weigh and deliberate these factors before she is able to

²⁶ See Wallace (1991), p. 485.

²⁷ See Wallace (1991), p. 488.

determine the moral course of action. On the other hand, perceiving the morally relevant factors could entail knowing the moral course of action. Eric Hutton helpfully labels the first type as *elemental* and the second as *conclusive* connoisseurship.²⁸ A wine connoisseur of the elemental type would be able to perceive the texture and taste of the wine, but need to deliberate and weigh the factors before rating the wine. In contrast, a conclusive connoisseur would perceive the texture and taste and immediately be able to determine the quality of the wine. The difference between the elemental and conclusive connoisseur is in terms of deliberation. Both types can give reasons, *post facto*, to justify one course of action over another. The conclusive connoisseur is like the elemental connoisseur in the justification stage, but similar to the rational intuitionist in regard to the deliberative stage. Like the rational intuitionist, the conclusive connoisseur is not able to provide reasons for her actions as she is deliberating.

Li Zhi as Particularist

Thus far we have described uncodifiability as found in the work of McDowell and proceeded to outline Wallace's further development of this notion of uncodifiability. I now want to argue that one productive and illuminating way to begin to understand Li Zhi is as an uncodifiabilist of the conclusive connoisseur type. In *Moral Reasons*, Jonathan Dancy defends a form of uncodifiabilism that can be described as conclusive connoisseurship, or in his

²⁸ I owe this distinction to Eric Hutton. See Hutton (2001), p. 67.

vocabulary, "particularism."²⁹ Employing Jonathan Dancy's vocabulary, Li Zhi is a particularist and in the following pages I will refer to him as such.

Even upon first reading Li Zhi, it is clear that one of his primary *bete noires* is the unfailing faith in universal truths. Repeatedly, Li criticizes the traditional veneration of ideas from antiquity. For example, Li describes the unreflective masses when he writes,

Contemporary scholars and Confucians from
antiquity guessed at and then spoke [Confucius']
words, our fathers and teachers passed them down
by chanting them, and young children blindly and
deafly listened to them. When ten thousand mouths
all utter the same phrase, none can counter what is
said. When for a thousand years there is only a single
stanza, no one can understand for
themselves....Today, although people possess eyes,
nobody uses them.³⁰

In another passage, we find Li both criticizing those who unreflectively embrace the ideas of antiquity as unchanging truth, and at the same time forwarding the conception that truths change as the context changes. Li writes,

²⁹ See Dancy (1993), pp. 60-72.

³⁰ See the appendix, "Commenting on Confucius' Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha."

Yesterday it was right and today it is wrong. Today it is wrong and tomorrow it is right again. Even if Confucius were reborn again in these times, we would not know what judgments of right and wrong to make. Thus, how can people quickly dispense of blame and praise based on his *Spring and Autumn Annals*?³¹

One helpful distinction to employ in describing Li Zhi is the distinction between rule-based thinking and uncodifiabilism. Li Zhi is clearly an uncodifiabilist. We have seen that he believes ethics cannot be adequately captured through a set of rules. Our inability to create a code to guide us in our moral life is not due to a flaw in our faculties of knowing. In fact, as we discussed earlier in this chapter, Li believes that humans at birth possess a perfect faculty of knowing. He terms this faculty of knowing the “child-mind.” When this child-mind is undamaged, we are able to know perfectly. For Li, it is not defects in our faculties of knowing but rather, the context sensitivity of right and wrong that makes ethics uncodifiable. The nuances of a particular situation matter in our deliberation and justification of right and wrong.

Before proceeding to ask what sort of uncodifiabilist Li Zhi is, I would like to point out one difference between McDowell and Li Zhi. McDowell, an

³¹ See the appendix, “Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in *A Book to Hide*.”

Aristotelian in his thinking, appears to view the task of judgement as divided between different faculties. Throughout McDowell's essay, he speaks only of ethical judgements. This focus on one sphere of life is not inconsistent with the Aristotelian notion that there exist different modes of reason that operate in different spheres of life. The faculty for judging ethics differs from, for example, that which judges aesthetics. Li Zhi, in contrast, offers a radically different vision in that he conceives of a single faculty as judging in all spheres of life. This faculty, the child-mind, deliberates and judges whether the subject be ethics, aesthetics, or politics. As we continue to describe the ways in which Li is an uncodifiabilist, we will see how in his thought the child-mind is utterly central in all spheres of life.

To return to a subject that we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, among the handful of contemporary western interpretations of Li Zhi, Willard Peterson argues that relativism is the central concept with which to understand Li.³² However, it is not the case that Li believes anything goes. Throughout Li's

³² See Peterson (1998). It is unclear which variety of relativism Peterson is speaking of when he uses the term to describe Li. For example, one way of distinguishing between relativisms is that which is local—the notion that there exist a plurality of truths—and global—the notion that there is no ultimate truth. Another way of helpfully distinguishing between relativisms is in regard to spheres of life whether aesthetic, moral, or epistemological. One can be, for example, an aesthetic relativist in a global sense and believe that color is purely a matter of taste. One might be a local epistemological relativist and believe that what is true is a certain set of facts at a certain time that coheres well.

Although Peterson does not explicitly define relativism as applied to Li, it appears that he primarily conceives of Li as a moral relativist. Moral relativism is commonly divided into at least three categories, descriptive, normative, and meta-ethical. Briefly put, descriptive relativism is the notion that there exists,

essays, he gives reasons justifying one course of action over another. In one of his most famous essay, "Views On the Child-mind," Li proclaims that writings that are products of the child-mind are all works of beauty, and criticizes works such as the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* because they are severed from our spontaneous nature. He adamantly declares,

The most exquisite literature in the world all comes from the child mind....Now, as for [the words one finds in] the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi*, if they are not excessive praise and reverence by official historians, then they are the inordinate praise of loyal subjects. If they are neither of the above, then they are what inexperienced followers and dimwitted disciples have written down of their teacher's sayings.³³

across societies and throughout history, a diversity of core moral beliefs. Normative relativists insist that one is morally obligated not to intervene with and judge other people's moral practices and beliefs. Finally, meta-ethical relativism, which exists in both radical and moderate versions, is the belief that there exists no single true morality. In its moderate form, there exist a plurality of moralities, some which are more defensible than others. In its radical form, moral relativism claims that no one morality is truer than another. In speaking of Li as a relativist, Peterson conceives of Li as a radical meta-ethical relativist. In my reading, among these three forms of moral relativism, Li in fact least resembles this latter form. K.C. Hsiao also refers to Li as a relativist, though such a thesis is only peripheral to Hsiao's paper. See Hsiao (1938), pp. 317-341, especially pages 325-341.

³³ See the appendix, "Views On the Child-mind."

In this passage, Li articulates relatively clear reasons for why he admires and disparages certain texts. In Li's letter on the famous lovers Zuo Wenjun and Sima Xiangru (179-118 BCE), Li offers well-defined reasons for why Zuo and Sima were right in defying Zuo's father. The story of Zuo Wenjun and Sima Xiangru finds its earliest telling in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*.³⁴ In this initial rendering, Sima Qian censures the lovers. Li Zhi, though, defends Zuo Wenjun's eloping with the poor but talented Sima Xiangru and writes in response to Sima Qian, "[Zuo Wenjun] properly saved herself and did not lose herself." He adds,

If at that time lady Zuo...had asked her father for permission to marry, I am sure that Wangsun definitely would not have listened to her....It was not worthwhile to talk with him about such matters...Would it not have been better to sever himself from this destiny early on and endured the small shame in order to attain a greater aim?³⁵

We find Li Zhi offering reasons for why Zuo Wenjun's actions were admirable.

While Li does not believe we can create a universal code to explain ethics or aesthetics, he still believes that reasons can be articulated in justification of one course of action over another. Unlike a rational intuitionist, Li does not hold that

³⁴ See chapter four for a further discussion of this story.

³⁵ See the appendix, "Sima Xiangru."

the moral or aesthetic agent simply knows and can offer no explanation either in deliberation or justification. Li can be productively understood as a conclusive connoisseur or in Dancy's terms, a particularist. A few words on Li's conception of the child-mind will help us better understand why Li's views are more similar to those of a conclusive than an elemental connoisseur.

To reiterate, the difference between an elemental and conclusive connoisseur is in the deliberative stage. The former must deliberate and weigh considerations before she is able to decide on a proper course of action. Thus, the elemental connoisseur is able to articulate reasons for her choices, preceding her actions. The latter perceives and evaluates all at once and so is unable to offer reasons for choosing X over Y. Li's moral agent is both unable to and needs not weigh factors before she acts. Perceiving entails judging. The child-mind instantly perceives and processes the salient moral or aesthetic features. The notion that the child-mind does not deliberate but instead, immediately perceives right and wrong, the beautiful and ugly, is reflected in Li's repeated censuring of reflection preceding action. In describing the child-mind Li writes, "As for the child-mind, free of all falsehood and entirely genuine, it is the original mind at the very beginning of the first thought."³⁶ The child-mind is the mind in its state at the very beginning of the first thought. Li praises the "spontaneous" over the "artful."³⁷ Also he writes, "...I am drawn to the

³⁶ See the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind."

³⁷ See the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind."

spontaneous writings of those with a child-mind.”³⁸ These spontaneous actions are those preceding thought and which spring immediately from the preserved innate child-mind. The artist who has preserved his child-mind,

...spew[s] out jade and spit[s] out pearls...goes crazy
and howls loudly, sheds tears and cries with sorrow,
and is unable to stop himself. In the end he cannot
bear to hide his writings in a famous mountain or to
throw it in the waters or the fires. He would rather
cause his readers and listeners to gnash and grind
their teeth, and desire to kill him and to slice him
up.³⁹

The verbs that Li uses to describe an artist are ones that conjure up images of absolute immediacy, of action that springs without prior reflection or thought. Li writes of “spew[ing]” 噴 and “howl[ing]” 大叫. His artist “is unable to stop himself” 不能自止. There are no references or even allusions to any reflection or deliberation preceding action. The moral and aesthetic agent is a cultivated person. Because she has worked to preserve her child-mind, when she creates works of beauty and acts ethically she is able to do so completely spontaneously. Li, a moral and aesthetic agent himself, is hardly inarticulate about his own and

³⁸ See the appendix, “Views on the Child-mind.”

³⁹ See the appendix, “On Miscellaneous Matters.”

other's actions and work. He is trenchant in his criticisms and lavish in his praise. However, the reasons for praise and disdain are given after the fact. Li's vision of the moral and aesthetic agent is one who can think for herself. She can give reasons for her actions, after the fact.

Li Zhi and McDowell

Thus far we have described McDowell's concept of uncodifiability and examined the ways in which Li Zhi's thought can be illuminated through the lens of one form of uncodifiability, that of particularism. In concluding this chapter, I would like to address one prominent difference between Li and McDowell's versions of uncodifiability. Briefly put, while both McDowell and Li Zhi offer some version of uncodifiability as a more fruitful alternative to a well-established adversary, the two have in mind different adversaries. McDowell aims his theory against that of rule-based ethics. Li Zhi argues against reverence for a golden era of antiquity.

One way to distinguish between rules is that of *stipulative* and *summary*. Put simply and in exaggerated terms, stipulative rules are rules that are created *in vacuo*. A philosopher theorizing in an armchair about the laws of justice would be creating stipulative rules. Rules are imagined according to an ideal measure such as justice, and then taken to the everyday world. An example of stipulative rules would be Kantian ethics or the rules of chess. In contrast, summary rules emerge from an existing context and are reformulations of ways that already

exist in the world. Examples of summary rules are traffic laws and legal laws in general. McDowell and Li formulate an ethics of uncodifiability that is in response to stipulative rules and summary rules, respectively. McDowell, as he writes throughout his article, asserts that his theory is meant to be a more fruitful alternative to Kantianism and consequentialism, both are examples of stipulative systems. In concluding, let us examine the ways in which the intellectual world Li inhabits is one that is governed by summary rules, and the ways in which his thought in great measure is a response to such a world view.

One of the most pronounced arguments in Li's works is his idea that standards of morality as well as aesthetics change through time. While Li insists that the nuances of a context—whether of time, of place, or of protagonists—matters morally, he is particularly sensitive to the component of time. Li's position on morality changing as time moves on is in marked contrast to most Confucians before him. The traditional Confucian reverence for antiquity can be found in attitudes toward certain figures of antiquity such as Confucius and the legendary sage-kings, Yao and Shun. For example, Mengzi repeatedly describes Yao and Shun as paradigmatic models of virtue and wisdom. In *Mengzi* 4A2 we find,

Mencius said, "The compass and the carpenter's square are the culmination of squares and circles; the sage is the culmination of humanity....all one has to do is to model oneself on Yao and Shun. Not to serve

one's prince in the way Shun served Yao is not to respect one's prince; not to govern the people in the way Yao governed his is to harm one's people."⁴⁰

This contrast between the thinking of earlier Confucians—such as Confucius and Mengzi—and Li Zhi is vividly brought to light in examining Confucius and Li Zhi's views on art. Confucius believed that certain forms of music were perfect through all time. In *Analects* 3.25 we find, "The Masters said of the *shao* that it was both perfectly beautiful and perfectly good..."⁴¹ The *shao* is the music of Shun's time. In contrast, Li Zhi is famous for arguing against the time-honored Confucian conception that art works are universally beautiful or ugly. Li writes in his well-known essay "Views on the Child-mind,"

As long as the child-mind is constantly preserved....People will be able to write great literary works in any era, and everybody will possess literary talent. All literature, no matter what it's style, will be considered good literature.

Li goes on to exclaim at length against traditional reverence for genres of antiquity. He writes,

Why must verse necessarily be in the "old" or "xuan"

⁴⁰ See Lau (1970), p. 118, adapted.

⁴¹ See Lau (1979), p. 71.

style of unregulated poetry?⁴² Why must writings necessarily be from the pre-Qin era?....All the most exquisite literature from the past through the present cannot be captured and discussed in terms of the tendencies of one age. Therefore, I am drawn to the spontaneous writings of those with a child-mind. So why speak of the *Six Classics*, and why speak of the *Analects* and the *Mengzi*?⁴³

For Li, the expression and conception of the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly change through time. The one constant is that all that is moral and aesthetically pleasing comes directly from the child-mind.

In this chapter, we began by discussing Li's innovative conception of the mind within the context of a sustained discourse in Confucian thought on the subject of self cultivation. Following, we offered further analysis of a concept central to Li's thought, that of the child-mind, by way of comparing his ideas to those of three scholars in the field of virtue ethics. Li holds that all humans are born with a pure and fully developed moral, intellectual, and spiritual mind. In the following chapter we will see how his belief that males and females are

⁴² "Old style" and "xuan style" poetry are those forms found in Xiao Tong's (501-531 CE) *Literary Selections* 文選 *Wenxuan*, one of the most influential literary anthologies in Chinese history. For an English translation of this text, see Knechtges (1982).

⁴³ See the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind."

endowed with the same talents and virtues, the central topic of chapter four, can helpfully be understood in the context of Li's conception of the child-mind.

Chapter Four

Li Zhi and Three Conceptions of Gender Relations

Equality, justice, and freedom are some of the common themes discussed through much of western political thought. In *Women in Western Political Thought*,¹ Susan Okin argues that although prominent thinkers such as Aristotle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Locke articulated insightful theories on these topics, they consistently neglected to apply these cherished principles to women. When these thinkers spoke of the dignity of “humans,” they simply meant “men.” As we will discuss in chapter six, even the seminal liberal feminist, John Stuart Mill, did not fully apply his principles of equality and freedom to his discussions on women. In summarizing the incoherent treatment of women given by these thinkers, Okin writes, “‘Human nature,’ we realize, as described and discovered by philosophers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, and many others, is intended to refer only to male human nature.”²

In the Chinese Confucian tradition, one also finds a number of influential thinkers articulating ideas that if carried to their logical ends, could readily lead to the idea of the same humanity in both men and women. Mengzi’s conception of incipient good sprouts in all humans, and Wang Yangming’s view of a fully

¹ See Okin (1979).

² See Okin (1979), pp. 6-7.

developed good nature in all individuals offer two clear examples of such potentially fruitful ideas. The ancient Confucian thinker Mengzi insists that all humans possess incipient “sprouts” 端 *duan* of goodness. Mengzi also often refers to these sprouts as “hearts” 心 *xin*. In speaking of the goodness of these incipient sprouts, he refers to moral and intellectual qualities such as benevolence, dutifulness, propriety, and wisdom. In *Mengzi* 6A6, for example, Mengzi speaks of these incipient sprouts:

“The heart of compassion is possessed by all people alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of right and wrong....That is why it is said, ‘Seek and you will find it; let go and you will lose it’.”³

The centerpiece of Mengzi’s thought is the notion that all humans, without specification as to gender, possess incipient sprouts of wisdom and compassion. All people also possess the capability to nurture these sprouts. In conflict with his argument about the sameness among all people, Mengzi at the same time assumes social and political inequality between men and women.⁴

³ See Lau (1970), p. 163, adapted. For further texts on the original “hearts” or the incipient “sprouts,” see *Mengzi* 2A2, 2A6, 6A7, 6A8, 7A15. For a discussion on development of these nascent sprouts, see Ivanhoe (2002a).

⁴ Passages on women in traditional roles as mothers, wives, caretakers of the elderly, or as objects of beauty rather than as individuals flourishing in their own right comprise nearly all the passages in the *Mengzi* that are explicitly on women. For references in the *Mengzi* to “woman” 女 *nu*, see *Mengzi* 1B5, 3B2, 3B3, 3B4,

Another place in Chinese Confucian thought where one finds ideas conducive to the development of gender equality is in Neo-Confucian thought in general, and Wang Yangming's ideas in particular. In early Confucianism, approximately from the 6th century BCE to the 2nd century CE, thinkers generally conceived of humans as born with *nascent* moral and spiritual capacities or potentials.⁵ By the period of Neo-Confucian thought, approximately the 10th to the 19th century CE, we find Confucian thinkers envisioning all humans as born with *fully developed* capacities. Every individual, not simply those with access to the proper texts and teachers, possesses the real possibility of achieving moral and spiritual enlightenment. Such an idea, taken to its logical conclusions, would imply that women too are able to attain full enlightenment. However, Neo-Confucian thought, which is deeply influenced by Chan Buddhism, on the whole is replete with descriptions of women as subservient to men. Unlike many other thinkers in the Confucian tradition, Li Zhi was a thinker who saw past the traditional Confucian world view of women

3B5, 4A17, 4B33, 5A1, 5B1, 7A22, 7B34. Of these passages, 3B5 and 5B1 speak of woman as commoners. The remaining passages all speak of women as wives, objects of beauty, or caretakers. In *Mengzi* 5A1, Mengzi speaks of women as objects of beauty that a man enjoys, "When a person is young he yearns for his parents; when he begins to take an interest in women, he yearns for the young and beautiful..." Later in the book we find references to women fulfilling the function of a care giver. A wife's job is to "care for the aged". See *Mengzi* 7A22, and Lau (1970), p. 186.

⁵ There were a wide variety of different theories among Chinese philosophers concerning the nature of these capacities and potentialities. For a discussion of these ideas in early Confucianism, see Fung (1953), Graham (1989), pp. 9-32, 111-136, and 235-266, and Schwartz (1985), pp. 56-134, and 255-320.

as subordinate to men.

Li attacks the traditional notion of women as inferior to men on many fronts. He amends the traditional conception of the cosmos in a way that supports an innovative conception of gender relations; he retrieves stories of women in history who succeeded in realms traditionally considered to be solely within the domain of men; he censures social practices of his day that serve to confine the space in which women live their lives; and he offers a utopian vision of relations between men and women where physical bodies are no longer the salient mark that determine the way males and females are treated. In short, Li argues for his innovative views on gender by engaging some of the most significant discourses in his time, discussions on cosmology, interpretations of history, and criticisms of social practices.

Scattered throughout Li's writings we can find commentaries on the Confucian classics, letters to friends, essays, and poems where Li satirizes, condemns, or bemoans the traditional treatment of women. In this chapter I would like to present and characterize Li's views on gender relations. In order to provide a vocabulary for characterizing Li's views, I will begin by describing two different conceptions of the relations between the basic elements in the traditional Chinese Confucian cosmos, one that I will refer to as *hierarchical*, and the other as *complementary*. With this background in mind, I will then go on to examine Li's reformulation of the cosmos, a revised view that supports an innovative conception of gender relations as closer to the latter complementary

conception. In the second part of the chapter, I will show that in examining Li's views on gender as revealed in his discussions of history, of social practices, and of the gendered body, rather than insisting on a *complementary* relationship between men and women, Li in fact conceives of women as being *identical* to men in their talents and abilities. In concluding, I will offer a number of suggestions as to how one might reconcile these two disparate views. Let us now turn to a discussion of Li's revisioning of traditional conception of the cosmos.

Gender and Cosmology

While cosmology has been a prominent topic in Chinese culture as far back as we know, it was not until the Han dynasty (206 BCE-25 CE) that the subject was scrutinized by not only rulers, physicians, and diviners, but also philosophers. It is in this period that we begin to find a serious interest in the cosmos. With the writing of the *Lushi Chunqiu* dated at around 240 BCE, we find the beginning of a long and significant discourse that systematically articulates the details of the cosmos, envisioning the natural cosmos as a reflection of the social world, and vice versa. Throughout much of later Confucian discourse, thinkers within the tradition envisioned the mechanisms that govern the cosmos to be the same ones that ought to govern the state and the family. The cosmos, the state, and the family are reflections of each other. The state, for example, is a microcosm of the cosmos, the family a microcosm of the state. This reflective

relationship is isomorphic in that each realm is of identical structure to the other. At the same time, the relationship is causal in that proper familial relations contribute to a more harmonious cosmos, and vice versa. There is a mutual resonance between different spheres of activity. This idea of a mutual mirroring between the social and the natural has been referred to by many scholars as "correlative cosmology."⁶ Li Zhi lived in one of the many periods in Chinese history when intellectuals were immersed in the subject of metaphysics, and were deeply interested in the problem of the relationship between the cosmic and the social world. Within such an intellectual world, Li innovatively reformulates the traditional conception of the cosmos in a way that supports his progressive view of gender relations.

In examining Li's modification of traditional cosmology, I would like in particular to examine a well-known letter by Li Zhi entitled "Discussion on Husband and Wife: Reflections After Long Contemplation" 夫婦論：因畜有感 *Fufu Lun: Yin Chu You Gan*.⁷ The meaning of this letter has been debated by a number of scholars. Chinese scholar Zhu Qianzhi asserts that the letter articulates a "vision of a society composed of equals."⁸ In contrast, Li Zhi scholar Liu Jilun objects to such a reading and argues that the letter does not speak of

⁶ For further discussion on the history of correlative cosmology in Chinese thought, see Graham (1986) and Schwartz (1985), pp. 350-382.

⁷ See the appendix, "Discussion on Husband and Wife."

⁸ Zhu (1957), p. 41.

gender equality or equality in general. Liu in part objects to reading the letter as an argument for gender equality because, "...in the Chinese conception of the Five Relations, the husband-wife relation originally was not one of equality."⁹ Instead, Liu argues that in this letter Li is concerned with Ming intellectuals' preoccupation with discussions of abstract metaphysical issues. I would like to show that Li's letter "Discussion on Husband and Wife" is indeed centrally concerned with the subject of gender equality. While as Liu rightly states, the traditional conception of the husband-wife relation is one of inequality, in Li's letter he offers a foundation for seeing the husband-wife relation as one of equality by amending the traditional Confucian conception of the cosmos. Let us begin with an introduction to the traditional Confucian conception of the cosmos.

Confucian Cosmology

Chinese Confucian cosmology can be seen in terms of the interplay between complementary pairs of forces, prominent among which are the elements *yin* and *yang*. Throughout the Chinese classics, *yin* and *yang* are commonly identified with other pairs such as the moon and the sun, the earth and the heavens, wife and husband, and female and male.¹⁰ While it is generally

⁹ Lunji Liu (1999), p. 71.

¹⁰ Lisa Raphals argues in her recent book *Sharing the Light* that the identification of *yin* and *yang* with male and female does not occur until at least the 1st century CE. See Raphals (1998).

accepted that the relationship between certain pairs comprises the structure of Confucian cosmology, what is less settled is the nature of the relationship between such pairs. Throughout much of Chinese history, the relations between pairs such as *yin* and *yang* has been conceived of as hierarchical. *Yin* and *yang* are interdependent pairs with *yin* as submissive and *yang* as dominant. Man, the heavens, the sun take the leading role, while woman, the earth, and the moon follow. In recent literature a number of scholars have argued that this hierarchical conception of *yin-yang* relations does not become prominent in Chinese thought until about the third century CE. Previous to the third century, the complementary nature of *yin* and *yang* was emphasized, and there was little talk of any natural hierarchy.¹¹ Chinese feminist scholar Lisa Raphals, in her recent book *Sharing the Light* (1998) succinctly summarizes such an argument, "Before the third century, *yin-yang* polarities are mostly cyclic [or complementary], and relatively nonhierarchical."¹² Without attempting to settle the interpretive controversy surrounding this issue, let us turn to a brief discussion of these two different conceptions of the relations between *yin* and *yang*. I will adopt and use Raphals terms and contrast "complementary" with "hierarchical" relations. Two of the texts that I would like to look at are the *Book*

¹¹ See Raphals (1998), p. 142. Also, see Tu (1998).

¹² Raphals (1998), p. 142.

of Rites 禮記 *Li Ji*¹³ and the *Book of Change* 易經 *Yi Jing*,¹⁴ both early Confucian texts of undetermined authorship generally considered to be as influential in shaping the Confucian tradition and the consciousness of the Chinese gentry as is Confucius' *Analects*.

Yin-Yang Relations as *Complementary*

Throughout the *Book of Rites*, one finds passages characterizing basic pairs that shape the structure of the cosmos as *complementary* in nature and equal in status. For example, in a chapter on the way in which sacrificial rituals find their pattern in the workings of the greater cosmos, we see the sun and the moon depicted as complementary, without any hierarchical relation between the two. I quote,

The sun comes forth from the east, and the moon

¹³ The *Book of Rites* consists of 49 records written by Confucians from the late Zhou (1122-255 BCE), Qin (255-205 BCE), and Han (206 BCE-24 CE) periods, and was compiled in the first century BCE. In the Sung dynasty, two chapters in the *Book of Rites*, the "Great Learning" and the "Doctrine of the Mean," were canonized along with the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* as the "Four Books." For a short introduction on the *Book of Rites*, see Riegel (1993). Also, see the introduction by Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai in Legge (1967), v. 1, liii-lxxx.

¹⁴ The primary text of the *Book of Changes*, what some refer to as the *Chou Yi*, attained its modern form by the latter part of the 9th century BCE. The 7 commentaries, also referred to as the 10 Wings, all attained their modern form by the mid-3rd to early-2nd century BCE, except for the 6th commentary which is dated to sometime during the 1st or 2nd century CE. For further discussion of the *Book of Changes*, see Kidder Smith, Jr. (1990).

appears in the west; the darkness and the light are
now long, now short; when the one ends, the other
begins, in regular succession:—thus producing the
harmony of all under the skies.¹⁵

In this passage, neither the sun nor the moon are described as superior to the other.

As a second example of a complementary relationship between dyads, let us look at the *Book of Changes*. This classic is comprised of a text presenting sixty-four hexagrams, and appended to this main text are seven different commentaries on these hexagrams. The first and second hexagram are of interest to us. The first hexagram in the text, *qian* 乾, is traditionally identified with the male and *yang*. The second hexagram of the sixty-four, *kun* 坤, is traditionally identified with female and with *yin*. In one of the commentaries in the *Book of Changes*, we find the following elucidation of the *qian* hexagram: “[a sage who] appears aloft, high above all things, and the myriad states all enjoy repose.” As explanation for the *kun* hexagram, we find the following: “[a sage who] is mild and docile, advantageous and firm:—such is the course of the superior [person].”¹⁶ Neither the *qian* nor the *kun* hexagram is described as superior to the other. With the *qian* hexagram we find comments regarding a

¹⁵ See Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 219.

¹⁶ Legge (1882), p. 215.

charismatic form of leadership that is able to transform others. With the *kun* hexagram we find descriptions of a quiet and yet unwavering form of guidance. We are presented with two different visions of a sage, neither superior to the other.

Hierarchical Relations Between Yin and Yang

We just examined one commentary in the *Book of Changes* on the *qian* and *kun* hexagrams. If we now look at parts of a different commentary, the "Great Appendix," which is generally agreed upon to be the most well-known of the seven, we find descriptions of not a complementary, but a *hierarchical* conception of the relations between pairs. The "male" hexagram is identified with "yang,"¹⁷ "the head," "heaven," "father," "strength," and "ruler."¹⁸ The "female" hexagram is associated with "yin,"¹⁹ "earth," "mother," "belly," "docility," and "support."²⁰ Here, we find *yin* and *yang* analogized to the pair "ruler" and "support," a pair that cannot be thought of as equal in status. A well-known and more evident example of a fundamental pair conceived of in terms of hierarchical relationship can be found in the *Book of Rites*, in a chapter on

¹⁷ See Legge (1882), p. 395.

¹⁸ See Legge, v. 2, 1967:428-430.

¹⁹ See Legge (1882), p. 395.

²⁰ See Legge (1882), pp. 428-430.

sacrificial, marriage, and capping rituals. I quote,

The woman follows (and obeys) the man:—in her youth, she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son.²¹

Before going on to discuss Li Zhi, one additional point I would like to note is that with this second hierarchical conception of the cosmos, historically one also finds a view of the cosmos as emanating from an unitary origin. An obvious source where we find such a position is in the works of the famous 2nd century BCE Confucian thinker Dong Zhongshu (ca. 179-104 BCE). Throughout his text “*The Luxuriant Gems of the ‘Spring and Autumn Annals’*” 春秋繁露 *Chun Qiu Fan Lu*,²² he describes the universe as springing forth from a single source, what he terms the “origin” 元 *yuan*. For example, Dong writes as further commentary on the *qian* hexagram,

What is called the single *yuan* is the great beginning....*Yuan* is the root of all things, and in it lies man’s own beginning.²³

Thus far we have described two different visions of the cosmos. In one

²¹ Legge (1967), v. 1, p. 441.

²² See Dong (1984).

²³ I borrow this translation from Fung (1952), v. 2, pp. 19-20.

picture, the underlying structure of the cosmos is that of complementary pairs of equal status. In the second picture, the underlying structure is that of pairs hierarchically related. Historically, one part of this second conception is also a vision of the cosmos as springing forth from a single source. Let us now turn to a discussion on how Li Zhi challenges the hierarchical conception of the cosmos.

Li Zhi's Revisioning of the Cosmos

In amending what was the traditional conception of the cosmos as based on hierarchical relations, Li preserves the formal way of looking at the relations by accepting a correlation between the natural and the social world, but transforms the content of the relationship. In his letter "Discussion on Husband and Wife," Li Zhi describes the traditionally accepted conception of the cosmos as issuing forth from an unitary source of power and manifesting inherent hierarchies. Li describes this hierarchical conception of the cosmos when he writes, "Still, there are those who say that one can give birth to two, *li* can give birth to *qi*, the Great Ultimate can give birth to *yin* and *yang*."²⁴ In this passage we find Li referring to three deeply influential Chinese classical texts. The first, "one can give birth to two," most likely refers to the early Daoist text the *Dao De Jing*. In chapter 42 of this text we find, "The Way begets one; one begets two;

²⁴ See the appendix, "Discussion on Husband and Wife: Reflections After Long Contemplation."

two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures."²⁵ In speaking of *li* giving birth to *qi*, Li cites a view held by one of the greatest Confucian scholars, Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE). Finally, in speaking of the Great Ultimate, Li's words echo those found in "The Great Appendix" of the *Book of Changes*. The text in the *Book of Changes* is the following, "Therefore in the system of the *Book of Changes* there is the Great Ultimate, which produced the two elementary forms."²⁶ Early on in Li's essay, then, we find him describing the commonly accepted conception of the cosmos as emanating from a single source.

In contrast to what we will refer to as the traditional model of the cosmos, Li envisions the production of the cosmos as cooperative, springing forth from a relationship between pairs such as *yin* and *yang*, woman and man, and wife and husband. Li describes this vision of the cosmos as issuing forth from the interplay of pairs when he writes, "In fact, only the two essences, *yin* and *yang*, and the two beings, man and woman, can give birth to human life."²⁷ Li Zhi offers a binary model of the production of the universe in contrast to the traditional hierarchical model where a single entity serves as progenitor. Again, like most Confucians, Li saw the cosmos, state, and the family as reflections of each other. Part of the justification for the traditional view of the family and the

²⁵ See Lau (1963), p. 103, adapted.

²⁶ Legge (1882), p. 373, adapted.

²⁷ See the appendix, "Discussion of Husband and Wife: Reflections After Long Contemplation."

state was the belief that they reflected the greater natural order. Li embraces the formal structure of this traditional argument but argues against its content which can be characterized as monistic rather than binary. It is important to us that Li argued against this monistic picture of the universe because, as we alluded to in mentioning the ideas of Dong Zhongshu, throughout Chinese history this monistic picture was commonly considered one part of the hierarchical vision of the cosmos.

So far we have seen that in "Discussion on Husband and Wife," Li contests the monistic vision of the birth of the cosmos. Now, if we examine Li's discussion of pairs such as the *qian* and *kun* hexagrams, we see that he upholds a vision of the universe as structured by pairs that are complementary in nature. For example, in quoting from the *Book of Changes* to support his viewpoint, he selects the following passages:

"Great is the power of *qian*, the myriad things rely on it for their beginning."²⁸

And also,

"Superlative is the power of *kun*, the myriad things rely on it for their birth."²⁹

²⁸ *Qian* is the first hexagram found in the *Book of Changes*. In speaking of *qian*, Li Zhi quotes from the *Book of Changes*, Appendix 1, Section 1. For English translation, see Legge (1882), p. 213.

²⁹ *Kun* is found in the *Book of Changes* as hexagram number two. Li Zhi quotes from the *Book of Changes*, Appendix 1, Section 2 in his references to *kun*. For English translation, see Legge (1882), p. 214.

Both passages come from the first appendix in the *Book of Changes*. The passages describe the *kun* and the *qian* hexagrams as equal in status. One is “superlative,” the other “great.” One is relied on for the beginning of all things. The other is relied on for the birth of all things. Immediately after citing these two passages, Li adds his own commentary on the two hexagrams and writes, “Providing beginning and birth, the changes are never ending.” With his own commentary, Li emphasizes the notion that the *qian* and the *kun* hexagrams bring forth the beginning of life in concert and together.

There are seven appendices in the *Book of Changes*, and there are a myriad of passages which Li might have selected to support his views. For example, he might have selected from the first section of the “Great Appendix.” I quote,

Heaven is lofty and honorable; earth is low. [Their symbols] *qian* and *kun*, (with their respective meanings), were determined (in accordance with this).³⁰

Such a passage certainly would lend support to a hierarchical rather than complementary conception of the relationship between *qian* and *kun*. One can reasonably infer that the absence of such passages shows that Li was selectively quoting the classics in order to support his new vision of the Confucian Way.

As Li challenges the traditional model of the cosmos, so too does he challenge traditional models of society. Traditional Confucian sources base

³⁰ See Legge (1882), p. 348.

society on five human bonds: father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, old-young, and that between friends.³¹ Aside from friendship, these five relations are all characterized by inequality of power. Additionally, these traditional sources hold the father-son relationship to be the most fundamental of human relations. Consequently, filial piety, an unreciprocal virtue unlike, for example, love, is a prime duty. This father-son relationship is hierarchical and purportedly given by nature. In contrast, Li's letter "Discussion on Husband and Wife" challenges this traditional paradigm by positing the husband-wife relation as the ultimate source of social ordering and second, as we will discuss later in this chapter, by revisioning this relationship as ideally between two equals who of their own volition choose one other. Li Zhi transforms the husband-wife relationship, traditionally one of difference and hierarchy, into a relationship between friends. Again, this vision of a social world based on equality and cooperation reflects Li's revisioning of the nature of the cosmos. The centrality of the husband-wife relation in Li's works can also be found in his work *Collection of Essays Begun at the Lake*. In this text, Li borrows from his friend Jiao Hong's categories of analysis and divides his text into the categories of: husband-wife, father-son, elder-younger brother, teacher-friend, ruler-subject. Here, we find Li overturning the traditional cataloguing of these relations by placing the

³¹ See *Mengzi* 3A4.

husband-wife relation first, and the ruler-subject relation last.³²

In "Discussion on Husband and Wife," Li defends a complementary relationship between pairs such as husband and wife, man and woman, *yang* and *yin*, and *qian* and *kun*. When we understand the intellectual assumptions operative during his time, in particular, the assumption that the cosmos is hierarchical in nature, we see the degree to which Li's views on gender were innovative. By arguing for a complementary conception of the social and cosmic world, Li makes a progressive statement about the status of the relations between men and women.

Li Zhi and *Identity* of the Genders

So far we have seen that in Li's essay "Discussion on Husband and Wife," he argues against a hierarchical conception of gender relations and in its place, insists that relations between genders ought to be complementary in nature. If we look at other letters and poems by Li Zhi on the subject of women, we will see that Li conceives of women and men as *identical* in nature. By identical, I

³² While on the one hand Li as a visionary iconoclast insists on a society centered around an egalitarian relationship between husband and wife, at the same time, in tension with this vision is his acceptance of traditional hierarchical relations such as that between ruler and subject. This tension might not be such a problem for Li Zhi's conception of society except for the fact that, as we just discussed, Li does hold the traditional notion that a properly ordered society is a microcosm of the natural cosmos. Li does argue that the cosmic world is one governed by equality and cooperation and so following along with this logic of microcosm and macrocosm, we would expect Li to insist that a properly ordered society ought to be one that is egalitarian in every respect.

mean Li sees women and men, though physically different, as identical in their intellectual and spiritual capacities. One might ask why a thinker deeply influenced by Confucian thought, a system of thinking that places moral cultivation at the center of social life, Li did not place greater emphasis on identical capacities between men and women for *moral* development. One reason for this lack of emphasis on equality in moral capacities might be that throughout Chinese history, women have most often been conceived of as not only equal, but even superior to men in moral capacities. Without specifying types of capacities, Li insists on the identical nature of women and men in his letter "In Response to a Letter Claiming that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted." He writes,

To say that woman and man exist is acceptable. But
to say there exists woman's "vision" 見 *jian* and man's
vision, how can that be acceptable?³³

In this letter, Li argues that women and men possess *identical* nascent capacities for "vision."

Through various types of arguments we find Li presenting a radical view of men and women as identical in their innate capacities. As one form of argument, Li points to historical examples of women who achieved excellence and attained fame for their work as writers, rulers, and spiritual savants. These

³³ See the appendix, "In Response to a Letter Claiming that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

women, though few in number, were every bit as accomplished as men in arts that were conventionally conceived of as solely within men's domain. For example, in "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao," Li notes that Yijiang was one of the ten great ministers during the reign of King Wu (1122-1115 BCE), Wen Mu was one of the editors and compilers of the great Chinese classic *The Book of Songs*, Xue Tao (ca. 768-831 CE) was a remarkable poet who drew the accolades of the most famous eminent poets of her time, and Ling Zhao was a spiritual savant able to attain enlightenment at a young age.³⁴ Throughout the first chapter of Li's *Collections Begun at the Lake*, he praises virtuous and courageous women as "real men" or "better than men."³⁵ Li draws on historical and contemporary examples to show that there exist women who in fact are just like men in their intellectual and spiritual capacities. The reason that so many women are intellectually and spiritually inferior to men, claims Li, is because women are socially restricted from opportunities to develop their talents. In the following pages we will examine Li's claim that women's inferior development to men is due to unjust

³⁴ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

³⁵ I owe this reference to Nanxiu Qian. For the Chinese text of this translation, see Li Zhi, *Collections Begun at the Lake*, pp. 26, 56. The project of translating this text, composed primarily of succinct commentaries on historical biographies, offers a significantly different sinological challenge from that of translating letters and essays. The collection of writings on women in this book is rich, and in a future project I intend to translate a number of these commentaries.

social conditions.

Aside from raising historical examples to counter the claim that women are inferior to men, Li's innovative views on gender are also evident in his censuring of various socio-political practices that constrict the space in which women are able to live their lives. One of the conventional practices that Li censures is the moral taboo against remarriage for widows. During the Ming period (1368-1628 CE), a widow who was considered "deeply loyal" to her deceased husband or betrothed was honored by the government through the building of a distinguished stone arch inscribed with her name.³⁶ Alternatively, a widow often was praised and honored with such an arch if she chose to demonstrate her loyalty by committing suicide, thus following her husband in death. The Ming government actively opposed widow remarriage, and throughout Neo-Confucian writings, we find references advocating widow suicide and condemning widow remarriage. For example, the great Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE) writes, "Woman is born to serve others with her person; a wife should serve her husband and die together with him."³⁷ The influential Neo-Confucian Cheng Yi (1033-1107 CE) is infamous for saying that it is a small matter for a widow and her children to die by starvation or exposure,

³⁶ See T'ien (1988), pp. 70-89.

³⁷ See Zhu Xi (1958), 3:29. I borrow this translation with slight adaption from Raphals (1998), p. 68. For further discussion of this text see Raphals (1998), p. 205.

by remaining unwed and thus loyal to her deceased husband, but a large matter for her to lose her integrity by re-marrying.

In a period where widow remarriage was perceived as dishonorable and even immoral, Li ridicules this *moral* prohibition.³⁸ In Li's essay "Sima Xiangru," found in *A Book to Hide*, Li rebuts the views of the great Han historian Sima Qian on the subject of a young widow, Zhuo Wenjun, who elopes with her lover, Sima Xiangru, and defies her parents wishes. Sima Qian considers Zhuo Wenjun as a woman of many virtues, but affirms that her remarriage and elopement was a source of shame for her father. Li Zhi comments on this story and celebrates Zhuo Wenjun's independence and defiance of irrational conventions. He praises her for her ability to recognize the virtues of Sima Xiangru, a man who would eventually become one of the great poets of his time. He writes, "In this world today those who know of Zhuo Wangsun's daughter, [Zhuo Wenjun], appropriately see her to be a great joy for him. What was he ashamed about?" While Sima Qian asserted that Zhuo Wenjun had lost herself when she eloped

³⁸ Much scholarship has pointed to the fact that attitudes toward widow remarriage during late imperial China are complex and often at odds with each other. For example, scholars and elite families condemned widow remarriage from a moral point of view. In contrast, those finding themselves in more strained economic circumstances considered a widow a financial luxury, and would often encourage and even compel widowed daughters, sisters, or daughter-in-laws to remarry. In the Qing period, the government instituted laws prohibiting family members from coercing a widow into remarriage. Such legal measures which can be read as prohibitions against widow remarriage as a means of protecting women's independence emerged after Li Zhi's time. For a discussion on the various attitudes toward widow remarriage in the Ming and Qing periods, see Waltner (1981), pp. 129-146.

with Sima Xiangru, Li Zhi offers the radical vision that, "She properly saved herself and did not lose herself."³⁹ In "Mourning the Precious Son," a poem written to the ghost of his deceased son, we find Li bringing his theoretical ideas to bear in his own personal life. Li advises that his daughter-in-law ought to have the opportunity to remarry. He writes, "Your wife should remarry."⁴⁰

Li not only argues against the taboo on widow remarriage, but he also rails against the cloistering of women within the domestic sphere. Late imperial China, the Ming and Qing periods, is considered by social historians to be a period of great social restriction for women, relative to earlier periods such as the Tang when elite women engaged in vigorous activities such as horseback riding.⁴¹ Throughout late imperial China, women, or at least elite women, were confined to what was referred to as the "inner chambers" within a household. This was a set of rooms, most often in the back of a household, where women lived out their days. Women's social interactions were limited to other women, and close male relatives. Li argues against this cloistering of women and begins his argument against this unjust social practice when he writes,

I humbly propose that those who desire to discourse
on shortsightedness and farsightedness should do as I

³⁹ See the appendix, "Sima Xiangru."

⁴⁰ See the appendix, "Mourning the Precious Son."

⁴¹ See Mann (1997).

have done. One cannot stop at the observation that women's vision is shortsighted. To say that shortsightedness and farsightedness exist is acceptable. But to say that a man's vision is entirely farsighted and a woman's vision is wholly shortsighted, once again, how can that be acceptable?⁴²

Li believes that women's "shortsightedness" and men's "farsightedness" is due to differences in the social space within which men and women live. He writes, "Women live with the inner chambers while men wander throughout the world. Clearly, there exists vision that is shortsighted and that is farsighted." Here, we find Li playing with the idea of shortsightedness as not only moral, intellectual, and spiritual, but also physical shortsightedness. Li agrees that women's wisdom may be limited to the domestic sphere, but he vehemently believes that such is the case only because women are physically confined within the walls of the domestic chambers.

It should be noted that while women were in many ways restricted, in the late Ming women's intellectual lives were also expanding in particular realms. In addition to the traditional arts of reading the classics, reciting poetry, strumming the zither, sewing, painting, practicing calligraphy, more and more women also

⁴² See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

devoted themselves to writing, whether it be letters to those outside the home or poetry.⁴³ Li Zhi not only argued against the cloistering of women within the “inner chambers,” but in his actions, he enlarged women’s spheres in at least one significant way. In a period when women were only beginning to engage in conversation with those outside their own home through the vehicle of letter writing, Li Zhi regularly engaged in the practice of writing letters to female students.⁴⁴ These letters covered the same subjects he discussed with his male pupils, subjects such as metaphysics and ethics. Li was one of the few men in the Ming and Qing period who was known to accept female pupils, carrying out discussions through letters.⁴⁵ Li was eventually charged with various transgressions including “lewd conduct,” and was sentenced to prison at the age of 76, based in part on this simple yet subversive act of writing to female pupils.

One of the most striking ways in which Li puts forth the notion that women are identical to men in terms of their capacities is in his utopian vision of the body. In several passages, Li bemoans the fact that women are fettered in their lives on earth simply because men perceive the difference between men’s

⁴³ For a discussion on the development of women’s writing and women’s lives within the “inner chambers”, see Ko (1994), Mann (1997), , Handlin (1975).

⁴⁴ For example, see his series of letters entitled “Guanyin Wen” in *A Book to Burn*, page 166.

⁴⁵ Yuan Mei 袁枚(1716-1797 CE) was another influential thinker who accepted female pupils. His critics depicted such a practice as lascivious. For a intellectual biography on Yuan Mei, see Waley (1956).

and women's physical form to be intellectually and spiritually relevant. Women are indeed, in Li's words, "shortsighted." But this is simply because they are socially restricted from fully cultivating themselves. I give two examples of Li's view on this subject.

In his fifties, Li left his wife and had her escorted back to her natal home because, in Li's words, "... I desired the transcendence of Buddhism." He wished to study and meditate, and as he presents the situation in his letters, she did not. Li writes in his poem "Mourning Madame Huang,"

Because I desired the transcendence of Buddhism,
I said goodbye to you toward the end of our lives....
[Your] husband had his heart set on the world,
And deeply regrets that you were not able to follow!⁴⁶

What was the content of Li Zhi's regret? In a different poem, "Recalling Madame Huang," he mourns his wife's death and writes,

Today I know you have passed away. You now truly
[have become] a Bodhissatva.
Why did you need to transform into a woman's body,
and then later become known as a Bodhissatva?⁴⁷

If we read the "Mourning Madame Huang" and "Recalling Madame Huang"

⁴⁶ See the appendix, "Mourning Madame Huang."

⁴⁷ See the appendix, "Recalling Madame Huang."

together, we see Li laments that his wife was not able in her life “to set her heart on the world,” as he was able to. As a woman in “a woman’s body,” she was restricted to living, in Li’s words in another essay, “within the inner chambers.”⁴⁸ But in her death, her physical form on earth is of no consequence. He writes of her death, “you now truly have become a Bodhissatva.” Having transcended her physical form, she is able to realize her innate spiritual capacities. Li’s regret is a lament and criticism of the sexist social conditions and practices of his time.

If we turn toward the beginning of Li’s *A Book to Burn*, we will find an essay where Li puts forth this utopian vision where gendered differences in physical bodies are not considered a relevant marker for individuals’ intellectual and spiritual capacities. The paragraph on this subject is worth quoting in whole. Li writes,

Suppose there exists a person with a woman's body
and a man's insight. Furthermore, suppose this
person delights in hearing upright discourse and
knows that uncultivated speech is not worth listening
to. This person delights in learning about the
transcendent and understands that it is not worth
becoming attached to things of this transient realm. If
men of today were to see such a woman, I fear they

⁴⁸ See the appendix, “A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted.”

all should feel shame and remorse, sweat profusely, and be unable to utter a single syllable. This person with a woman's body and a man's insight is perhaps the sort of person Confucius wandered throughout the world in search of. He desired to meet her just once but could never find her. In our times we simply see women as shortsighted creatures. Isn't this grievously wrong? However, whether or not these views are wrong, why would women worry over what we think of them? Perhaps, though, someone observing this situation would find these views disgraceful.⁴⁹

In this passage, we see Li describing women as he imagines they would be in a more just society. He sees women ideally as "with a woman's body and a man's insight." He grieves that in his age, men treat women as if they are innately inferior creatures. He writes, "In our times we simply see women as shortsighted creatures. Isn't this grievously wrong?" In the end he imagines women as taking the moral high ground, and not condescending to mind how men conceive of them. Li writes, "However, whether or not these views [on women's inferiority] are wrong, why would women worry over what we think

⁴⁹ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

of them? Perhaps, though, someone observing this situation would find these views disgraceful.”

In Li's lament over his wife's death he envisions her as casting off the gendered body that, due to social constrictions, interfered with her ability to cultivate herself spiritually and intellectually while on earth. Li imagines that in her death in a state where her physical body no longer marks her to be socially subjugated, she attains spiritual enlightenment. In his essay, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao," Li believes that it is the social conditions that arise from men's misconceptions about the relevance of women's bodies in relation to their intellectual and spiritual capacities that hinders women from realizing themselves. Women's innate capacities, in Li's view, are no different from those of men. Given the same opportunities as men for self cultivation, women could develop what people in his time perceived of as, in Li's words, "man's insight." However, men do not see women as equal in spiritual and intellectual status. Rather, simply because of a difference in physical form, men see women as inferior creatures. As we shall discuss in chapters five and six, Li's notion that women are identical to men, and moreover his notion that women possess what he terms a "man's insight," prove problematic in many ways. However, for his time and place, he presented a remarkably progressive and liberating vision of gender relations.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with a discussion of Li Zhi's amended conception of the cosmos. In particular we examined Li's letter "Discussion on Husband and Wife." Upon first glance, the letter may not seem to offer too much in terms of a radical vision on gender relations. However, if we place the letter within the context of late-Ming discussions on correlative cosmology, we see that in fact, Li offers a progressive view of gender relations. In the letter Li offers a view of gender relations that are complementary rather than, as was accepted during his time, one that was hierarchical in nature. In the second part of the chapter, we examined a number of other arguments Li mobilizes in support of his views on gender equality. Li puts forth historical examples of women who succeeded at projects traditionally conceived of as men's work. He engages in criticism of social practices—the moral prohibition against widow remarriage, the cloistering of women within the inner chambers, the refusal on moral grounds by male intellectuals to tutor female pupils—that simply serve to constrict the space in which women live their lives. Li also imagines a utopian vision where one's gendered body is no longer relevant in determining the resources in society that one receives. In bringing forth historical examples, critique of social practices, and a utopian vision, Li offers not a complementary vision of gender relations, but rather, a vision of men and women as possessing identical intellectual and spiritual capacities.

What do we make of Li's two disparate conceptions of gender relations,

one of relations as complementary, another as identical? Further study of Li's writings on gender will be needed to address the question more adequately. We might however speculate that the difference is due simply to a change in views in his later life or a difference in the audience he is addressing. Perhaps the explanation lies in a difference of concerns: Li's radical views on specific issues such as widow remarriage and the teaching of female pupils might be distinct from his carefully considered theoretical views, such as his conception of the cosmos. For those who are interested in women's full flourishing, both Li's *complementary* and *identical* conceptions of gender relations leaves something to be desired. Nevertheless, whether we are looking at one or the other of his views on the relations between genders, clearly in Li Zhi we find a courageous thinker from sixteenth-century China creatively arguing for a radical reconception of gender relations. Having described some basic aspects of Li Zhi's views on gender relations, in the following chapter I would like to ask, What, if anything, is distinctive about Li's feminism? Let us now turn to this question.

Chapter 5
**Li Zhi and John Stuart Mill: A Confucian and Liberal Feminist
Dialogue¹**

In order to discern more clearly the distinctive aspects of Confucian feminism as articulated in the writings of Li Zhi, I will compare Li's ideas with one of the most influential forms of feminism in western feminist discourse, that of liberal feminism. More particularly, I will compare Li's thinking with that of the Utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). In the conclusion, I will identify one merit and one shortcoming each of Mill's and Li's feminist agendas, and then describe one way in which liberal and Confucian feminism are compatible and even complementary theories for efficaciously addressing the problem of the subjugation of women.

Upon first reading Li Zhi's arguments for gender equality, it is striking to see how similar they are to those forwarded by Mill in his feminist treatise *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Both appear to be arguing that the cloistering of women in the domestic sphere has created creatures who appear "naturally" subrational and submissive, and that gender equality can be attained by giving women the same educational and professional opportunities as men. For example, Li Zhi writes,

¹ Portions of chapter five reprinted by permission of Open Court Publishing Company, a division of Carus Publishing Company, Peru, IL, from *The Sage and the Second Sex* edited by Chenyang Li, (c) 2000 by Carus Publishing Company.

From our contemporary time we can observe the following: Yi Jiang, a woman, completed the ranks of King Wu's ministers. Nothing hindered her from joining esteemed men such as Zhou, Chao, and Tai-gong as one of the ten able ministers. Wen Mu, a sagely woman, edited and compiled the airs of the Southern states. Nothing prevented her from being praised along with commentators such as San Yi-sheng and Tai Dian as the four friends....[P]eople who have heard of these women no longer dare to link shortsightedness with women and farsightedness with men....²

Mill argues for,

[women's] recognition as the equals of men in all that belongs to citizenship—the opening to them of all honorable employments, and of the training and education which qualifies for those employments.³

However, if one interprets Mill's and Li's thinking through an understanding of the social structures by which each perceives their own social world, these facile

² See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

³ Mill (1988), p. 86.

similarities quickly dissolve.

Put briefly, Mill conceives of the world as divided between a private, domestic sphere and a public sphere comprised of economic and political activity. In contrast, Li, as a Confucian thinker, conceives of society as delineated along the lines of “inner” 內 *nei* and “outer” 外 *wai*. Scholars have commonly identified the inner with the concept of private (or domestic) and the outer with that of public. For example, in *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (1985) Tu Wei-ming makes such an identification when he writes, “The division of labor between the inner (domestic) and the outer (public) realm of responsibility makes it functionally necessary for the wife to assume a major role at home.”⁴ While there are similarities between the inner and the private (or domestic), and the outer and the public, I will show that the differences between the inner/outer and the private/public model are much more significant. In brief, the private/public model describes spheres that are impermeable and categorical, while spheres of the inner/outer model are permeable and graduated.

The dichotomy between the private and public sphere is central in much of contemporary Western feminist discourse. This distinction is not only of interest to feminists, but it has been a topic of sustained analysis and debate

⁴ See Tu (1985), p. 143.

among thinkers throughout the Western philosophical tradition.⁵ There have been a wide range of conceptions concerning what constitutes the public versus the private realms. What is characteristic about the model that feminists take as object of critique is the separation and opposition between the two spheres. Much feminist scholarship identifies the purported impermeability between the public and private realms as one of the primary sources of gender inequality. As I will argue later in this chapter, impermeability does accurately diagnose one of the major oversights in Mill's feminist thinking.

In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), bell hooks brings African-American women into the realm of feminist scholarship and in doing so, offers a good illustration of the problematic nature of the public/private distinction. She argues that although the separation and opposition between private and public may be a major source of subjugation for white, upper-middle-class women, it is not so for African-American women. This is because many African-American women, as well as other women from non-elite classes, have regularly crossed and to some extent effaced the sharp distinction between a private, domestic realm and a public realm of wage earning labor. Many women in the margins of society have had to work outside the home in order to support their families.⁶ And so, in this critical respect, the private/public model born from liberal

⁵ For an analysis of the various ways thinkers have conceptualized the private in contrast to the public, see Weintraub (1997).

⁶ See hooks (1984).

thought is an inadequate lens through which to identify the sources of gender inequality among African-American women.

For different reasons, the application of the private/public distinction also obscures rather than illuminates the sources of gender inequality in traditional Confucian society. An analysis of the ideas of Mill and Li in light of their dissimilar conceptions of social structure can give us insight into at least one fundamental and important difference between their feminist views, as well as those between liberal and Confucian feminist thought in general. First, we turn to a discussion on the private/public distinction.

Conceptions of the Private/Public Dichotomy in Western Philosophy

In order to better understand the model of private/public that will help illuminate Mill's argument for gender equality, it will be productive to describe three of the more prevalent models of the private/public dichotomy. One way of defining the private and the public is to contrast the domestic world with the world of citizenship. Aristotle deploys such a distinction. He distinguishes the household (*oikos*) centered on domestic life (which in his time was tied to economic trade and production) from the political community (*polis*), the world of communal discourse and action.

Today, one of the most prevalent ways of thinking about the private and the public sphere is in terms of the administrative state on the one hand in

contrast to civil society and the market economy on the other.⁷ This model, well represented in the works of John Locke, differs in one important way from models such as Aristotle's in that the former defines the two spheres as bifurcated and distinct while the latter envisions the spheres in a relation of relative continuity. Also of significance, unlike the Aristotelian model which distinguishes between a sphere of "natural" inequality (i.e., the *oikos*) and a sphere of equality and autonomy (i.e., the *polis*), this second model distinguishes two spheres which are both characterized by equality and autonomy.

Yet another form of the private/public distinction, one that is of particular significance to the discussion in this paper, was first articulated by feminists such as Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo,⁸ and has since been applied by numerous feminist scholars and social activists as a productive tool for analyzing the subject of gender inequality. This model bears a resemblance to the views that we find represented in the thinking of Aristotle and Locke. It is akin to the Aristotelian model both in that it identifies the private sphere with the domestic, and in that the private sphere is one characterized by "natural" inequality while the public is characterized by autonomy. At the same time, it is similar to the Lockean model and differs from Aristotle's conception in that the private and public spheres are

⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between the administrative state and civil society in late imperial and modern China, see the collection of essays in *Modern China* 19.2 (1993).

⁸ See Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974).

impervious to each other. Much feminist scholarship identifies the impermeability between the private and public spheres as one of the primary sources of gender inequality. In order to distinguish this model from other forms of the private/public, feminists have often referred to it as the domestic/public distinction. In the following pages, I too will refer to this model as such.⁹

The notion of impermeability between a private and public sphere has been honored through much of western thought, and this notion has indeed been used to subjugate women. However, at least one feminist scholar, Frances Olsen, has gone on to argue convincingly that the idea of impermeability between a public and private sphere is in fact incoherent. For example, Olsen reveals the incoherence of the notion of a state power committing to non-interference in the private lives of citizens when she writes,

[State] non-intervention is a false ideal because it has no coherent meaning. For example, suppose a good-natured, intelligent sovereign were to ascend to the throne with a commitment to end state intervention in the family. Rather than being obvious, the policies

⁹ See Pateman (1983). Pateman distinguishes two ways in which liberals have defined the private/public distinction. First, liberals have defined the division as one between the economic and political realm from the domestic sphere and second, as one between the state and all other aspects of social life. Feminists take the former model as their object of critique and often refer to it as the domestic/public distinction.

she should pursue would be hopelessly ambiguous.

Is she intervening if she makes divorces difficult, or
intervening if she makes them easy?¹⁰

And again, “‘Non-intervention’ loses much of its appeal if one thinks of it as mere reinforcement of the status quo.”¹¹ Despite the conceptual incoherence, the concept that there should and does exist “impermeability” has been called on throughout western thought and the use of such a concept has served to subjugate women. Again, examples of this rhetoric of impermeability used in the service of subjugating women can be seen, for example, when child care or domestic abuse is conceived of as outside the purview of government responsibility.

One aspect of the domestic/public model that is often left ambiguously defined is the issue of what constitutes the public sphere. The most common version of the domestic/public model defines the public sphere as comprised of the market economy, civil society, and the state. The private, domestic world is predicated on particularity and sentiment while the public sphere of economics and politics is, in contrast, governed by universal principles founded on reason. In contemporary scholarship, the private/public distinction is also cast in terms such as nature/culture, personal/political, and female/male.

¹⁰ See Olsen (1985), p. 842.

¹¹ See Olsen (1985), p. 143.

Respect for the individual and his autonomy is at the center of liberal thought. However, throughout most of the western liberal tradition, not all humans have been considered autonomous individuals. Women, like children, were regularly conceived of as subrational by nature and their interests were subordinated under the paternal care of the male head of the household. This male head of the household is the paradigmatic individual in traditional liberalism. In order for this individual to fully flourish, he needs a private sphere separate from the political domain where he can freely pursue his particular vision of the good life. At the same time, he needs the state to help protect his privacy from intrusion by other individuals. The paradigmatic individual of liberal thought moves between two independent spheres, the public and the private. A woman, because of her nature, is necessarily relegated to the private realm. Her interests in the political sphere are assumed to be identical to that of her husband's. Again, our concern is with this domestic/public model because of its role in feminist scholarship and in helping shed light on the merits and oversights of Mill's feminist thinking.

Inner and Outer in the Book of Rites

On first examination, the Confucian delineation between the inner and outer realm appears to bear significant resemblance to that between the domestic and the public sphere. As with the domestic/public dichotomy, the inner realm centers around the family with women as protagonists, while the

outer realm is primarily constituted of the economic and political aspects of society and is directed by the wills of men. However, the structural differences between these two models go beyond any superficial similarities in content. The Confucian inner/outer delineation which is graduated and permeable can be envisioned as a series of nested concentric circles with the family as the fountain of moral energy at the center of the well-ordered political and economic world.

In recent feminist scholarship, a number of scholars have criticized the conflation of the domestic/public with the inner/outer model.¹² For example, Susan Mann remarks,

...the distinction between *nei* and *wai*--between women's inner sphere and men's outer sphere--is quite unlike the Western dichotomy separating the "domestic" from the "public" spheres. [Men and women]...are part of a family system that constitutes a seamless, unitary social order centered on the home and bounded by the outer reaches of the imperium.¹³

Dorothy Ko insists,

Although often rendered in English as "domestic" and "public," "inner" and "outer" in their Chinese

¹² See Ko (1994), pp. 12, 13, and chapters 3-5; Bray (1997), pp. 53, 95, 180; and Mann (1997), p. 15.

¹³ Mann (1997), p. 15.

contexts are always relative and relational terms.¹⁴

What follows here is a schematic presentation of the inner/outer division as described in the *Book of Rites* 禮記 *Li Ji*, which as we mentioned earlier, is a Confucian text commonly considered to be as influential in shaping the Confucian tradition and the consciousness of the Chinese gentry as are the *Analects*, the *Mengzi*, and the *Xunzi*. It is in the *Book of Rites* that we find one of the first and fullest accounts of the inner/outer division in Confucian literature.¹⁵

The vision of differences as graduated rather than oppositional is well captured in the oft-used image in Confucian literature of the relationship of root to branch.¹⁶ For example, in the *Xunzi* we find, “[Through rituals] the root and the branch are put in proper order; beginning and end are justified.”¹⁷ And in the *Book of Rites*, “It cannot be, when the root is neglected, that what should spring from it will be well ordered.”¹⁸ Inherent in this image of root to branch is also the notion of permeability.

¹⁴ Ko (1994), p. 13.

¹⁵ For a discussion on conceptions of women in the *Book of Rites*, see Guisso (1981), pp. 47-61.

¹⁶ See Legge (1967), v. 2, pp. 411, 420. Also, Tu vividly articulates this particular mode of thinking in “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature”. See Tu (1985), pp. 35-50.

¹⁷ Watson (1963), p. 94.

¹⁸ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 412.

Permeability within the Confucian social structure is manifested in at least two ways. First, the virtuous individual situated in the family is the necessary root of a harmonious society. Discussion of the powerful radiating influence of the virtuous individual situated in the family on all other aspects of social life is famously articulated in the "Great Learning" chapter of the *Book of Rites*. One must first cultivate the self before one is equipped to regulate one's own family, properly care for one's family before one can then govern the state, and govern the state well before one can then bring harmony to the world. In the "Great Learning" we find,

The ancients who wish to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons.¹⁹

Traditional Confucian sources base society on "five human relations" 五倫 *wu lun* which are father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife, old-young, and that between friends.²⁰ In the concept of the five relations one also finds reference to the notion that cultivation of oneself within the family necessarily precedes proper governing of society. The fluidity between the domestic and the political

¹⁹ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 411.

²⁰ See *Mengzi* 3A4.

is apparent in that proper ruler-subject relations spring from harmonious and upright spousal relations. This notion is articulated throughout the *Book of Rites* where, for example, it states,

From the distinction between man and woman came
the righteousness between husband and wife. From
that righteousness came the affection between father
and son; and from that affection, the rectitude
between ruler and minister.²¹

While we have just discussed how permeability in the Confucian social structure radiates outward, influence also radiated inward as well. For example, one of the recurring images in Confucian literature is that of the virtuous ruler possessing a charismatic transformative influence over all those around him. This image is captured in *Analects* 2.1, "The Master said, 'One who rules through virtue can be compared to the Pole Star which commands the homage of the multitude of stars without leaving its place.'"²² The root, though, of all that is admirable in the world find its very beginnings and sustenance in the virtuous individual. It is in the family that individuals begin the demanding and yet deeply fulfilling project of self cultivation. The Confucian political order is

²¹ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 430.

²² Lau (1979), p. 63, adapted.

founded on the virtue of individuals.²³ It is only when the individual has cultivated his virtue that he can then properly perform his role-specific duties whether as son, husband, father, minister, ruler, or friend.

This brings us to the second respect in which permeability is manifested in the Confucian social structure. The virtues and skills one gains through cultivating the self and caring for one's family are necessary and transferable to the task of governing the state. Generally speaking, within the Western philosophical tradition, markedly different skills and virtues are required for operating within the domestic in contrast to the public sphere. For example, the public sphere is one that ought to be governed by justice upheld with impartiality, while the domestic sphere is filled with loving care. In the Confucian society structured by the division between inner and outer, however, the mechanisms that govern the cosmos are the same ones that ought to govern the state and the family. This conception of the family as microcosm of the state and the state as microcosm of the empire is arguably first articulated in Chinese literature in the *Mengzi*,

“The Empire, the state, the family.” The Empire has its basis in the state, the state in the family, and the family in one's own self.²⁴

²³ See, for example, *Analects* 2.1, and Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 418.

²⁴ See *Mengzi* 4A5.

The transferability of skills and virtues from the inner to the outer sphere is also evidenced in the analogy of the ruler to the parent. Repeatedly, the ruler is analogized to a father and mother,

“The happy and courteous sovereign
Is the father and mother of the people;”²⁵

And later,

When (a ruler) loves what the people love, and hates
what the people hate, then is he what is called ‘The
Parent of the People.’²⁶

The permeability between the inner and outer exists not only in the relationship between the family and the political sphere, but also between the family and the economic domain. In order for a woman to properly fulfill her role-specific duties in the family, she was expected to help support her family through weaving and embroidery and these works then were sold in the marketplace.²⁷

In its details, the location of the boundary and the degree of permeability between the inner and outer spheres is negotiated differently both practically

²⁵ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 278.

²⁶ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 420.

²⁷ For example, see Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 431.

and theoretically throughout Chinese history.²⁸ What is held constant in the inner/outer model is that the source of moral energy finds its locus in the family, and the same principles that govern the domestic sphere also apply to the political and economic sphere. For anyone interested in the subject of feminism, the relationship between family and political life is an important one. During the last decade, feminist scholars have devoted much of their efforts to arguing for the notion that the personal is political. A careful study of how the Confucian tradition conceives of the relationship between family and political life has much to offer to such an inquiry. More to the purpose of this chapter, having drawn out the significant differences between the domestic/public and the inner/outer models, we now turn to a discussion of J. S. Mill's and Li Zhi's arguments for gender equality.

J. S. Mill: Initiating Women into the Public Sphere

J. S. Mill, one of the great philosophers in the liberal philosophical tradition, contributed to a broad spectrum of fields whether it be logic, political philosophy, metaphysics, or economics. In the following pages, I describe the main argument in Mill's feminist philosophy in order to compare his ideas with

²⁸ For example, in *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Ko writes that 17th-century China is a period where the boundary between the inner and outer is heatedly contested among the gentry. In a social world defined by rapid urbanization, commercialization, and an emerging print culture, a significant number of talented elite women challenged and enlarged the domestic sphere by means of successfully taking on traditional men's roles as professional teachers. See Ko (1994), especially pages 115-142.

those of Li Zhi.²⁹ Through such a comparison, I intend to bring to light one interesting and important respect in which Confucian feminism, as articulated in the works of Li Zhi, can productively address a shortcoming in liberal feminism, as represented in the writings of Mill, as well as contribute to contemporary feminist discourse at large.

Legal and educational reform for the purpose of initiating women into the public sphere, a world constituted by the rights and duties of full citizenship and opportunities for employment, is the centerpiece of most versions of liberal feminism. In J. S. Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, we find one of the classical formulations of this seminal approach to the problem of the systematic oppression of women. Mill's treatise begins with a call for legal reform. He writes,

[T]he principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and...ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality....³⁰

²⁹ For an introductory discussion on liberal feminism including a discussion on J. S. Mill, see Tong (1998), pp. 10-44. Also, for a discussion on J. S. Mill's feminist philosophy, see Okin (1979), pp. 197-232.

³⁰ Mill (1988), p. 1.

Legal reform resonates throughout this work and is indeed at the heart of Mill's agenda for overturning gender inequality.

The concept of equality undergirds all of Mill's political philosophy. Before further examining Mill's feminist political philosophy, it thus seems profitable to first examine Mill's conception of equality. Equality has been conceived of by thinkers throughout history in various ways. One useful way to define equality is by distinguishing between *difference equality* and *sameness equality*.³¹ In respect to the subject of gender, sameness equality is the notion that equality consists in allotting identical amounts of a given thing to both men and women alike. Difference equality is the notion that equality is allotting amounts of a given thing in respect to what men and women need in order to obtain identical degrees of power and privilege in society. Giving men and women the same time-off for maternity and paternity leave is an instance of sameness equality. Giving women longer time-off for maternity leave because it is women, and not men, who carry and bear children and thus are physically and emotionally taxed is an instance of difference equality. In legal literature, sameness and difference equality in reference to gender have also been termed gender neutrality and special protection, respectively.

Mill, as is characteristic of liberal feminists in general, articulates a notion of equality that can be identified as sameness equality. In light of his conviction that identical treatment between men and women in the professional sphere will

³¹ For a discussion and critique of this distinction, see MacKinnon (1991).

enable women to attain equal privilege and power both in the domestic and public world, Mill devotes his feminist treatise to pushing for legal and educational reform that will enable women to participate equally alongside men in the public sphere.

While Mill chooses to focus his discussion of legal reform on two subjects in particular, that of marriage and professional employment, the crux of his vision for overcoming gender inequality turns on legal reform that will open up professional opportunities to women. Mill argues that for at least two reasons, admission into professional vocations is necessary and of significant importance if women are to become equal members alongside men both at home and in society at large. First, in order for a woman to possess equal power alongside her husband in the domestic sphere, she cannot be wholly dependent on him for every essential need and in particular, her economic needs. By opening up professional opportunities to women, women then possess the invaluable *option* of pursuing wage-earning labor. This option makes independence construed as economic self-sufficiency a real possibility. A woman then is freed from the state of being forced to rely on her husband's good graces for her every happiness, and also possesses the real option, if relevant reasons arise, to dissolve the bond of marriage.

Second, Mill believes that a fulfilling professional career contributes importantly to a meaningful life and therefore, such opportunities ought not be denied to women. In order to understand why Mill holds a professional career in

such high regard, we must understand Mill's conception of the self. Mill differs from earlier Utilitarians, such as his father, James Mill, and Jeremy Bentham, in that the younger Mill envisions an organic rather than a mechanistic model of the self. In other words, Mill believes that human beings grow and develop, and this process of intellectual and moral maturation is an essential aspect of a fulfilling life. Pursuit of a self chosen profession is intrinsically a joy but even more important to Mill, is also one of the prime ways humans can cultivate what is best in them—their intellectual and moral capacities. Engagement in a career of one's choice, then, is one important way to cultivate oneself. This self cultivation in turn enables one to enjoy the more deeply rewarding things in life, such as poetry rather than pushpin, and in this way, live a more meaningful life.

Even though Mill sees the option of pursuing a professional career as necessary to women's liberation, peculiarly enough, in the end he insists that given the choice between a profession outside of the home and marriage, which in his mind entails the full-time care of home and children, most women will desire the option of marriage. He admits that there are women who possess unusual talents and sensibilities which cannot be satisfyingly stimulated in the capacity of wife and mother. For these women, and in order to guarantee women the real possibility of economic independence, it is necessary that respectable professional opportunities be opened up to both genders.

In arguing that women be freed from the fetters that tie them to the domestic sphere, one of Mill's chief foes is the age-old stereotype of women as

"naturally" submissive and subrational and therefore best relegated to the domestic sphere. Mill's prime tactic in arguing against the subordination of women is to deconstruct this caricature of the "natural" women, one which runs throughout much of the history of western philosophy.³² Mill argues that men and women possess the same talents and virtues, and that the cloistering of women within the domestic sphere has only served to create warped creatures with stifled talents and frustrated ambitions. He writes,

What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing--the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others....[I]n the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has always been carried on of some of the capabilities of their nature....while other shoots...are left outside in the wintry air....[M]en, with that inability to recognize their own work...indolently believe that the tree grows of itself in the way they have made it grow, and that it would die if one half of it were not kept in a vapour bath and the other half in

³² With the exception of Plato, the major thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition have all held some version of the view that women are *naturally* submissive and subrational. This conception of women is well represented in Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*. For an analysis of this subject, see Okin (1979).

the snow.³³

Mill's prime strategy, then, for attaining gender equality is to bring women into the public sphere. By doing so, he thus transforms the substance of the division between the domestic and public sphere, but holds onto the traditional formal structure defined by impermeability between the two spheres. Put in other terms, Mill deviates from liberal thinkers before him in that he innovatively applies cherished liberal principles of freedom and equality to women and argues that women, too, ought to be given the opportunity to enjoy the goods brought by participation in the public realm. Where he falls short is in taking for granted the inalienability of the traditional distinction drawn between the public and the private. Mill sees society structured in such a way that the public and private are so rigidly set apart that domestic chores and child rearing are all consuming tasks. Mill liberates women by giving them a choice between a family life and a public career. However, while men, in Mill's world, can have both, women still must choose one or the other. In terms of Mill, then, contemporary feminists who identify impermeability between the domestic and public spheres as one of the prime sources of women's subjugation have their finger on one of the foremost problems in Mill's feminist philosophy. One of the shortcomings in Mill's feminist vision, is indeed his inability to imagine a social world where there exists permeability between the spheres of the domestic and the public.

³³ Mill (1988), pp. 22-23.

While the main focus of Mill's feminist agenda is on legal reform, Mill does also recognize the importance of self cultivation, or put in more limited terms familiar to contemporary social activism, consciousness raising. Self cultivation in Mill's philosophy, though, is always of secondary importance to legal reform. We will return to this subject later in this chapter. First, we turn to a discussion on a thinker who does place self cultivation at the center of his philosophy for overturning the oppression of women.

Li Zhi: Liberation through Self Cultivation

Upon first reading Li's writings on women, one aspect that is striking is the resemblance of Li's defense of gender equality to that of Mill's. Li too holds that women's lives are unfairly restricted to domestic affairs and insists that this seclusion is responsible for fashioning women, who innately possess the same talents and virtues as men, into petty, shortsighted creatures. Not only are these two thinkers' arguments akin in many ways, historically speaking, Mill and Li occupy similar roles in their respective traditions. Both are seminal feminist thinkers who find themselves arguing against cultural traditions whose major thinkers throughout history viewed women as submissive, morally developed but intellectually lacking, and best belonging in the domestic sphere. Despite the initial striking similarities, in fact what is much more interesting and substantive are the differences between Mill's and Li's arguments for gender equality. While Mill believes that gender equality can be achieved by bringing women into the public sphere, Li focuses his discussion on one of the most fundamental concerns to any Confucian, that of self cultivation.

The primacy of self cultivation in the Confucian tradition is forcefully articulated in the "Great Learning" chapter of the *Book of Rites* which states, "From the son of Heaven down to the multitudes of the people, all considered the cultivation of the person to be the root (of everything besides)."³⁴ As we discussed in chapter three, self cultivation is central to the Confucian tradition

³⁴ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 412.

and from antiquity through the present has been envisioned in various nuanced ways by different thinkers.³⁵ To review briefly, while the early Confucian Mengzi conceived of self cultivation as a *development* process, another Confucian from antiquity argued for self cultivation as *re-constructing* one's passion-laden nature. Neo-Confucians such as Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi articulated a markedly different form of self cultivation and insisted on the *discovery* of one's innate and fully developed good nature. Among Neo-Confucians each had his own particular version of this discovery model of the self. Li Zhi, a Neo-Confucian whose lineage is drawn by many scholars as deriving from Wang Yangming, conceives of self cultivation as a process of *preserving* one's innate child-mind.

Like Mill, Li also argues that women's deficiencies are due to confinement. However, the two differ on the kind of confinement each has in mind. Mill focuses on the fact that women have been excluded from the public sphere of citizenship and professional careers. In contrast, Li argues that women suffer intellectually and spiritually because of socially prescribed gendered differences in methods of self cultivation. Confucian educational segregation based on gender lines is described throughout the *Book of Rites*. For example we find, "a boy (was taught to) respond boldly and clearly; a girl, submissively and low."³⁶

³⁵ For a detailed discussion of this subject see Ivanhoe (2000b); and Ivanhoe (1990).

³⁶ Legge (1967), v. 1, p. 477.

By the age of ten, boys and girls were reared in separate quarters: "A girl at the age of ten ceased to go out (from the women's apartments). Her governess taught her (the arts of) pleasing speech and manners, to be docile and obedient," to manage the household, and to assist in ritual ceremonies.³⁷ Li operates within the Confucian framework where self cultivation is the basis of all other forms of social transformation. Predictably, then, Li identifies self cultivation as the central concern in his argument for gender equality.

In speaking of equality, both Li and Mill refer to the notion that humans, regardless of sex, possess nascent capacities that are similar in kind. Li and Mill differ in that while Mill has in mind intellectual and moral capacities, Li additionally identifies spirituality as a capacity. In fact, among the moral, the intellectual, and the spiritual, Li extols the spiritual to be the worthiest. Spiritual development is not only a good in itself, but also gives one an ineffable power that has a transformative moral and spiritual effect over those around oneself. As such, spiritual cultivation is also an essential means to any form of truly effective political leadership.

Unlike in the Western philosophical tradition where women on the whole have been conceived of as subrational and docile in contrast to men who are conceived of as rational and assertive,³⁸ in the Confucian tradition, men's and

³⁷ Legge (1967), v. 2, p. 477.

³⁸ The topic of women's in contrast to men's ways of thinking is a subject of considerable debate in contemporary feminist scholarship. For example, see Gilligan (1982).

women's ways of thinking differ not in mode (e.g., intuition, reason) but in content. As we discussed in chapter four, Li Zhi refers to this difference as one between "shortsightedness" 短見 *duan jian* and "farsightedness" 遠見 *yuan jian*. Women think in the same way as men do, but regarding different subject matter. In traditional Confucian society, women's vision is considered shortsighted. Li describes the shortsighted as ones who "hear only the chatter in the streets, the viewpoints of those in the alleys, the talk in the marketplace, and the words of children."³⁹ Their cares are about the "transient realm" and are limited to the sphere of the personal rather than the larger society. Men, in traditional Confucianism, are identified with farsightedness. Such people, writes Li, devote their minds to great literature, government, the "thoughts of sages," and the "transcendent." In refuting the assertion that women are by nature shortsighted, Li points to the "small minded person in the marketplace."⁴⁰ Peddlers and other men of a variety of professions, Li remarks, also dwell on the petty and transient and so too are shortsighted.

The women Li extols as "farsighted" are those who are given the opportunity to apply themselves to the study of the most refined subjects. For example, Li writes,

³⁹ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

⁴⁰ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

How much more would people's views on women change if a woman were to apply herself to the study of the transcendent and desire to be like Shakyamuni and Confucius...

And later,

What if one were to meet a woman who wandered in the refined world with an understanding achieved by studying the Buddha's teachings? If one were to meet a woman who transcended this material world, would it be possible for anybody not to greatly admire her?⁴¹

For Li, women's deficiencies arise from lack of opportunities for self cultivation. In order for women, like men, to develop into the rational and spiritually sensitive beings that they can be, women too need to be given the same opportunities as men for engaging in self cultivation.

A Confucian Feminist Critique of Liberal Feminism

We began this chapter by describing the significant differences between the domestic/public dichotomy as conceived by contemporary Western feminists, and the inner/outer delineation as articulated throughout the

⁴¹ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

Confucian tradition. We then argued that the facile identification of the domestic/public with the inner/outer model when reading the Confucian tradition conceals rather than reveals what is distinctive about Confucian feminism as found in the writings of Li Zhi. The Confucian tradition envisions the virtuous individual as the source of moral energy at the center of a harmonious society. Consequently, the tradition places moral, intellectual, and spiritual self cultivation at the heart of its moral and political philosophy. Li contests the traditional Confucian vision of women as shortsighted, and in a radical reformulation of the tradition, argues that opportunities for self cultivation ought to be available to both men and women. In concluding, I outline one way in which Li's feminist thinking can redress a shortcoming in liberal feminism as represented in the writings of Mill.

While Li forges a feminism with self cultivation as the basis of social transformation, Mill turns his attention to legal reform. Although Mill focuses on ensuring certain basic rights, it would be inaccurate to claim that he wholly overlooks the importance of self cultivation or the limitations of mere legal reform in advancing social change. For example, throughout *The Subjection of Women*, he voices the notion that part of what is wrong with the cloistering of women within the narrow confines of the domestic sphere is that it leaves men with intellectually dull wives. This lack of stimulation in an intimate relationship robs men of one important resource for self cultivation. Mill writes,

Any society which is not improving is deteriorating:

and the more so, the closer and more familiar it is.
Even a really superior man almost always begins to
deteriorate when he is habitually (as the phrase is)
king of his company: and in his most habitual
company the husband who has a wife inferior to him
is always so.⁴²

However, despite this cognizance of the importance of self cultivation, for many reasons Mill's vision of social transformation differs from Li's not merely in degree but in kind. For one thing, in Mill's philosophy, legal reform comes logically prior to possibilities for self cultivation. For example, it is only when women are given the legal right to work in the public sphere that they can pursue professions of their choice which in turn offers them challenges conducive to self cultivation. Also, Mill's understanding of self cultivation, as primarily intellectual though in some respects also moral, is significantly more limited than that of Li's which encompasses a richly developed notion of moral, intellectual, and spiritual cultivation. Indeed, then, Mill is primarily concerned with legal reform, while Li with self cultivation. These two prescriptions, whatever their marked differences, are at the same time compatible and even complementary strategies for addressing the problem of patriarchy.

Self cultivation is essential to any meaningful and substantive form of social change. At the same time, self cultivation is a long and arduous process

⁴² Mill (1988), p. 101.

and one which some never understand or fully engage in. Li expresses a richly developed understanding of the crucial role of self cultivation in advancing the position of women in society. Where he falls short in his feminist thinking is that he overlooks how important it is to guarantee basic rights in order to protect society and its most marginalized from at least the worst kinds of oppression. Mill, in contrast, apprehends the necessity of guaranteeing basic rights. However, he does not fully appreciate the fact that meaningful and substantive social transformation requires tremendous and protracted efforts in self cultivation and consciousness raising.

In concluding, we have claimed that Li Zhi and John Stuart Mill offer complementary strategies for attaining gender equality. One might ask how Li's and Mill's views can be complementary when their conception of the self and society are so different and perhaps mutually exclusive. As we discussed through this chapter, Li offers a picture of society as a system of concentric circles that are permeable to each other. In contrast, Mill envisions society as bifurcated into public and private realms with these spheres as impermeable. Furthermore, implicit in this discussion are two very different conceptions of the self. Li sees the self as in relation to others, an individual is defined by her relationship to family, community, and the state, while Mill conceives of the individual as an autonomous being. Are not theories emerging from such disparate conceptions of the self and of society be incompatible? In my view, Li and Mill offer two different ways of being in the world that are not in necessary opposition to each

other. In fact, they present two different and potentially complementary ways of living one's life.⁴³ Mary Bockover eloquently articulates the complementary nature of these two conceptions of the world. She writes, "Independence and interdependence are not logically inconsistent, unless we make the facile--and culturally biased--assumption that 'interdependence' means 'not independence' (nor should we make the same mistake the other way round, for 'interdependence' does not just mean 'not independent')." ⁴⁴

By giving further analysis and drawing out the significant differences between two models of social structure, domestic/public and inner/outer, that at first glance appear to bear striking resemblance to one another, we have discerned in Li Zhi's thought a particular feminism that is distinctive to Confucianism. A careful study of the varieties of feminist thinking within the Confucian tradition can only serve to further nuance and deepen our understanding of the sources of gender oppression, and aid us in formulating efficacious strategies for addressing the injustices wrought by patriarchy. For now, having identified self cultivation as central to Li's discussion on women and gender equality, in the following chapter I would like to further examine the nuances of Li's conception of self cultivation.

⁴³ I owe this discussion on apparent incompatibility of two very different conceptions of the self and of society to Mary Bockover and Eric Hutton.

⁴⁴ Bockover (2001).

Chapter Six
Radical, Cultural, and Confucian Feminism on Self and Social Transformation

Through a comparison of Li Zhi and John Stuart Mill, in the previous chapter we identified *self cultivation* as distinctive to Confucian feminism as found in the writings of Li Zhi. Furthermore, we concluded by pointing to one of the strengths and weaknesses of Li's Confucian in contrast to Mill's liberal feminism. In this chapter, we will explore ways in which Li's thinking on gender comes into productive dialogue with two other influential voices of western feminism, that of Catherine MacKinnon and Mary Daly. More particularly, I will examine the similarities and differences among three different methods of attaining liberation for women: MacKinnon's consciousness raising, Daly's exorcising, and Li Zhi's self cultivation. I begin by describing two different conceptions of self cultivation, one as a private spiritual and psychological project, and the other as centered on the public project of transforming the socio-economic world. In describing these two visions of self cultivation, I take as a model Daly's idea of "exorcising," and MacKinnon's idea of "consciousness raising." I show that MacKinnon and Daly in various ways challenge the notion of a necessary distinction between private and public, yet each ultimately assumes these very categories as the basis of their respective analysis.

With MacKinnon's and Daly's conceptions of self cultivation in mind, I then revisit our discussion in chapter five on the subject of social space and continue analysis of this topic by identifying ways in which Li's conception of

society challenges the idea of the social world as divided between a sphere of spiritual and psychological development, and one of socio-economic activity. In conclusion, I show that an understanding of Li's vision of social space enables us to perceive with greater nuance his conception of self cultivation as both self and social transformation.

In discussing self cultivation within the context of conceptions of social space, we will also be led to an analysis of MacKinnon's, Daly's, and Li's theories of human nature. The subject of human nature is central to Confucian discourse, and at the same time relatively ignored in western ethical discourse.¹ A comparative discussion of human nature will illuminate the ways in which the subject is implicitly central to MacKinnon's, and explicitly underlies Daly's feminist theory.

Before turning from our introductory remarks, it will be beneficial to define a number of terms. One common way of cataloguing the strands of thinking in western feminist ethical and political theory is between liberal, marxist, and radical.² While such categories serve as a productive analytical framework, they also impose a clearly demarcated order that betrays the great variation of feminist voices. One challenge to the traditional cataloguing insists on further attention to the complexity of thought within radical feminism. For

¹ See Nussbaum (1992).

² See Jaggars (1983) and Tong (1998).

example, Rosemarie Putnam Tong, in her more recent work, calls for a division between what she terms “radical-libertarian feminists” and “radical-cultural feminists.”³ Alice Echols divides the traditional category of radical feminism in a substantively different way and refers to the distinction as one between “radical” and “cultural”⁴ feminism. For Echols, radical feminists are invested in socio-economic transformation of society at large, while cultural feminists are concerned with valuing and preserving virtues traditionally attributed to women. Radical feminists concern themselves with social power, cultural feminism with morals, psychology, and spirituality.

In the following pages, I will borrow Echols’ framework of radical versus cultural feminism in order to highlight one relevant difference between MacKinnon and Daly. I will identify MacKinnon with radical and Daly with cultural feminism, and argue that MacKinnon and Daly in great part are similar in their conceptions of women’s natures and in their theories of social

³ See Tong (1998), pp. 45-93. Tong writes that her new interpretation of radical feminism is influenced by the works of Alice Echols and Linda Alcoff. For Alcoff’s work on this topic, see Alcoff (1988).

⁴ One of the first individuals to use the term “cultural feminism” is radical feminist Brooke Williams in her 1975 article “The Retreat to Cultural Feminism.” See Brooke Williams “The Retreat to Cultural Feminism” in *Redstockings* (1975), pp. 79-83. For another early source that uses the term “cultural feminism,” see Willis (1984). For one of the seminal documents of cultural feminism, see Alpert (1973). For further discussion on the differences between cultural and radical feminism, see Echols (1989), pp. 6-8, 9, 22, 199-202, 243, 257, 264, 281-284.

knowledge. However, the two differ importantly in their views of the personal versus the public realms.

In order to prepare for our discussion of women's nature and the ideal community, let us begin with a description of consciousness raising as first articulated by radical feminists in the early 1960s. Both Catherine MacKinnon in speaking of consciousness raising and Mary Daly in describing exorcising refer back to this early 1960s radical feminist movement and its conception of consciousness raising.⁵

⁵ In order not to confuse the early radical feminists' discussion of consciousness raising with that of MacKinnon's, I will refer to the earlier CR as Consciousness Raising, in capitals, and MacKinnon's as consciousness raising.

Early Radical Feminism on Women's Nature, Epistemology, and Community

Early radical feminism⁶ flourished in the United States from around 1967-1975.⁷ What is characteristic of radical feminist thinking is the belief that women's oppression is universal, and at the core of all other forms of socio-political oppression. Women as a group must be liberated for society at large to be liberated. Central to this tradition of feminism is the concept of Consciousness Raising as a tool enabling revolutionary socio-political change. Consciousness Raising as part of feminist thought first emerged in the late 1960s in the United States when small groups of women, wanting to get at the root of women's oppression, gathered together to share their experiences as women.⁸

Most radical feminists see the beginnings of Consciousness Raising as first

⁶ For examples of early radical feminist writings, see Firestone (1970), Millet (1970), Atkinson (1974), the Cell 16 (n.d.), and New York Radical Women (1968), Firestone and Koedt (1970).

⁷ For a history of the emergence of radical feminism, see Evans (1979), Echols (1989), and Rosen (2000).

⁸ The term itself was first coined in the women's liberation group New York Radical Women. For further discussion on the New York Radical Women, see Echols 1989, pages 21, 72-82, 388. Kathie Sarachild, one of its members, is considered to be the chief architect and one of the most influential proponents of consciousness raising. For further discussion on Sarachild's role in designing the concept of radical feminist concept of consciousness raising, see Echols 1989, pages 10, 76, 83-90, 140, 143, 148, 151, and 384. For Sarachild's views on consciousness raising, see Kathie Sarachild's "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" in *Feminist Revolution* ed. Redstockings (New Paltz: Redstockings, 1975). Also, see Sarachild's "A Program for 'Consciousness Raising'" in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (April 1970).

coming to some inchoate form during the U.S. civil rights activism of the early 1960s.⁹ Many also acknowledge a deep intellectual debt to the consciousness raising work found in the cultural revolutionary work of Chinese peasants and the revolutionary struggle in Guatemala, both of which find inspiration in Marxist thought.¹⁰ Through the influences of Marxism, Maoism, and civil rights activism, radical feminists have shaped a program of Consciousness Raising that can be schematically described through an analysis of radical feminist conceptions of women's nature, of epistemology, and of the ideal community.

Throughout the literature published by radical feminists one finds the assumption that consciousness, one's capacity to clearly perceive and accurately judge oneself and the world, is innately fully operative. However, patriarchal society has so oppressed this capacity in women that it no longer can function in its natural ways. Borrowing the language of Neo-Confucianism, patriarchal society has muddled women's innately pure and fully functioning consciousness.¹¹ Women's liberation necessarily involves dissipation of this

⁹ See Evans (1979) and Echols (1989).

¹⁰ See Echols (1989) and Mitchell (1973). Also, see Firestone and Koedt (1970), pp. 77, 81, and Redstockings (1975), pp. 133, 136.

¹¹ Such a description of women's consciousness and the task of consciousness raising could easily be a description of Wang Yangming's discovery model of one's *liangzhi*. See my earlier discussion on Wang Yangming, chapter three.

beclouded consciousness, or “false consciousness,”¹² and re-discovery of women’s true consciousness. Anne Forer in her contribution to the influential radical feminist publication *Feminist Revolution* (1975) succinctly describes this innate pure and wholly functioning capacity. She writes,

In this instance it is women who feel that their consciousness (which must be their awareness and perception regarding themselves and the world) has been cramped, darkened, frustrated, undeveloped, misguided or even seemingly replaced by a false consciousness. So that women’s awareness is not all that it could be....Their own true individual awareness is somehow not really operative, either it has been blocked or stymied or repressed or just overloaded with so much shit.¹³

Forer speaks of women’s consciousness as “blocked, stymied,” and “not fully operative.” Through Consciousness Raising women seek to recover their “true individual awareness.” Again, Forer writes, “...we must now use this information to discover all we can about this *false consciousness*....When it is

¹² See Redstockings (1975), p. 138, Firestone and Koedt (1970), pp. 82-83.

¹³ See Redstockings (1975), p. 138.

exposed and destroyed in this way *real consciousness* can take its place.”¹⁴ As is common among radical feminists, Forer believes that the initial stage in Consciousness Raising is to mend damage inflicted by patriarchy on women’s innately, fully functioning consciousness. Generally speaking, radical feminists believe that social injustices of all forms, whether racism, ethnocentrism, or classism, are intimately tied to sexism and will also collapse when sexism does. Foundational to radical feminist thinking is the conception of women’s nature as good. Because women’s consciousness, or women’s nature, is innately good, raising women’s consciousness enables women to once again judge wisely and act justly in the world. Women’s consciousness, or women’s nature, is indeed innately good. Radical feminists, then, articulate a realist conception of justice; When one accurately perceives the social world, one sees it through the eyes of justice.

The epistemology for knowing about social reality that underlies early radical feminist Consciousness Raising begins with the individual and her feelings. Radical feminists both borrow from and react to the epistemology generally found within the scientific tradition. Like the scientific tradition, central to radical feminist Consciousness Raising is the importance of collecting data for analysis. As scientists employ the scientific method to scrutinize the natural world, radical feminists offer Consciousness Raising as a method that analyzes women’s interior world and thereby enables people to see and imagine solutions

¹⁴ See Redstockings (1975), p. 138, italics mine.

to rectify unjust gender inequities. In "Consciousness Raising: A Radical Weapon," Sarachild compares Consciousness Raising to the seventeenth-century western scientific revolution which challenged the prevailing tradition of scholasticism, and replaced it with empiricism. The aim with the scientific method is to "study nature, not books."¹⁵ For radical feminists, the aim is to study the experiences of women as voiced by women rather than as found in scholarly treatises. Common to both traditions is the idea that there exists one true picture of the world that can be grasped by human understanding.

While borrowing from the scientific tradition's faith in the methodical collection of data, radical feminists also react against the scientific tradition in at least two ways. First, in speaking of the social world, radical feminists envision an epistemology that erases the traditional subject-object distinction and second, radical feminists see individual feelings rather than objectively measurable facts of the external world as the data that must be gathered. Generally speaking, those from the scientific tradition see the world as divided between subject and object. The scientist, a subject, is interested in understanding the exterior world, the object, as it is unperturbed by human consciousness. To truly know the world is to know it from a view-from-nowhere, distinct from one's own individual interpretation. In contrast, while radical feminists posit an epistemology that sees the self and the world-out-there as distinct, not unlike the

¹⁵ See Sarachild's "Consciousness Raising: A Radical Weapon" in *Redstockings* (1975), p. 132.

scientific tradition, they also see the self and the world-out-there as intimately connected. The self and the world-out-there are distinct spheres but nevertheless connected. To understand the world one must begin by understanding the self. Consciousness Raising enables women to see women's interior world as an object that is part of the world. As radical feminist Anne Forer writes, "Women's liberation has discovered that by sharing honestly our own feelings and experiences--we can sort of objectify our consciousness as it exists at the present time."¹⁶

In contrast to the scientific tradition which sees feelings as an obstacle in one's pursuit of an accurate view of the world, radical feminists insist that feelings truly exist and are an integral part of the social world. With both a new conception of the relation between self and the world and a new valuing of feelings, radical feminists argue that to understand the world, one must begin with knowledge that is most accessible to oneself, one's own experiences and feelings. Kathie Sarachild articulates this new epistemology where one begins with individual feelings when she writes, "Let's let ourselves go and see where our feelings lead us. Our feelings will lead us to ideas and then to actions."¹⁷ Again, the aim of Consciousness Raising is to arrive at a true picture of the world. As Sarachild writes, "There is tremendous energy in consciousness-

¹⁶ See Redstockings (1975), p. 138.

¹⁷ See Firestone and Koedt (1970), p. 78.

raising, an enthusiasm generated for getting to the truth of things, finding out what's really going on."¹⁸

Front and center in radical feminist conceptions of Consciousness Raising is the priority of socio-political transformation. Consciousness Raising is central to radical feminism because Consciousness Raising, which enables sharing of thought and formulation of theory, ultimately leads to revolutionary political action. As early radical feminists conceived it, Consciousness Raising is a political, not a lifestyle movement. It is a change in self that ultimately leads to a change in the socio-political world. While MacKinnon and Daly both see their own respective thought as deriving from early radical feminism, in later parts of the chapter we will discuss how both MacKinnon and Daly see transformation primarily in terms of either self or society.

When radical feminists first engaged in Consciousness Raising sessions, critics looked upon the practice as "coffee klatches" and "hen parties." For radical feminists, Consciousness Raising is not seen as personal therapy, though it does serve those ends through increased awareness and understanding of injustice, but primarily as a methodological tool leading to political action. Kathie Sarachild succinctly describes the political aims of consciousness raising when she writes,

The purpose of hearing people's feelings and
experience was not therapy....The importance of

¹⁸ See Redstockings (1975), p. 136.

listening to a woman's feelings was collectively to analyze the situation of women, not to analyze *her*. The idea was not to change women, not to make "internal" changes except in the sense of knowing more. It was and is the conditions women face, it's male supremacy, we want to change.¹⁹

Early radical feminists, then, see Consciousness Raising as a method leading first to an understanding of the political nature of all experience whether private or public and second, to a transformation of the unjust political world. Underlying this vision of a transformed social world is a picture of women's nature as innately good, and knowledge as beginning from understanding of one's own interior mental world. In the following pages let us examine the ways in which MacKinnon, Daly, and then Li Zhi compare with this early radical feminist model along these lines: a conception of women's nature, a theory of knowledge, and a vision of the ideal community.

MacKinnon and Socio-Political Transformation

One of the most vocal contemporary feminists who speaks on the subject of consciousness raising is legal and political theorist Catharine MacKinnon. As with early radical feminists, MacKinnon articulates an epistemology regarding

¹⁹ See Sarachild's "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" in *Redstockings* (1975), p. 135.

social knowledge that values the interior mental world, and envisions an ideal society that primarily is transformed politically rather than psychologically or spiritually. Unlike early radical feminists, MacKinnon does not explicitly articulate a conception of women's nature. However, I will argue, her views on epistemology make sense only when one is able to assume a covert theory of women's nature as good. Let us turn to a discussion on MacKinnon's views on consciousness raising.²⁰

To MacKinnon, consciousness raising is the embodiment of a theory of knowing and the bedrock of feminism. In *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, MacKinnon writes, "The key to feminist theory consists in its *way* of knowing. Consciousness raising is that way."²¹ As with early radical feminists, MacKinnon too argues against the epistemology common to the scientific tradition. In contrast to an epistemology that sees one's internal mental world of experiences and feelings as an impediment to understanding the world as it truly is, MacKinnon offers an epistemology that begins with the interior, mental world. In setting her theory of knowledge against the traditional scientific view MacKinnon writes,

[Social science's] model of knowledge posits a mind

²⁰ In the following pages I will focus on MacKinnon (1989) and MacKinnon (1987). For other prominent works of MacKinnon's also see Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988), MacKinnon (1993), MacKinnon and Dworkin (1998), and MacKinnon (2001).

²¹ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 84.

needing to overstep its determinants in order to get outside itself in order to get at the facts....Feminist method as practiced in consciousness raising, taken as a theory of knowing about social being, pursues another epistemology. Women are presumed able to have access to society and its structure because they live in it and have been formed by it, not in spite of those facts. Women can know society because consciousness is part of it, not because of any capacity to stand outside it or oneself.²²

MacKinnon's epistemology in regard to knowing the social world contrasts with the epistemology of social science in at least three important ways. First, she asserts that ideas, subjective experiences, and feelings are a real part of the world. As MacKinnon writes, the epistemology she advocates "grasp[s] women's reality from the inside...."²³ Second, ideas and feelings are in dialectical relationship with the material world. Thought shapes the material world, and vice versa. As MacKinnon puts it, "Mind and world, as a matter of social reality, are taken as interpenetrated."²⁴ Third, and at once most central and yet most

²² See MacKinnon (1989), p. 98.

²³ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 242.

²⁴ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 98.

problematic in MacKinnon's discussion of consciousness raising, is her insistence that one's view of the social world depends on one's social position. Let us examine the problematic nature of this third point.

As a legal scholar, MacKinnon primarily takes law and more particularly, contemporary American law, as her data in analyzing conceptions of the social world. Repeatedly in her work MacKinnon speaks of the American legal system presenting itself as embodying justice standing in judgement from an objective standpoint. In fact, argues MacKinnon, legal systems generally reflect a world view derived from the male's point of view. In speaking in part about the American legal system she writes, "In male supremacist societies, the male standpoint dominates civil society in the form of the objective standard—that standpoint which, because it dominates in the world, does not appear to function as a standpoint at all."²⁵ To MacKinnon, how we know the social world is necessarily political. This knowledge is shaped both by our social position and our choice of an epistemology. Social knowledge is in part knowledge of what each individual lives through. Women, then, have special access to the knowledge of women's social existence. MacKinnon writes, "Feminist epistemology asserts that the social process of being a woman is on some level the same process as that by which woman's consciousness becomes aware of

²⁵ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 237. For further discussion on law as representing the male point-of-view, see, for example, MacKinnon (1987), p. 97.

itself as such and of its world.”²⁶ Not only is one’s view of the world shaped by one’s social position, but also, asserts MacKinnon, by one’s choice of an epistemology. In MacKinnon’s work, she describes two different epistemologies, that found in the scientific tradition and that which MacKinnon refers to as “feminist” or consciousness raising as epistemology.

While MacKinnon insists that one’s view of the world is shaped by one’s social position, at the same time, she claims that there exist true views of the world. Repeatedly she speaks of people or at least women having access to “correct knowledge” and of having the ability to “validly” comprehend the world.²⁷ MacKinnon seems to argue that all narratives are true. She writes, “[Feminism] redefines validity as nonuniversal but nevertheless correct....” And again, “The process [of consciousness raising] affirms a product of the determinants--self as knower of one’s condition....”²⁸ For MacKinnon, to see a true picture of the world entails wanting what is just. At least, for MacKinnon, such is the case for women. Consciousness raising is powerful because by seeing the social world in a new and true light, women see the injustices of a society that give women less with the excuse that women are different. While believing the subject’s understanding of his or her own condition and so taking the subject’s

²⁶ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 98.

²⁷ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 102.

²⁸ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 102.

view of the social world as a true picture of the world, at the same time MacKinnon does undercut certain subject's understanding of the world. One of her recurring arguments is that the American legal system is created by individuals who possess a skewed view of the social world. In contrast to what she explicitly claims about affirming the self as knower of one's condition, MacKinnon appears to implicitly assume that certain members of society, most specifically those in power, are lacking insight while those who are marginalized possess some form of epistemological privilege. Again, in her discussions of epistemology, she is concerned with moral truth, rather than, for example, scientific truth.

Throughout her work, MacKinnon identifies the legal system and social science as presenting their views as an objective account of the world. This view-from-nowhere, claims MacKinnon, is in fact the view of those in power. In critiquing the view-from-nowhere epistemology found in social science she writes, "Because social science is crippled by its mythos as distanced and aperspectival, it cannot give an account of the social reality it approaches...."²⁹ The male point of view, because it is the point of view of those in power, cannot give a true account of the social world. Again, MacKinnon implies that men lack the ability to see a true picture of the world when she writes, "...the male standpoint dominates civil society in the form of the objective standard....Under

²⁹ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 99.

its aegis, men dominate women and children...."³⁰ For MacKinnon, to see the social world correctly is to see it with the proper affective, cognitive, and motivational structures that will enable one to work toward appropriate social ideals. The domination of women and children is far removed from MacKinnon's picture of the truly just world.

Why would it be that women possess special insight into the social world as it truly is? One way to make sense of MacKinnon's conception of women as possessing some form of epistemological privilege is to assume a covert conception of women's nature. If we can assume, as Mary Daly explicitly states, that women's nature is innately good, then we can make sense of women's epistemological privilege. Without some such assumption, MacKinnon can claim at most that women's epistemology is an alternative--not necessarily the correct or normative standard.

While MacKinnon does not explicitly say much more about her theory of truth, in the end, her underlying view of truth may be similar in significant ways to that of Li Zhi's. Like Li Zhi, metaphors of vision run throughout MacKinnon's discussion. She repeatedly describes consciousness raising as leading to a "broad

³⁰ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 237.

unmasking,"³¹ a "discern[ing],"³² a "perceiv[ing]."³³ Indeed in MacKinnon's view, what is most important to feminist theory and what consciousness raising enables is the envisioning of a new society. In chapter three we identified Li as a particularist. In brief, Li Zhi is an ethical realist who believes that moral knowledge is accessible to anyone who works to achieve it but that ethical judgements are not in any strong sense codifiable. Each and every moral judgement is *particular* to its specific conditions and time. Confusion and lack of understanding results from a cloudy faculty of knowing. The aim of self cultivation is to clarify this faculty so that one again is able to perceive clearly. Underlying Li's theory of knowing, the idea of the re-discovery of an innate and good knowing faculty within oneself, is a well defined concept of human nature as good. This faculty of knowing can be effectively analogized to the faculty of vision.

In MacKinnon's writings she too repeatedly invokes the metaphor of vision. MacKinnon forcefully captures the fundamental importance of clear vision when she writes,

Sexism is seen to be all of a piece and so much a part
of the omnipresent background of life that a massive

³¹ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 109.

³² See MacKinnon (1989), p. 90.

³³ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 102.

effort of collective concentration is required even to discern that it has edges. Consciousness raising is such an effort.³⁴

Underlying MacKinnon's valuing of clear vision is a certain unarticulated conception of human nature. Her view that the simple act of seeing without impediment enables one to see what is just best make sense when we can assume a conception of women's nature as good.³⁵ There are different ways in which human nature might be shaped whether, for example, through biological determinism or through work. As a thinker greatly influenced by Marxism, it is more plausible that MacKinnon sees human nature as shaped by one's work. Being socially marginalized, then, creates a certain nature that enables one to possess special insight into the world, an ability lacking in those with social power.

Thus far we have seen that MacKinnon's feminism is similar to that of early radical feminism in that she holds a theory of knowing that begins with the consciousness of the individual and at least implicitly, she conceives of women's nature as good. While challenging the traditional understanding of the private and public spheres, like the early radical feminists MacKinnon assumes the traditional social structure of the social life as falling within either the private or

³⁴ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 90.

³⁵ For a discussion on the need for ethicists and political theorists to articulate a theory of human nature, see Nussbaum (1992).

the public realm. MacKinnon challenges the impermeable boundary between private and public by arguing that for women, there exists no private sphere of personal freedom. MacKinnon writes, "The law of privacy treats the private sphere as a sphere of personal freedom. For men, it is. For women, the private is the distinctive sphere of intimate violation and abuse, neither free nor particularly personal."³⁶ Again, MacKinnon insists that for women, the private sphere of morals is in fact a public sphere of politics. She writes,

The law of obscenity treats regulation of pornography...as regulation of morals, as some men telling other men what they may not see and do and think and say about sex. From the standpoint of women, whose torture pornography makes entertainment, pornography is the essence of a powerless condition, its effective protection by the state the essence of sexual politics. Obscenity law's "moral ideas" are a political reality of women's subordination.³⁷

While challenging the traditional distinction between private and public, in the end MacKinnon still assumes these very categories as the basis of her analysis.

³⁶ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 168.

³⁷ See MacKinnon (1989), p. 169. For further discussion of the private and public distinction, see, in particular, MacKinnon (1987), pp. 93-102.

She argues that for women, the private sphere does not really exist. All is political. Let us now turn to a thinker who unlike MacKinnon calls for women to retreat to a private sphere.

Mary Daly and Self Transformation

In Mary Daly we find a feminist whose early works are rooted in the radical feminist tradition³⁸ but who later develops into one of the strongest voices of cultural feminism.³⁹ In her writings from the late 60s and beginning of the 70s, we clearly see Daly advocating for social transformation. At the same time, there are hints of Daly's later cultural feminist concern with culture, morality, and psychology in contrast to the focus on politics and economics that

³⁸ See Mary Daly "The Spiritual Dimension of Women's Liberation" in New York Radical Feminists (1971), pp. 75-78. For more on the New York Radical Feminists, see Echols 1989, pp. 21, 186-98, 388. The radical feminist aspiration of changing society at large can be found in these early writings.

³⁹ While Daly's earlier works, such as *Beyond God the Father* (1973), can be classified as radical feminist, her later works, such as *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) and *Pure Lust* (1984), are representative of cultural feminist thinking. For Daly's most influential early works, see *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), and *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973). These early works are a sharp contrast to her later one. Most influential of her later works are *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1984), a book co-written with Jane Caputi entitled *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (1988), *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage* (1993), *Quintessence...Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto* (1998), and *Quintessence...Realizing the Archaic Future: A Radical Elemental Feminist Manifesto* (1999).

is common to radical feminists.⁴⁰ The turning point in Daly's thinking from radical to cultural feminism can be found in her book *Gyn/Ecology* (1978). By the time she writes *Pure Lust* (1984), her cultural feminist identity is in full view. Common to cultural feminists, we find Daly insisting on women's affirmation of themselves through the separation of women from men. In the following pages, I would like to look at Daly's cultural feminist conception of consciousness raising through an analysis of this concept in *Pure Lust*.

Daly never explicitly refers to the term "consciousness raising" in *Pure Lust*. However, the cultural feminist concept of sharing one's personal experiences, realizing one's gender oppression, and establishing a separate sphere is clearly central to her work. Rather than the term "consciousness raising," we do find Daly using terms such as "exorcising,"⁴¹ "unmasking,"⁴² "anamnesia,"⁴³ and "pure lust."⁴⁴ I will speak of "exorcising" to refer to the cluster of ideas that in a number of important ways is similar to what we have thus far described as early radical feminist Consciousness Raising. Daly sees exorcising as an act engaged in community. Through creative acts such as

⁴⁰ For example, see Daly (1971), p. 78.

⁴¹ See, for example, Daly (1984), pp. 77-78, 86,-87, 142, 146, 192-194, 356, 397.

⁴² See Daly (1984), p. 79.

⁴³ See Daly (1984), p. 85.

⁴⁴ See Daly (1984), pp. 2, 164, and throughout much of book.

writing, speaking, and painting, women are able to name the oppressive patriarchal forces, rediscover their innately good natures, and thus flourish in a sphere separate from that of men. Daly speaks of this flourishing as "ecstasy." One of Daly's most vivid descriptions of this task of "exorcising" is the following,

Feminism is a Name for our moving/movement into
Metabeing. Given the conditions of the sadostate, the
Moving that is feminism requires overcoming the
possessed powers—engaging in battles of
principalities and powers. This Battling is our *great
exorcism*, and it is also our ecstasy, for it is the claiming
of our principalities, the Naming/Actualizing of our
powers. That is, it is creation....⁴⁵

Like MacKinnon, Daly too conceives of women's natures as good, but does so explicitly and for different reasons. For MacKinnon, women's natures are good because of their marginalized social position. Disempowerment offers people a particularly clear vision of the social world. In contrast, Daly can be characterized as a biological determinist. Women innately possess a different way of thinking and of being, and this way of thinking and being is superior to that of men's. Daly refers to women who are in touch with their natures as "...true Witches, Weirds, who are in touch with the powerful creative

⁴⁵ See Daly (1984), p. 194, italics mine.

Demon/Genius/Muse within."⁴⁶ In contrast, Daly describes men as being innately without the ability to exist freely and in harmony with nature. Daly writes, "Since [men] themselves were incapable of being truly Mantic, of soothsaying/divining, the torturers lusted then, as they do now, to blunt and debase these powers."⁴⁷

Daly further implicitly points to women's innately good natures when she speaks of women's relation to nature. Daly describes the world in its natural state as intrinsically ethically good. She then presents women's natures as seamlessly connected to this natural world. She writes,

When Muses re-membering enter the rhythms of
Tidal Memory we [women as muses] experience a
connectedness with the cosmos that had been broken.
Our reason/passion connects with the most distant of
stars....⁴⁸

Women as part of the natural world were born in complete harmony with it, but later this harmony was disrupted by patriarchal forces.⁴⁹ In Daly's view,

⁴⁶ See Daly (1984), p. 191.

⁴⁷ See Daly (1984), p. 185.

⁴⁸ See Daly (1984), p. 175.

⁴⁹ There are striking similarities between the Neo-Confucian discovery model of one's good nature and Daly's conception of women's nature. We will explore this topic in later parts of this chapter.

women are alienated from their true natures. While it is difficult to defend Daly's assertion that the world in its natural state is wholly good, one can offer a sympathetic reading of Daly by understanding her assertion as an antidotal response to an authoritarian, overly ritualized society.

The task of exorcising is for women to rid themselves of notions learned in patriarchal society. Daly writes of healing and mending, of rediscovering one's natural ties with the universe. She writes, the task of exorcising is to "...mend[] our broken ties with the Witch within ourSelves, who spins and weaves the tapestries of Elemental creation."⁵⁰ Through exorcism, women heal "broken consciousness, broken heartedness, broken connections among women and between women and the elements."⁵¹

Underlying Daly's conception of exorcising is a particular epistemology that in a number of significant ways is similar to that of MacKinnon's. Like MacKinnon, Daly too draws out a theory of social knowledge that contrasts with the traditional epistemology found in the sciences. Daly sees social knowledge as beginning with the subject. To know the social world is to know the self first. Daly differs from MacKinnon in that Daly sees artistic pursuits, whereas MacKinnon considers discourse and political action, to be the central means for beginning to perceive the social world in its true colors. Let us now examine the

⁵⁰ See Daly (1984), p. xii.

⁵¹ See Daly (1984), p. 1.

centrality of artistic pursuits to Daly's conception of exorcising.

Daly never speaks of exorcising in the form of small group consciousness raising sessions. However, as I shall argue, she does present a theory of consciousness raising. She speaks of exorcising as beginning with creative acts such as writing, speaking, painting, pottery, political action, athletic activities, and sharing stories of warrior women.⁵² Daly writes, "It is through acts of Elemental creation that Lusty women unblock/unlock our deep memories."⁵³ And again, "The chains of silencing are broken by continuing acts of creativity, inspired by Pure Lust."⁵⁴ Daly assumes that through such acts, women will in time fall back in tune with their true natures. Daly argues that patriarchal society blocks women's "gynergies," binds women and renders them impotent, passive, even paralyzed. It is through activity that one becomes free again. Repeatedly Daly speaks of feminism as a form of Be-ing, and existence as an unceasing process of growth. Daly sees action as absolutely fundamental to lustful living. She writes, "Women who are risking Realizing soon realize that this event is not at all a passive reception of revelation....for active participation is essential to true discovering."⁵⁵ Daly's conviction that creative activity will inevitably free women

⁵² See Daly (1984), pp. 17, 25, 139, 175, 356-7, 172, 279, 340.

⁵³ See Daly (1984), p. 139.

⁵⁴ See Daly (1984), p. 175.

⁵⁵ See Daly (1984), p. 164.

from the negative forces of patriarchy rests on her underlying conception of women's nature; Women are naturally passionate and loving, and through activity, women will be drawn back to their powerful and original good natures. Through creating, women are able to rediscover hidden connections and reweave what was originally beautiful.

While Daly often asserts that a great many acts enable women to rediscover their own natures, she clearly privileges the act of writing. Daly articulates the primacy of writing as a "device" for exorcising when she writes,

Writing actualizes Memory in an especially potent way. The process of writing, and of seeing/hearing the words come forth on the page, is journeying. The dis-covering of one connection, this lifting it out, lifts out others. A complex tapestry is found, woven. The writer becomes more energized as the process continues, as she seeks, says, and finds more. As

[Virginia] Woolf wrote: "The pen gets on the scent."⁵⁶

For Daly, words make up much of the fabric of our lives. By transforming words, we transform our world. Letters, journals, conversation—in Daly's mind these are all powerful forms of writing that enable the rediscovery of women's inborn powers.

Much of Daly's work, from the writing of *Gyn/Ecology* to the present, can

⁵⁶ See Daly (1984), p. 173.

be described as an experiment with poetry, transvaluing traditionally women-oppressive words such as “hag,” “crone,” and “spinster” for the purpose of creating a liberating world for women by women. For example, Daly traces the etymology of the word “spinster” to its original definition as a woman who spins thread. From this, she redefines “spinster” as one who creates and makes life with unbounded energy. This project of transvaluing words is best captured in Daly’s cowritten work, *Webster’s First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (1988).⁵⁷

One question that may arise is, If patriarchal society is so overwhelmingly oppressive, how do women begin to break the chains of passivity? Daly believes that a few remarkable women simply are able to create. These voices then touch others who follow the growing waves of women engaged in liberating activity. For example, Daly writes, “[Virginia Woolf] was/is a Muse, singing other women into consciousness Memory, a Soothsayer whose creative pursuit of the past overcame impotence and paralysis, actualizing potency.”⁵⁸ And later Daly writes of Simone de Beauvoir,

Most important was the fact that de Beauvoir, by
breaking the silence, partially broke the Terrible
Taboo. Women were Touched, psychically and e-

⁵⁷ See Caputi and Daly (1988).

⁵⁸ See Daly (1984), p. 173.

emotionally. Many such women, thus re-awakened,
began to have conversations, take actions, write
articles....⁵⁹

Daly terms this act of inspiring others as one of "Be-friending."⁶⁰ It is not just famous women who sing to us and awaken our consciousness, but all women who create and have rediscovered their original selves. Daly writes, "The powers of Crones evolve in harmony with each other, in *communication* with each other."⁶¹ Common to radical and cultural feminists is the importance of community.

Important to understanding Daly's view of women is not only her conception of human nature, but also her ontology in regard to women. Daly conceives of women as connected on a deep level. When one woman re-discovers her original powers, all women feel some reverberation of this power. Daly writes, "In the cosmic concerto, a woman who Names deep Memory--any part of it that she can catch--makes the hope of Memory more accessible to other women, for, as we have seen, memories are connected." Daly believes that patriarchal society has caused women to forget their original powers. The act of creating enables us to re-discover this memory that we share with other women.

⁵⁹ See Daly (1984), p. 374.

⁶⁰ For example, see Daly (1984), pp. 374-5.

⁶¹ See Daly (1984), p. 348.

Repeatedly Daly speaks of the importance of “recalling,” “retrieving,” “remembering,” “tapping into”⁶² women’s “deep ancestral memories.”⁶³ Remembering is one important part of the act of creating.

The act of creating begins with remembering and develops into what Daly repeatedly refers to as “naming.” Naming enables demarcation of the world. It is by identifying women’s innate powers and the stultifying forces of society that one is able to see the world clearly. Daly insists that by correctly naming the forces around and within us, we see and thus know the world as it truly is. Because women’s true nature and nature are good in themselves, this ability to see with clarity is itself an act of liberation. Daly speaks of the liberating power of naming when she writes, “...Musing women can choose to exorcize the patriarchal myth through Naming and Living our own lives—which is to breathe forth the Archimage within.”⁶⁴ Understanding the social world as it is begins with engaging in creative projects. Through these creative acts, women are able to fall back in tune with their intrinsically good natures and regain harmony with the greater cosmos. Once a woman has regained her connection with nature, she is able to perceive with clarity. In Daly’s view, with this clear vision a woman can name the world properly, and come to understand the social world as it truly

⁶² See Daly (1984), pp. 8, 10, 18, 36, 48, 96, 113, 178.

⁶³ See, for example, Daly (1984), pp. 96, 113.

⁶⁴ See Daly (1984), p. 107.

is. Social knowledge begins with creativity, and can be attained through individual effort.

In concluding this section, let us examine Daly's conception of the personal and public spheres. As we discussed earlier, Daly conceives of men as by nature emotionally, spiritually, morally, and intellectually stunted creatures. Daly insists that to fully flourish, women must separate themselves from "patriarchy." Daly writes,

...women who settle for a partial break from patriarchy while failing to sustain and further the feminist vision...may be "liberated" from the onus of the incarnate male presence just sufficiently to lose touch with the real horrors of patriarchy.

Daly thus concludes, "...physical separation/freedom...[is] so important for the development of a radical feminist analysis...."⁶⁵ The ultimate aim of exorcising is the formation of a separate women's sphere. In Daly's eyes, women are naturally good and men are intrinsically stunted creatures, and thus separation from men is an end rather than a means to a more just society. Daly speaks of the fundamental importance of "radical feminist separatism," and of "women's space,"⁶⁶ in enabling women to get back in touch with their original powers, and

⁶⁵ See Daly (1984), p. 143.

⁶⁶ See Daly (1984), pp. 370-371.

then to maintain this connection with what she terms "ancestral memory." Daly does not imagine that women can, or perhaps even should, live entirely separately from men. However, she does insist that women need their own space. She writes of separatism as "...an essential aspect of gynophilic communication, for it separates a women from the causes of fragmentation--the obstacles, internal and external--which separate her from the flow of integrity within her Self."⁶⁷ And again, "Feminist separatism, then, is a communal process, affirming the flow of connectedness within each woman--her Presence of Presence."⁶⁸ For Daly, this separate sphere is a moral, spiritual, and psychological enclave wholly distinct from that of men's.

Underlying both MacKinnon and Daly's conceptions of consciousness raising is a particular concept of social space, that is, social space as divided between a domestic and a public sphere. In talking about consciousness raising as leading to socio-political change, MacKinnon focuses her attention on what traditionally are attributes of the public sphere. In contrast, Daly primarily sees the aim of consciousness raising as that of changing the private, domestic sphere. Daly envisions the establishment of a women's culture separate from that of men's. Her concern is not with the realms of economics and politics, traditionally conceived of as integral to the public sphere. Instead, Daly's interest is in the

⁶⁷ See Daly (1984), p. 370.

⁶⁸ See Daly (1984), pp. 371-372.

creation of a separate sphere that values feeling over thinking, the spiritual over the political, and art and literature over economics. In the following pages, I would like to show how Li Zhi's conception of self cultivation differs from that of both MacKinnon's and Daly's in that Li envisions the spiritual and the political to be intimately tied together rather than distinct spheres of life. Put succinctly, Li sees self cultivation as leading to spiritual and cultural, *and* political and economic transformation. Li assumes different categories of analysis than do MacKinnon and Daly, and so his conception of self cultivation differs accordingly.

Li Zhi: Self and Social Transformation

For Li Zhi, self cultivation brings about the transformation of both self and society. As noted earlier, self cultivation is a theme that runs throughout Confucianism, and has been conceived of differently by different members of the tradition.⁶⁹ For example, the early Confucian Mengzi envisions self cultivation as a process of nurturing innate sprouts of virtue, while the early Confucian Xunzi envisions self cultivation as a process of re-forming inchoate passions. While both thinkers believe in the efficacy of self reflection and study of texts as methods of self cultivation, Mengzi's inclinations lean toward reflection while Xunzi's toward study. In contrast to both Mengzi and Xunzi, the Neo-Confucian Yan Yuan (1635-1704) emphasizes physical methods of self

⁶⁹ For a discussion on self cultivation in the Confucian tradition, see chapter five. For a fuller discussion of this subject, see Ivanhoe (2000a).

cultivation such as the practice of the Confucian arts of socio-religious ritual, music, archery, and charioteering.⁷⁰ Li Zhi, as we have seen, argues for self cultivation as the preservation of our innately good and fully developed child-mind. He sees the practice of self cultivation occurring while one is engaged in nearly any activity that does not cause suffering in others. Engaging in conversation,⁷¹ farming, making pottery, studying, serving as an official, running a business⁷²--these are all viable activities for one who is cultivating the self. What is important is that the activity suits one's individual interests. If one has chosen well, then one will also possess the proper attitude toward these activities. Li Zhi urges people to do what is in tune with their original natures. What he vehemently argues against is hypocrisy. By acting in harmony with their natures, people will then spontaneously fall back in tune with their child-mind. Li describes the ideal society of individuals in tune with their natural inclinations when he writes, "Each person pursues what he zealously desires, and each person seeks what he is good at. Each person is employed in the way that best suits him. How many things are this easy?"⁷³ Later in the same letter Li

⁷⁰ For further discussion on Yan Yuan, see Ivanhoe (2000b), pp. 75-88. Also, see Hummel (1944), pp. 912-915; and Tu (1979).

⁷¹ See the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind."

⁷² See the appendix, "An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar-Officials."

⁷³ See the appendix, "In Response to the Vice Censor in Chief Geng."

reiterates his conviction that each individual has his or own path to follow. The important task is to follow one's natural inclinations as these will lead one back to one's original state. Li also believes in a natural order to society: When all people follow their natural inclinations, then society at large will be in harmony.

While the method of self cultivation differs depending on the thinker, what is common to the countless diverse and varied conceptions of Confucian self cultivation is the idea that self cultivation leads to both self and social transformation. Li Zhi emphasizes self transformation when he speaks of spiritual cultivation. Moreover, unlike Confucian thinkers before him, he explicitly includes women in his discussion of such transformation. For example, in "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao," Li speaks of women's spiritual capacities as being identical to those of men. Li praises women's abilities to "study...the transcendent."⁷⁴ He praises two women, Ling Zhao and her mother, for transforming their spiritual nature. He writes,

[Layman Pang, his wife, and their daughter, Ling Zhao] sought to transcend the ways of this material world and one day they completely transformed themselves. They became the sort of people who transcend the material world and are admired by

⁷⁴ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim That Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

those from the past through the present.⁷⁵

In the Confucian tradition, self transformation inevitably leads to social change. When the self is moral and upright, then the entire social world and even the greater cosmos falls into order. The power of the morally and spiritually cultivated individual to transform society is eloquently captured in *Analects* 2.1: "One who rules through the power of Virtue might be compared to the Pole Star, which simply remains in its place while receiving the homage of the myriad lesser stars."⁷⁶ In *Analects* 14.44 Confucius explicitly states that self cultivation leads first to self and then to social transformation:

Zilu asked about the gentleman. The Master said...."He cultivates himself in order to bring peace to the people. Cultivating himself and thereby bringing peace to the people is an accomplishment that even a Yao or a Shun would not disdain."⁷⁷

In both the *Analects* and in the writings of Li Zhi, we find enormous faith placed on morally luminous individuals. While one individual is sufficient to catalyze a transformation of the social world, these individuals are rarely found in the world.

⁷⁵ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim That Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

⁷⁶ See Lau (1979), p. 63.

⁷⁷ See Lau (1979), p. 131. Also, see *Analects* 4.1, 9.14, 15.5.

Li too speaks of self cultivation as a process enabling both self and social transformation. Li points to public service as one of the hallmarks of a cultivated individual in tune with his or her child-mind. He writes, "To genuinely follow one's nature, deepening and broadening it, and with the rest of the world to serve the public good—this is the Way."⁷⁸ Li praises individuals who are virtuous and transform the world. He writes,

Jiang Taigong brought prosperity and power. The Duke of Zhou established rituals and music....Confucius deeply revered the Duke of Zhou, and so when Confucius was minister in the state of Lu for a three month period, he grandly practiced rituals and teachings.⁷⁹

Li Zhi's letters on the subject of gender equality may be few in number. However, what he does write on women is remarkably radical for his time. Li's society was one where mastery of the Confucian classics lent people moral and social status, and gave people entree into the powerful world of politics. In such a society Li insists that not simply men, but women too ought to be given opportunities of self cultivation. However, while he transforms gender relations by arguing for a relationship of equality between men and women, the

⁷⁸ See the appendix, "In Response to the Vice Censor in Chief Geng."

⁷⁹ See the appendix, "An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar-Officials."

substance of his vision can still be seen as lacking from the perspective of women's liberation.

Like Daly, Li harks back to an ideal era though one that differs markedly from that envisioned by Daly. As I have suggested earlier, Daly imagines a pre-historical matriarchal period before women's natures were obscured by the influences of patriarchy. When Daly does refer to historical figures as models to be emulated, she speaks of women. The world she envisions from the past is one that contrasts with the contemporary patriarchal world. It is a world that values feeling, community, and the arts. In sharp contrast, Li envisions a world different only in that women too participate alongside men in the spheres of culture, economics, and politics.

To Li's credit as a feminist, he does go a moderate distance in transforming the substance of self cultivation. As we discussed earlier, Neo-Confucian thought can be helpfully divided into the school of principle, or the Cheng-Zhu school, and the school of the mind, or the Lu-Wang school.⁸⁰ Briefly put, the school of principle emphasizes the rigorous study of the classical texts, the practice of ritual, and the normativity of tradition. In contrast, the school of mind criticizes excessive study and traditional forms and precedents and instead urges people to look within their own hearts. Foremost on Li Zhi's list of foes are scholars from the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism. Throughout his works he mercilessly satirizes scholars from the school of principle. For

⁸⁰ For further discussion, see chapter five.

example, he sees these gentleman as devoting their lives to mindlessly reciting the words of those from antiquity. Li writes,

Contemporary scholars and Confucians from
antiquity guessed at and then spoke [these words of
Confucius], our fathers and teachers passed them
down by chanting them, and young children blindly
and deafly listened to them. When ten thousand
mouths all utter the same phrase, none can counter
what is said. When for a thousand years there is only
a single stanza, no one can
understand for themselves.⁸¹

Li also criticizes the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians for narrowness in their choice of texts for study. For these scholars, generally speaking the texts worthy of study are the five classics of the Confucian tradition. Li does praise the *Analects* and the *Book of Changes*, but he also believes that good literature comes in a wide variety of forms. Li writes,

The most exquisite literature in the world all comes
from the child-mind....Why must verse necessarily be
in the "old" or the "xuan" style of unregulated
poetry? Why must prose necessarily be like that

⁸¹ See the appendix, "Commenting on Confucius' Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha."

written in the pre-Qin era....I am drawn to the
spontaneous writings of those with a child-mind.⁸²

Li looks back at the historical past and is innovative in considering not simply the traditional heroes of Confucius and Mengzi as figures to be emulated, but women as well. In many of his writings he speaks well of women such as the political figure Yi Jiang, the literary scholar Wen Mu, and the spiritual savant Ling Zhao.⁸³ In his expressions of admiration for the ideas in certain texts, Li cites both those from the traditional Confucian canon such as the *Analects* and the *Book of Changes*, and also romances and adventure stories that were dismissed by the educated elite as mere frivolous literature. Li praises fantastic tales, playscripts, Yuan comedies, and novels such as *The Western Chamber* and *The Water Margin*. In a most unorthodox move, Li even celebrates the best of the civil service exam eight-legged essays,⁸⁴ generally considered to be a dull and pedantic genre. Li describes a social world that includes women, but is not seriously transformed by this inclusion. In contrast, Daly offers a world that

⁸² See the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind."

⁸³ See the appendix, "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted."

⁸⁴ For Li's opinions on these various works, see the appendix, "Views on the Child-mind." The eight-legged essay is a highly structured essay prescribed as the standard form of examination answer from the mid-15th century until the beginning of the 20th century. Essays had eight prescribed sections. Candidates for civil service examinations were given selected phrases from classical texts and then asked to write a 300-400 character commentary using the eight-legged essay format.

excludes men, and is distinctively different from the patriarchal social world.

While for his time, Li is progressive in his transformation of the traditional substance of Confucian society, the non-canonical works he refers to such as Tang poetry and *The Western Chamber* are still clearly written by well-educated and famous men. Also, the women he brings to our attention are ones who achieve what a man is able to. Li, then, does make large strides for the liberation of women by arguing for the inclusion of women in the project of self cultivation. However, he falls short in his feminism in that he overlooks the degree to which the substance of traditional forms of self cultivation might be oppressive to women. One of the weaknesses in Li's vision of liberating women is that he does not fully see the oppressive nature of the substance of self cultivation as traditionally construed. He urges women to read poems, plays, and treatises which do open up new worlds for them, but the writings he admires and recommends are all the works of elite men.

If we jump ahead to the Cultural Revolution in 20th-century China, we can find a method of attaining liberation that in many ways bears close resemblances to Li's view of self cultivation. Cultural Revolution "speak bitterness" sessions arose in the rural villages during the land reform period (1947-1952). In these sessions, small groups of peasants gathered together and gave testimonies of the oppression they suffered at the hands of gentry. If these sessions seem remarkably similar to radical feminist Consciousness Raising sessions, it may be because radical feminists borrowed many of their ideas from

Maoist “speak bitterness sessions.” A number of feminists trace the roots of radical feminism back in part to Chinese Maoism. For example, Alice Echols writes, “The proponents of consciousness-raising took their inspiration from the civil rights movement...the Chinese revolution when peasants were urged ‘to speak pains to recall pains,’ and from the revolutionary struggle in Guatemala.”⁸⁵ Radical feminist Juliet Mitchell writes, “Consciousness-raising was the reinterpretation of a Chinese revolutionary practice of ‘speaking bitterness’.”⁸⁶ Throughout the writings of the early radical feminists we find direct quotations of Mao, and references to Maoist ideas and texts.⁸⁷

The content of these “speak bitterness” sessions was of the most revolutionary sort. The most marginalized in society were encouraged to come together and speak about their suffering at the hands of elite society. Mao conceived the aim of these sessions to be clarification of one’s oppression which would lead to organized mass revolutionary action. In preparation for these sessions, individuals read Mao’s works, a marked contrast from the *Analects* and the Tang poetry recommended by Li. In the Chinese tradition, self cultivation

⁸⁵ See Echols (1989), p. 24.

⁸⁶ See Mitchell (1973), pp. 24-25.

⁸⁷ See Redstockings (1971), pp. 133, 136, 183, and Firestone and Koedt (1969), pp. 77, 81.

finds its earliest articulations in Confucius' *Analects*. Through the millenia this concept has developed and changed. In the hands of Mao, self cultivation becomes a powerful tool for revolutionary social action.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In the present work I began with an introduction to Li's intellectual biography and using conceptual tools borrowed from the field of contemporary virtue ethics, proceeded to describe a concept that is foundational to his entire body of work, that of the child-mind. I argued against the common understanding of Li as an ethical relativist and showed that the child-mind provides a normative standard with which to judge actions. I then entered into an analysis of Li's views on women by examining his reformulation of the forces governing the cosmos. An understanding of Li's conception of the cosmos illuminates his vision of gender relations because for Li, as a Neo-Confucian, the structure of the social world was a reflection and microcosm of the greater cosmos. I showed that Li conceives of women as possessing identical spiritual and intellectual capacities as men. Although his conception of women offers only a limited vision of women's liberation, nevertheless, for his time and place Li articulates a radical view of gender equality.

Following, I analyzed ways in which Li's feminism can be brought into fruitful dialogue with contemporary western feminist discourse. In doing so, I examined how Li's vision of certain ideas—for example, "private" and "public" space, and methods for catalyzing self and social transformation—both contributes to and problematizes discussions found in contemporary western feminist scholarship. Li's conception of the mind (i.e., the child-mind), the

divisions of social space (i.e., “inner” and “outer”), and the greater cosmos as it relates to the self and society, differ in overt and subtle ways from those one finds in the western thinkers discussed in this dissertation, namely John McDowell, John Stuart Mill, Catherine MacKinnon, and Mary Daly. I attempted to identify what is most distinctive about Li’s feminism by engaging in such comparative analysis.

In concluding, I would like to address some of the broader implications of this dissertation by describing two possible paths for future research. One idea is to study earlier conceptions of gender that inform feminism as it develops in China. For example, one might consider the distinction between thinking and feeling. Throughout much of western literature on political theory, one finds the assumption that women and men possess different virtues. The virtues that are assumed to be natural to women are those such as submissiveness and emotional keenness. What is most distinctive to men is the capacity for reason.¹ A number of western feminists have considered this problem regarding thinking and feeling, accepted this distinction, and argued for feeling as a superior mode of interaction.² Generally speaking, in early Chinese thought, there is neither a gendering of nor a distinction made between thinking and feeling.

To give one clear example of thinking and feeling as differently conceived

¹ For further discussion of this subject, see Okin (1979).

² For example, see Gilligan (1993).

of in the western political theoretical tradition in contrast to the early Chinese tradition, one might compare the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) to the early Confucian Mengzi. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*³ we find a clear case of thinking and feeling as gendered. The protagonist of the story, Emile, is raised to be an independent thinker who accepts no conventions but rather, reasons ideas out on his own. In contrast, Sophie, his future wife, is reared to be submissive, emotionally keen, and docile. Rousseau considers feeling to be naturally the domain of women, and thinking to be that of men.

Mengzi, in contrast, never explicitly distinguishes between the virtues possessed by men and women. While women, when referred to in the *Mengzi*, are most often cast in the role of wife, mother, or bewitching object of beauty, the vices and virtues that they possess are rarely different than those of men. A cultivated woman is depicted as loyal and obedient, but so too is an educated man when fulfilling the role as minister to the state. A virtuous wife is "obedient" to her husband. A virtuous husband is also thus, but to his parents and his ruler rather than to his spouse. A virtuous man is one who is benevolent and upright, and who puts other's interests before his own. A virtuous woman is no different. Lisa Raphals succinctly articulates the role of thinking and feeling in early Chinese thought when she writes, "...Warring States and Han narratives represented women as possessing the same capacities for wisdom, practical

³ See Rousseau (1996).

intelligence and moral reasoning as men.”⁴ One noteworthy difference in respect to gender between western political theories and early Confucian thought, then, is the existence of gendered virtue in the former and lack of this concept in the latter.

What implications does this difference have for the project of a feminist revisioning of ethical and political theories, western and Confucian?

Speculatively speaking, one possibility is that early Confucian thought is much more amenable to a feminist revisioning that includes women and men in all spheres of life, whether in the home or in the larger community. On the other hand, another possibility is that because in early Confucian thought we do not find a developed argument for the seclusion of women within the domestic sphere, as we do in western political thought, the task of producing a feminist revisioning of Confucian thought is all the more difficult. The problem is no longer illogical or untenable arguments, but rather, deeply entrenched views that are held with no justification that can be dismantled.

A second project that I envision emerging from this dissertation involves moving forward in time and studying contemporary Chinese feminists. In recent years, western feminist scholars have begun to write about the emergence of an inclusive feminist discourse community that includes scholars

⁴ See Raphals (2000) and Raphals (1998).

both western and non-western, third and first world.⁵ Scholarship on Chinese feminism can be seen as one part of this growing community. Generally speaking, current scholarship, both Chinese and non-native, identifies the May 4th Era (1915-1925), a period driven by a desire for democratization, scientific and technological progress, and a renewal of national strength, as the beginning of a feminist consciousness in China.⁶ Scholars have often acknowledged Kang Youwei (1858-1927) as a noteworthy figure in the history of Chinese feminism. Kang perceived his writings on gender—on subjects such as the abolishment of marriage contracts and the need for socialized child care—as too radical for his time. They were not published in his lifetime and so, his ideas have been only of novel interest to historians as they had little historical influence on the Chinese discourse on gender equality.⁷

Both the May 4th Era feminists and Kang Youwei are described as developing progressive ideas on gender equality through the stimuli of western socialist and liberal writings. A number of articles present a feminist consciousness as emerging in China when a handful of elite Chinese students studied abroad in the early 1900s in Japan, a country which was then ripe with

⁵ For example, see Jaggar (1998) and Smith (2000). Also, see the Spring 2001 issue of *Signs* devoted to the subject of "Gender and Globalization" with a special roundtable on "Globalization, Postsocialism, and the People's Republic of China."

⁶ See, for example, Lan and Fong (1999) and Wang (1999).

⁷ See Wang (1999).

socialist ideas--also imported from the west.⁸ Broadly speaking, underlying such scholarship exists an assumption that Chinese feminism finds its roots in western ideas and most often western liberal ideas such as human rights, the autonomous individual, and the privileging of legal change to bring about social transformation. Such an assumption can also be found in English scholarship on the beginnings of a Japanese feminism.⁹

Again, these various narratives on Chinese and Japanese feminism have in common the notion that women's liberation involves the adoption of western liberal concepts and the casting off of native Chinese or Japanese conceptions of the self and society. In *The Empowered Self: Law and Society in the Age of Individualism*, Thomas Franck similarly privileges the notion of the self as an autonomous individual when he speaks of the liberation of people in general. He writes, "For various reasons...*individualism* has emerged, at the end of the twentieth century, as an increasingly preferred alternative to self-definition imposed by nationalism's genetic and territorial imperatives."¹⁰ By individualism, Franck means one's ability to "imagine" an identity for oneself and transcend one's cultural, geographic, religious, and ethnic heritage.

In this dissertation, I assert that in Li Zhi, we find an indigenous Chinese

⁸ See Rankin (1975).

⁹ See, for example, Sievers (1983) and Hane (1988).

¹⁰ See Franck (1999).

feminism, one that is voiced before the importation into China of western liberal values. In future work, I intend to study the writings of May Fourth Era feminists, and the ways in which their feminist ideas are an innovative hybridization of various cultural values, rather than a simple absorption of western liberal ideas. The history of feminism in China is a complex story, and one that weaves across national, ethnic, economic, and traditional boundaries. One can only believe that as even more sophisticated studies become available, the story will grow increasingly vibrant and complex.

Appendix
Selected Annotated Translations of Li Zhi

In this appendix I have included annotated translations of a number of Li Zhi's letters, poems, historical commentaries, and prefaces. The essays have been selected to give the reader an introduction to Li's views on topics central to his works, ranging from the context-sensitive nature of truths, Li's novel concept of the mind, to his disputations with the Neo-Confucian preoccupation with abstract metaphysics. As the subject of this dissertation is on Li's conception of women, included too are the most important of his essays and poems on women in his two most famous books, *A Book to Hide* and *A Book to Burn*, along with their appended *Addendum to a Book to Burn* and *Addendum to a Book to Hide*. I would like to comment on a few of the following essays and poems.

"Views on the Child-mind" is a discussion of one of the concepts that I argue underlies all of Li's thought, that of the child-mind. It is also one of the most famous essays of Li's, and one that has been particularly influential in the area of Chinese literary theory. In "In Praise of Liu Zie" and "Commenting on Confucius' Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha," one finds two well crafted and charming examples of Li's "anecdotal essays" *xiaopin*, a form of writing that was particularly popular from the middle of the sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, and one which Li was a great master. In "Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in *A Book to Hide*," one finds one of Li's finest discussions on a topic that was

central to his writings, that of the context sensitive nature of truths and the infallibility of the child-mind. In "Sima Xiangru," one finds a form of writing that was much used by Li Zhi, and was traditional in form but radical in substance. Li takes the form of his essays from the Chinese commentarial tradition, copying word for word a chosen classical text and then intercolating his own interpretation of the text. In substance, however, his interpretations are most radical. In "Sima Xiangru," Li copies the great Han historian Sima Qian's biography of Sima Xiangru, and turns his commentary to the purpose of defending marriage based on intellectual compatibility, and a women's right to remarry, to elope, and to choose her own partner. Li writes in a variety of genres and some, such as his letters to friends, require further explanation and thus I have provided heavy annotation while others, such as his playful anecdotes, stand on their own.

Throughout these writings, whether essays, poems, philosophical tracts, or historical commentaries, we find Li presenting himself in various moods. Some of his writings are angry, others are personal and deeply tinged with sadness, yet others are delightful and witty. Li is a thinker of 16th century China, a time when power was in the hands of those who had spent their youth successfully memorizing the classical texts, women's feet were still bound, and it was inconceivable that a female should sit in the presence of a male teacher. Whatever the tone of Li's writings, moving or delightful, angry or playful, again and again, in Li's writings we find an imaginative social critic incisively satirizing

many of the practices and values of his time and exposing them for what they are.

Selection of Writings

From 焚書 *A Book to Burn*.

First published in 1590. This text consists of Li's letters, prefaces, poems, and short essays and is considered the most radical of Li's books.

自序 "Author's Preface"

答鄧石陽 "In Response to Deng Shiyang"

答耿中丞 "In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng"

與楊定見 "To Yang Dingjian"

與莊純夫 "To Zhuang Chunfu"

答以女人學道為見短書 "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted"

夫婦論 "Discussion on Husband and Wife: Reflections After Long Contemplation"

雜說 "On Miscellaneous Matters"

童心說 "Views on the Child-mind"

哭貴兒 "Mourning for the Precious Son"

憶黃宜人 "Remembering Madame Huang"

贊劉諧 "In Praise of Liu Xie"

哭黃宜人 "Mourning Madame Huang"

From 續焚書 *Addendum to A Book to Burn*.

First published in 1591.

與馬歷山 "To Ma Lishan"

題孔子像於芝佛院 "Commenting on Confucius' Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha"

From 藏書 *A Book to Hide*.

First published in 1599. The text consists of commentaries on historical biographies from the Spring and Autumn Period (772-481 BCE) through the Yuan period (1206-1368 CE).

藏書世紀列傳總目前論 "Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in the *Cangshu*"

德業儒臣後論 "An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar Officials"

司馬相如 "Sima Xiangru"

From 初潭集 *Collection of Essays Begun at the Lake*.

First publication date unknown. Written between 1585-1588. The work consists of biographies from *Tales of the World*, composed in 430 CE, and Jiao Hong's *Mr. Jiao's Collection of Works* (1587).

初潭集序 "Preface to Writings from *Collection of Essays Begun at the Lake*"

又述 "An Additional Discussion"

Page numbers cited are to the following editions of Li Zhi's works:

Fenshu 焚書 [*A Book to Burn*]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961.

Xufenshu 續焚書 [*An Addendum to A Book to Burn*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961.

Cangshu 藏書 [*A Book to Hide*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961.

Xu Cangshu 續藏書 [*An Addendum to A Book to Hide*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961.

Chutan Ji 初潭集 [*Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974.

Li Zhi's Writings

Author's Preface

自序
Zixu

Source: *A Book to Burn*, page 1.

I have written four types of books. One is entitled *A Book to Hide* and is about the rights and wrongs of the past thousands of years. This book is not easy for the common person to understand and so I desire to hide it. I say that I must hide it in the mountains until later generations of people like Zi Yun find it. A second book is entitled *A Book to Burn* and includes responses to questions written to me by my dearest of friends. Because [these letters] come so close to what gives sustenance to contemporary scholars, and since [these letters] strike at the heart of their chronic diseases, [if these scholars read these letters] they will certainly wish to kill me. Therefore I desire to burn this book. I say that I must burn and discard it. I cannot keep it. At the back of my *A Book to Burn* I also have a separate collection of works which I have entitled *Old Bitterness*.¹ Although it is similar [in content] to *A Book to Burn*, it has its own table of contents. Of the [books] that I desire to burn, this is one of them. Only the forty-four chapters of the *Discourse on Miscellaneous Topics*² can one truly delight

¹ Li also refers to this work as "An Addendum to *A Book to Burn*."

² *Discourse on Miscellaneous Topics* 說書 is a collection of Li's critical essays on the four books: *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi*. These critical essays were later incorporated into Li's *Commentary on the*

in. This book further develops the finest of the collected words of the sages and explains the ordinariness of everyday affairs. It is also able to cause readers to realize in one glance that to become a sage is not difficult, and the ability to transcend this world is not a false [illusion]. Truthfully, as for writings such as commentaries and annotations, they are [written to aid] people in becoming sages but in fact close the doors [to sagehood]. [Such writings] are not able to entice people, but in fact, sever people [from sagehood]. Isn't this terrible!

....Now I have already carved [the plates] for the *Discourse on Miscellaneous Topics* and so I will also carve [the plates] for *A Book to Burn*, and carve one or two works from *A Book to Hide*. What was to be burned, I now don't burn. What was to be hidden, I now don't hide. Another person has said, "If the situation is truly like this, then it is not fitting to entitle your book *A Book to Burn*."

....Alas! How can I know this? And how can you know this? When [I say] I desire to burn [the book], I say this because the book is grating to people's ears. When I say I desire to carve [the book], I say this because the book speaks to people's hearts. As for those who find my work grating to the ear, they most certainly will kill me which is something that merits fear. But I am sixty-four years old. If [one of my essays] speaks to the heart of another, then perhaps I may find somebody who understands me! I take joy in those few [who might

Four Books 四書評. For further bibliographic information on these two texts of Li's, see Hok-lam Chan (1980), pp. 169-170.

understand me] and therefore have carved [these plates].

In Response to Deng Shiyang

答鄧石陽

Da Deng Shiyang

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 4-5.

Dressing and eating constitute human relations and the principle of things. There is nothing more to human relations and the principle of things than dressing and eating. In this world, everything simply regards those things that fall into the category of dressing and eating. And so, if one speaks of dressing and eating, then naturally one speaks of the various things in this world. If it is other than dressing and eating, then it is absolutely severed from this world, and is different from the lives of ordinary people. Scholars ought to perceive the true emptiness³ in human relations and the principle of things, and should not make discriminations regarding human relations and the principle of things. It is said, "...[he] understood the multitude of things and had a keen insight into human relations."⁴ If on the subject of human relations and the principle of things one applies one's discerning insight,⁵ then one will be able to grasp what is fundamental and recognize the real source of all things. If one spends all one's

³ Li Zhi is referring to the Buddhist term 真空.

⁴ Li quotes from the *Mengzi* 4B17: 明於庶物，察於人倫。 Lau translates this passage as, "[Shun] understood the way of things and had a keen insight into human relationships". See Lau (1970), p. 131.

⁵ The concept of "discerning insight" 明察 finds one of its classical sources in *Mengzi* 1A7: 明足以察秋毫之末. Lau translates this line as, "I have eyes that can see the tip of a fine hair." See Lau (1970), p. 56.

time guessing and discussing the minute details, in the end one will not attain one's own understanding.⁶ The difference between attention to minute details and to simplicity⁷ resides precisely here. If discerning insight enables one to perceive true emptiness, this is because one has "acted through benevolence and rightness."⁸ If there is no discerning insight, this is because one has "walked the path of benevolence and rightness,"⁹ sunken into the task of discriminating between minute differences, and remained oblivious to these happenings. Is it not appropriate to be cautious!

Yesterday I replied to you in regard to your work "True Emptiness," a

⁶ The virtue of "attaining one's own understanding" 自得 *zi de*, finds one of its earliest articulations in the *Mengzi* 3A4: 勞之，來之，匡之，直之，輔之，翼之，使自得之。 For Chinese text and English translation, see Legge (1960), v. 1 and 2, p. 252.

⁷ The importance of these two concepts, "minute details" 支離 and "simplicity" 易簡, was famously debated between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan in a meeting in 1175 at Goose Lake Temple. On the way to the debate Lu wrote a significant poem capturing his views on these two concepts. Two lines from the poem run, 易簡工夫終久大，支離來業寬游沉。 Wing-tsit Chan translates this line as, "Work that is easy and simple will in the end be lasting and great. Understanding that is devoted to isolated details will end up in aimless drifting...." For English translation, see Chan (1963): p. 583. Also, see Ching (1974), pp. 161-181.

⁸ Again, Li quotes from *Mengzi* 4B19: 由仁義行。 This passage follows immediately from the above cited passage from the *Mengzi*. The entirety of 4B19 is translated by Lau as the following, "Mencius said, 'Slight is the difference between man and the brutes. The common man loses this distinguishing feature, while the gentleman retains it. Shun understood the way of things and had a keen insight into human relationships. He followed the path of morality. He did not just put morality into practice.'" See Lau (1970), p. 131.

⁹ See *Mengzi* 4B19.

work consisting of sixteen characters. I have already discussed your essay with much thoroughness. But now I have added commentary and explanations, and ask for your corrections. What is your opinion? As for the saying, "Emptiness cannot use emptiness," this refers to the nature of the emptiness of the infinite. Fundamentally, nobody is able to empty what is infinite. If people are able to empty the infinite, then it is not worthy of being called the infinite. What is mysterious about wishing scholars focus on beholding the nature within themselves as the ultimate task? As for the words, "In the end things cannot be emptied," this refers to the fact that if one allows the exertion of one ten-thousandth part of an ounce of human effort, it is like having squeezed out one part of true emptiness. If one has squeezed out one part of true emptiness, it is like being polluted with one speck of dust. This one speck of dust is like the fetters that bind one for a thousand kalpas. Never will one be free of it. Is there not good reason to be fearful?

In this world, on this broad and level path, thousands of people have followed, and tens of thousands together have walked the path. I am on this path, you, my friend, are also here, all the people from everywhere together are here. If you yourself create distinctions, then would it not be better to return to the daily living of the ordinary people? I hope you agree with this!

I, in all humbleness, have hastily written this letter, and have far from adequately articulated my thoughts. If you have your heart set on learning the principles of simplicity and do not wish to be born this time in vain, then even

though I have exerted all my life energies as together we examine the issues and seek evidence for the various positions, I am more than willing to do so. If you persist on holding onto your contrary views and do not give thought to matters of life and death, then I beg you not to trouble yourself by offering me your teachings!

In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng

答耿中丞

*Da Geng Zhongcheng*¹⁰

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 16.

Yesterday I received your letter bearing the most excellent advice that speaks to the heart of the illness plaguing this wild and stupid man. To genuinely follow one's nature,¹¹ to deepen and broaden it,¹² and with the rest of the world to serve the public¹³—this is referred to simply as the Way. If one desires to follow the Way in this world and with other people, then the power of the Way to regulate heaven and earth and to nourish all things is great.¹⁴

"In studying Confucius' teachings, is it possible to have no methods?"

These are your esteemed words. You borrow these words from Confucius,

¹⁰ Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524-1596) served as vice censor-in-chief in Fujian in the year 1585.

¹¹ Li quotes from the *Great Learning*: 天命之謂性，率性之謂道。 Legge translates this passage as, "What Heaven has conferred is called the nature; an accordance with this nature is called the path of duty...." For Chinese text and English translation, see Legge (1960), p. 383.

¹² This phrase echoes that found in *Mengzi* 2A6: 凡有四端於我者，知皆擴而充之。 For English translation and Chinese text, see Legge (1960), page 203. Lau translates the sentence as, "If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through." See Lau (1970), p. 83.

¹³ Li quotes from the *Great Learning*.

¹⁴ Li here quotes from the *Book of Changes*.

firmly believed in them, and adopted them as your own learning. How could I comment on this! And so, the following are the words of Confucius, not mine. Heaven gave birth to one person and he naturally had his own way of living in this world. He did not wait to receive Confucius' learning in order to become perfected. If one must wait to learn Confucius' teachings before becoming perfected, then since many thousands of years ago there was yet no Confucius, were people of that time not able to become truly human? And so, one person who desired to learn the teachings of Confucius, that being Mengzi, was not able to go beyond being a mere follower of Confucius. I deeply regret that he was not a sage. And you say that I wish to follow Mengzi!¹⁵

Moreover, Confucius never instructed others to follow himself. If he did, why is it that when Yan Yuan inquired about benevolence Confucius responded, "Benevolence comes from oneself"¹⁶ and not from others! Why did he say, "The students of antiquity studied to improve themselves"¹⁷ And why did he also say, "The gentleman seeks all from within himself"¹⁸ Because benevolence comes from within oneself, Confucius' disciples did not need to ask him about

¹⁵ Li draws from *Mengzi* 2A2: 乃所願則學孔子也。"It is my hope and wish to follow the example of Confucius." See Lau (1970), p. 79.

¹⁶ This passage plays on *Analects* 12.1.

¹⁷ See *Analects* 14.24.

¹⁸ See *Analects* 20.21.

benevolence. Because learning is for the sake of self, Confucius did not have [particular] methods by which to transmit learning to his disciples. This is the learning of “no self” and “no others.” Because there is no self, therefore in learning nothing comes before conquering the self.¹⁹ Because there are no others, therefore in teaching, the task simply rests in teaching students in accordance with their needs.

Let me offer examples as illustration. Zhonggong²⁰ was a person who held himself respectfully and was simple in the actions that he took. When he asked about benevolence, Confucius immediately pointed to him and said, “Respect and reciprocity,” and that was all. Yong was intelligent and so he found enlightenment and put these words into action.²¹ Sima Niu²² suffered from the knowledge of his brother’s rebellion and thus was often worried and fearful.

¹⁹ Li quotes from *Analects* 12.1: 克己復禮為仁.

²⁰ Zhonggong 仲弓 is the cognomen for Confucius’ disciple Ran Yong 冉雍. He was praised by Confucius for being the most virtuous of his disciples. For passages in the *Analects* referring to Ran Yong, see *Analects* 6.2, 12.2.

²¹ In speaking of Zhong Gong, Li quotes *Analects* 6.2: 仲弓曰，居敬而行簡，以臨其民，不亦可乎，居簡而行簡，無乃大簡乎.

²² Sima Niu 司馬牛, also known by his name Geng 耕 and his cognomen Ziniu 子牛, was a disciple of Confucius’. In referring to Sima Niu, Li refers to passages from the *Analects*. See *Analects* 12.3: 司馬牛問仁。子曰，仁者其言也訥。*Analects* 12.4: 司馬牛問君子。子曰，君子不憂不懼。*Analects* 12.5: 司馬牛憂曰，人皆有兄弟，獨亡。

[Sima] was careful in his words and cautious in his actions. When he asked about benevolence, Confucius immediately pointed to him and said, "One should be cautious in his speech," and that was all. Niu was not intelligent, and so he doubted these words and considered them inadequate. Judging based on these two examples, how could it be that Confucius ever instructed others to follow him! And so, Confucius never instructed others to follow him, but those who did follow him obstinately abandoned their own learning and followed Confucius'. Even you must consider this to be truly ridiculous! Only Confucius never took himself as a model for others to follow. He attained his purpose. He certainly did not take himself to be the model for teaching all those in this world. And so, the sage is respected, the myriad things all find their place, and events follow as they should.

When what those in the world receive is enduring, those who receive nothing are greedy and harass others, and the "benevolent ones" harm others. The "benevolent ones" observe the "wrongs" in the world and worry about them. Anxiously and unwearying, they desire to transmit these worries to later generations so that people will restrain themselves from doing "wrong." There are virtues and rituals to place restraints on one's heart and legal punishments to tie up one's four limbs. These are the beginnings of the wrongs committed by people.

The variety of people and things in this world are countless. If one desires all these people and things to abide by my methods, then heaven and earth

would not be able to function....If those who are rich and powerful treat me well, it is because it profits them to do so. Therefore, the sage follows what is profitable. He follows what is profitable and then rests content in these actions. If a person is greedy, then give him emoluments. If he seeks power, then give him a high position. If he is strong, then give him a chance to use his strength. If he is able, then give him work and an official position. If he is timid, then nurture and employ him. If he is virtuous, then pay him respect and give him an honorary position, but only give him respect. If he has great talent, then offer him an important official position and do not ask about his lineage. Each person pursues what he zealously desires, and each person is sought for what he is good at. Each person is employed in the way that best suits him.

Why is this so easy to do? Even if one desires to deceive others as to what one zealously desires, one will have no such desires. Even if one wishes to cover up what is "shameful" with what appears "beautiful," one will have no shame to cover. Why is it that some say this is difficult? Is it really the case that "right" and "wrong" are able to brighten luminous virtue under heaven and to create peace in this world? Is it really the case that those who embrace "right" and "wrong" never encounter a hint of hypocrisy, and that "right" and "wrong" enable people to live their lives with a happy heart and days of ease? If Confucius' methods of learning are indeed splendid, then even if one says that Confucius had [set] methods and teachings to pass onto others, that is all right. As for those without a teaching and without methods, they in fact are practicing

Confucius' methods of learning!

If you deeply believe in and genuinely practice the ways of Confucius, then even if you call these ways your own methods of learning, that is acceptable. But it is simply not necessary that everybody follow your way! All your actions are naturally good, the methods you use range across a great breadth, and your knowledge is naturally pertinent. Though I respect you, I do not need to imitate you. Although you naturally feel affection for me, your virtues need not be manifested in me.

As for your actions, you are just like others. Everybody delights in celebrations preparing one for official employment. If this is not the case, then those who are like me are few and those who differ from me are many. Those who are virtuous are few, and those who are stupid and ignorant are many. Whenever will there ever be peace in this world!

To Yang Dingjian

與楊定見

Yu Yang Dingjian

Source: *A Book to Burn*, page 19.

This situation is simply not permissible. In this world, judgments of what is right and wrong are innumerable. When humans exist in the midst of these judgments of right and wrong, how can they themselves avoid making judgments.²³ If on top of judgments of right and wrong one adds, for example, desire for status, materialism, covetousness, indifference, and resentment, then we see the state of mind of the petty man. There is nothing odd about this. Those of antiquity shared their true feelings with others and then would suddenly find themselves betrayed. Who knows to how many people this happened. One can only laugh and then pretend that nothing occurred.

Now somebody discusses right and wrong with me, and I discuss right

²³ For more on Li's views toward judgments of right and wrong, see Li's "Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in *A Book to Hide*" in *A Book to Hide*, page 7. In this essay, Li insists that rather than relying on the words of others, one should judge for oneself what is right and wrong. In Peterson (1999), Peterson argues for the thesis that Li is a moral relativist. By relativist, Peterson seems to mean that Li believes right and wrong are radically relative to each individual. However, both "To Yang Dingjian" and "Introduction to the Table of Contents..." in fact support the interpretation that there are objective rights and wrongs in this world that can best be found by looking not in tradition, but within one's own child-mind.

and wrong with him. We talk endlessly to the point that we begin to argue.²⁴ Those who hear us are not annoyed by the beginnings of this *discussion* on right and wrong, but instead are annoyed by this *disputation* on what is right and wrong.²⁵ The [logic behind this] situation is clear, but it is simply hidden in the midst of everything and so [nobody] realizes the problem. On the one hand I detest it when others speak of right and wrong, and yet I myself speak of right and wrong. I ceaselessly talk about it to the point that the discussion becomes a dispute, and the dispute goes on without end to the point that I cry out almost to the point of becoming voiceless. I cry out without ceasing to the point that I make enemies. If I cry out to the point that I lose my voice, then I injure my life-energy. If I speak more, then I injure my body. If I make enemies, then I lose myself. This is extremely unbeneficial. People are born in this world and they do not know to seek out even one bit of what is beneficial for themselves. Have they attained wisdom?

I abide by loyalty and rightness when I interact with others. This already

²⁴ Throughout Li's works, we see a distrust toward those whose words are not genuine expressions of one's child-mind. For Li's views on the child-mind, see Li's essay "Views on the Child-mind" in *A Book to Burn*, page 98. A distrust of words can be seen throughout the history of Chinese thought. For example, in the *Laozi*, chapter 5 we find, "Talking on endlessly is not as good as protecting what is inside." 多言數窮，不如守中。

²⁵ Peterson translates these lines in Peterson (1999), p. 749. He uses this text to illustrate the notion that Li allegedly believes "morality is relative." The thrust of this essay, though, is not about the status of morality, but about the fruitlessness of arguing with most people.

is unwise. But then, I also blame others for turning their backs to loyalty and rightness. This is lack of wisdom added upon lack of wisdom, foolishness added upon foolishness. If even those who know to love themselves are not able to do so, then how am I am able to love myself?²⁶ If those who know what is beneficial to themselves necessarily ridicule [this situation], then can they persuade others to ridicule me? This kind of situation, I ordinarily deeply oppose it. But I am able from time to time to counter the situation and subdue it. I am not willing to give what is beneficial to others. One must ridicule [the situation], and then one will find peace and stability. One's spirits will once again be renewed, and one's heart will returns to its original state of openness and agreeableness. Moreover whether one is studying or preparing for the civil service exams, if one simply has one night of peaceful sleep, then one will be at ease with oneself. This is something that one can deeply lament and feel great shame for. But as for disputation and accusations, these in fact are things that are not met with lament or shame.

²⁶ In Chinese philosophical texts there is a long tradition of ridiculing those who claim to "know." For example, in chapter 56 of the *Laozi* we find: "Those who know, do not say. Those who say do not know." 知者不言，言者不知。

To Zhuang Chunfu ²⁷

與莊純夫

Yu Zhuang Chunfu

Source: *A Book to Burn*, page 45.

Rizai has arrived. I know that the burial matters [for my wife] have been completed. That is gratifying! That is gratifying! Humans are born in this world one time and that is simply how things are.

We lived together for over forty years. We were deeply familiar with each other's feelings, traveled together and spent a long time in Binzhou, and grew up in the same town. It is difficult to suddenly sever myself [from you]. With relations between husband and wife, loving kindness is especially profound. The [relation] is not only about the intimacies shared at night, it is also the advantages derived from toil, and economic and bodily sacrifice. Daily we treated each other as respectfully as we would a guest, and we were sincere to each other as husband and wife should be. [She was] filial, warm, loyal, and trustful. [She] sacrificed herself in order to benefit others. [She] surpassed the likes of those today who are referred to as students of the Way. They are [virtuous] only in name, but not in fact. And so, arriving at this time when I must bid farewell, it is especially difficult to sever myself [from her]. How is this? In the midst of [her] love she also possessed women's deportment, women's skills, women's way of speaking, and women's virtues. For these

²⁷ Zhuang Chunfu is Li Zhi's son-in-law.

[virtues] she was even more fondly thought about by others.

Your mother-in-law, Madame Huang, was like this. Only in lectures on one subject did she not believe another's words, which is a little regrettable. [What she had in generous amount] are what people of today do not yet possess. Even though I am a hard-hearted man, how can I not feel deeply! Moreover, we were separated from each other as we headed toward old age, and were not able to bid a final farewell to each other. That's all! That's all!

Since I learned of the death, every night [she] has entered my dreams. But [in my dreams] I know nothing of this death. Is it truly the case that she has passed away? Or is it that I think of her, and our spirits naturally beckon each other? I call to mind that throughout her life [your mother-in-law] was cautious, and did not easily step foot into a monastery. But, what problem is there once one has entered a monastery? Most [people] are not yet free from hindrances. Since we only are our soul and spirit, what is male and what is female? What is far and what is near? What are restraints and what are barriers? If it is still like the days of old, with restraints and barriers and lack of understanding, then we will never see a time when people have freed themselves. Now spirit and soul do exist, and so we know that the self does not die. There are no things as restraints and hindrances. But again, we create [this idea of] restraints and hindrances. Is this possible? Now this [world of] no restraints and no hindrances is the Western Pureland, a world of complete joy. It is particularly [a world of joy] since there is no other than the Western Pureland.

Chunfu, you can burn this letter and share it with the spirit of your mother-in-law so that she knows these ideas. Do not greedily desire elixirs. Once one is born into this world, there is the dusk of yet another world. Do not greedily desire the material goods of this world. Once one is born into the heavenly world, one will receive nourishment. Suddenly one will forget all recollections of one's previous incarnation where one lived contentedly. Reward will be fully given and the consequences of karma will be fully expressed. From a distance one will [see] the six directions of reincarnation. No time will be one of impoverishment. In her daily life your mother-in-law lived her life as if [she were in the Western Pureland]. There is no question that she has been reborn in heaven. [Your mother-in-law] must remember my words and not forget a single one.

Even though, [my wife], you are in heaven, do not forget these [words] for even a moment. When I pass away, come and greet me. Then we can mutually rely on each other, and make no [more] mistakes.

Perhaps, [Chunfu, you can] temporarily store [her ashes] in a Buddhist cemetery. That would be better. In reflecting on the friendships that I have made throughout my life, perhaps it is with the one who I have constantly respected and loved that I can rely on. And you can rely on me. Wait for me to come, and this will be possible. Do not greedily desire to receive another life on earth, to be reincarnated.

Chunfu, please do not forget to burn, with all your heart, incense and

paper money and read [this letter] a few times. Repeat it to her soul [until she] understands the meaning [of my words]. Then Madame herself will know [my thoughts].

**A Letter in Response to the Claiming that Women Cannot Understand the Dao
Because They are Shortsighted**

答以女人學道為見短書

Da Yi Nuren Xue Dao Wei Jianduan Shu

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 56-58.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to hear your esteemed teaching wherein you proclaimed that women are shortsighted and therefore are incapable of understanding the *Dao*. Indeed this is so! Indeed this is so!

Women live within the inner chambers while men wander throughout the world.²⁸ Clearly, there exists vision that is shortsighted and that is farsighted. This fact need not be discussed. Some say what the so-called shortsighted see is simply that within a room in the inner chambers. In contrast, the farsighted deeply investigate the clear, vast and open fields. The moderately shortsighted hear and see only what happens within a hundred year span. The seriously shortsighted hear and see only what happens within the life span of their children and grandchildren. The truly shortsighted hear and see only what happens within their own life span. The farsighted see beyond their own physical body, transcend beyond the superficial appearances of life and death,

²⁸ More literally, "a man shoots in the four directions like a bow of mulberry wood or a wild rubus dart." Li Zhi adopts this image of the bow and dart from the *Book of Rites*, "The Pattern of the Family," paragraph seventeen. Here we find, "When a son and heir to the ruler of a state was born....The master of the archers then took a bow of mulberry wood, and six arrows of the wild rubus, and shot toward heaven, earth, and the four cardinal points." For Chinese text and English translation of this passage, see Legge (1967), p. 471.

and extend into a realm that is immeasurably, unimaginably large, larger than the numbers a hundred, a thousand, a million, a billion, a kalpa. The shortsighted hear only the chatter in the streets, the viewpoints of those in the alleys, the talk in the marketplace, and the words of children. The farsighted are able to deeply revere great people, do not dare to slander the words of the sages and moreover, they are never misled by the dislikes and prejudices that come from the mouths of the commoners.²⁹

I humbly propose that those who desire to discourse on shortsightedness and farsightedness should do as I have done. One cannot stop at the observation that women's vision is shortsighted. To say that woman and man exist is acceptable. But to say there exists woman's vision and man's vision, how can that be acceptable? To say that shortsightedness and farsightedness exist is acceptable. But to say that a man's vision is entirely farsighted and a woman's vision is wholly nearsighted, once again, how can that be acceptable?

Suppose there exists a person with a woman's body and a man's insight. Furthermore, suppose this person delights in hearing upright discourse and knows that uncultivated speech is not worth listening to. This person delights in learning about the transcendent and understands that it is not worth becoming attached to things of this transient realm. If men of today were to see such a woman, I fear they all should feel shame and remorse, sweat profusely, and be

²⁹Li Zhi quotes from *Analects* 16.8, 孔子曰：「君子有三畏，畏天命，畏大人，畏聖人之言。小人不知天命而侮聖人之言。」

unable to utter a single syllable. This person with a women's body and a man's insight is perhaps the sort of person Confucius wandered throughout the world in search of. He desired to meet her just once but could never find her. In our times we simply see women as shortsighted creatures. Isn't this grievously wrong? However, whether or not these views are wrong, why would women worry over what we think of them? Perhaps, though, someone observing this situation would find these views disgraceful.

From our contemporary time we can observe the following: Yi Jiang, a woman, completed the ranks of King Wu's ministers. Nothing hindered her from joining esteemed men such as Zhou, Chao, and Tai-gong as one of the ten able ministers.³⁰ Wen Mu, a sagely woman, edited and compiled the airs of the Southern states.³¹ Nothing prevented her from being praised along with

³⁰ In *The Book of History*, the fifth section, "The Books of Zhou," we find a reference to King Wu (ca. 2nd century BCE) who employed ten able ministers 十亂. Legge notes that amongst them were San Yisheng, Tai Dian, and one woman, possibly King Wu's wife, Yi Jiang. For further discussion, see Legge (1935), p. 292. In *Analects* 8.20 we find another reference to King Wu's ministers. Zhu Xi, in his commentary on the book, writes that Liu Shidu argues although many consider Wen Mu, King Wu's mother, to be one of the ten ministers, a filial son such as King Wu would never employ his mother. Yi Jiang, then, was the tenth minister. For Zhu Xi's commentary, see *Analects* 5.1a in *Sishu jizhu* 四書集註 (SBBY).

³¹ Wen Mu is King Wu's mother, King Wen's wife. The Airs of the two Southern States *er nan*, found in the *Book of Songs*, are a set of eleven poems written by writers from states south of the feudal state of Zhou, and a set of fourteen poems from writers south of the feudal state of Shao. For an English translation of the poems, see Owen (1996).

commentators such as San Yisheng and Tai Dian as the four friends.³² These achievements were small, merely of this ordinary world, achieved at a time of peace. Still, people who have heard of these women no longer dare to link shortsightedness with women and farsightedness with men. How much more so would people's views on women change if a woman were to apply herself to the study of the transcendent and desire to be like Shakyamuni and Confucius who believed that if one hears the Dao in the morning then one could contentedly die in the evening?³³

If a small minded person of the alleys were to hear one talk about such a farsighted woman, the person would relentlessly upbraid him or her for entertaining such views,³⁴ urge women to uphold their "female" virtue, and consider Wen Mu and Yi Jiang to be criminals. Isn't this grievously wrong? Thus, all those who take upon themselves the duties of a farsighted scholar must not let themselves be laughed at by a great person or a gentleman, and must not care whether or not one gains the approval or affection of a small minded person of the marketplace. If one desires to be admired by a small minded

³² King Wen's four friends were Tai Gongwang, Nan Gongshi, San Yisheng, and Hung Yao.

³³ Li Zhi quotes from *Analects* 4.8, 子曰：「朝聞道，夕死可矣！」

³⁴ More literally this phrase translates as, "...relentlessly upbraid one for holding the view that women ought to peek out beyond the doors of the inner chambers." The phrase "peeking out from behind the doors of the inner chambers" 闚闚 comes from the second commentary of hexagram number 20, the *guan* 關 hexagram, found in the *Book of Changes*.

person of the marketplace, then one is nothing more than such a creature. Are women farsighted, or are they shortsighted? One needs to decide this for oneself. As for me, I believe that women such as Wen Mu and Yi Jiang who have farsighted vision are the propitious omen of a proper family. If it were not the case that these women had accumulated virtue through countless hundreds of years, they could not so easily have been born.

There once was a woman named Xue Tao who came from the city of Chang An.³⁵ Yuan Wei-zhi³⁶ heard about her and requested to be employed in Sichuan in order to meet Xue Tao. Following Yuan Zhi's departure, Tao wrote a poem "In Praise of the Four Friends" to reciprocate his good intentions. Wei Zhi greatly admired this poem. Wei Zhi, in 785 CE, was the most outstanding poet of his times. Could he easily have praised another's poem? Ah! A literary talent such as Tao is still able to cause those from a thousand miles away to strain their necks in admiration of her. What if one were to meet a woman who wandered

³⁵ Xue Tao (courtesy name Hungtu, 768--831 CE) was one of the most distinguished women poets and also a famous courtesan of the Tang dynasty. She lived in a part of Sichuan which in ancient times was known as the country of Shu. She wrote poems, was unofficially honored with the title of Female Editing Clerk of Sichuan, and shared her poetry with eminent poets such as Du Fu, Bai Juyi, and Yuan Zhen. For a biographical sketch in English, see Nienhauser (1986), pp. 438-9.

³⁶ Yuan Zhen (courtesy name Yuan Wei-zhi, 779-831 CE), a man of Henan, was one of the most eminent poets of the Tang dynasty and also a prominent government official. He was a man of vision, intent on social and literary reform. In 809 CE, Yuan Zhen travelled to Sichuan as an investigating censor on an inspection tour and at this time asked to meet Xue Tao. See Nienhauser (1986), pp. 949-951.

in the refined world with an understanding achieved by studying the Buddha's teachings? If one were to meet a woman who transcended this material world, would it be possible for anybody not to greatly admire her? You say there has never existed such a woman? Have you not heard the story of Layman Pang?³⁷

Layman Pang was a man from the feudal state of Chu, the city of Heng Yang. He and his wife, Woman Pang, and their daughter, Ling Zhao, revered the Chan master Mazu³⁸ and made him their teacher. They sought to transcend the ways of this material world and one day they completely transformed themselves. They became the sort of people who transcend the material world and are admired by those from the past through the present. I hope, sir, that this man's story can inspire you to become a farsighted person. If you tell me, "I must wait to discuss this issue with the likes of a small minded person from the marketplace," then I am at a loss for words.

³⁷According to legend, Pang Yun (often referred to as Pang Gong, ~740--808 CE) was a simple layman who in the middle of his life turned to Chan Buddhism and is known to have attained the ultimate spiritual enlightenment. Pang Yun, his wife, and two children were greatly admired by those in the Tang dynasty. According to story, Pang Yun lived his final days with his daughter Ling Zhao atop Deer Gate Mountain. Here, Ling Zhao died seven days before her father did. Pang Yun's poems are found in a book entitled "The Recorded Sayings of Layman P'ang" *Pang chu-shih yu-lu*. For English translation of this book, see Sasaki (1971).

³⁸ Mazu (709-99 CE), a native of Sichuan, is one of the most renowned Chan sages in Chinese history. Hundreds of students sought to study under him. For further biographical details, see Sasaki (1971), p. 95.

Discussion on Husband and Wife: Reflections After Long Contemplation

夫婦論
Fufu Lun

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 89-90.

Husband and wife are the origin of humankind. Only when there is husband and wife is there father and son. Only when there is father and son is there elder and younger brother. Only when there is elder and younger brother is there superior and subordinate. Now, if the relations between husband and wife are properly established, then amongst the myriad things, nothing will fail to find its proper state. Husband and wife, then, are the origin of all things.

In the end, Heaven and Earth are like husband and wife. Thus, only when there is Heaven and Earth can there be the myriad things. Clearly, all things under Heaven are born from two, and never from a single entity. Still, there are those who say that One can give birth to Two,³⁹ "Principle" 理 *Li* can give birth to *Qi* 氣, the "Great Ultimate" 太極 *Taiji* can give birth to *Yin* 陰 and *Yang* 陽.⁴⁰ How can that possibly be?

In fact, only the two essences, *Yin* and *Yang*, and the two beings, man and woman, can give birth to human life. In the beginning there is no so-called One or Principle, and certainly no Great Ultimate. If we understand this, then in the

³⁹ Li Zhi is most likely referring to the *Laozi*, chapter 42.

⁴⁰ More literally, "...the Great Ultimate is able to give birth to the Two Modes." Li Zhi is most likely referring to the *Book of Changes*, "The Great Appendix," Section 1, chapter 11. Here we find, 是故易有太極。是生兩儀.

end what is this so-called One? In the end where does this so-called Principle exist? In the end to what does this Great Ultimate refer? If Two comes from One, then where does One come from? A one and another one make two. Principle and *qi* are two, *yin-yang* and the Great Ultimate are two, the Great Ultimate and the Non-Ultimate are two. No matter how you look at things, nothing does not come in pairs. Yet, some have never seen this so-called One and nevertheless hastily and rashly speak of it! For this reason, I have ventured to investigate the source of things and have seen that indeed husband and wife are the source of all creation.⁴¹

Since things are like this, I speak only of the two entities husband and wife. I never speak in terms of the One and never speak in terms of principle. Since I do not speak in terms of the One, I certainly will not speak in terms of Nothingness. Since I do not speak in terms of Nothingness, I certainly will not speak in terms of the nothingness of Nothingness. Why? Because I fear that by speaking in terms of these nonentities, I will only further confuse the masses. By talking on endlessly,⁴² I will in fact increase people's confusion. It is better to submerge myself with others in the realm of silence and forgetfulness.⁴³ There,

⁴¹ Li Zhi's phrasing in this passage strongly resembles that found in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, section 12, 君子之道，造端乎夫婦：及其至也，察乎天地。

⁴² Li Zhi's phrasing is identical to that from the *Laozi*, chapter 5, 多言數窮，不如守中。

⁴³ This notion of "silence and forgetfulness" 則不如相忘于無言 echoes that found in the *Zhuangzi*, chapter 6, 不如相忘於江湖。

with Heaven, Earth, humans and all things, I too can simply be born from a husband and a wife, breathe and rest in this realm, and talk only with others from this realm.

In the *Book of Changes* it is said:

Great is the power of *Qian* 乾, the myriad things rely on it for their beginning.⁴⁴

Superlative is the power of *Kun* 坤, the myriad things rely on it for their birth.⁴⁵

Providing origin and life, the changes of *Kun* and *Qian* are never ending.

If amongst the myriad things each finds and manifests its nature and thus attains its proper place, then the Great Harmony 太和 will be realized and protected.⁴⁶

In the Great Harmony we can find the actualization of each thing's nature. This Great Harmony is brought into existence through the union of *Qian* and *Kun*.

Qian is the husband, *Kun* is the wife. When each thing's nature is manifested and thus each thing attains its proper place, naturally nothing in this world will fail to

⁴⁴ *Qian*, the symbol of the male, of firmness, and of Heaven, is the first hexagram found in the *Book of Changes*. In speaking of *Qian*, Li Zhi quotes from the *Book of Changes*, section 1, chapter 1.

⁴⁵ *Kun*, a symbol of the female, of submission, and of the Earth, is found in the *Book of Changes* as hexagram number two. Li Zhi's quotes from the *Book of Changes*, section 1, chapter 2 in his references to *Kun*.

⁴⁶ In the *Book of Changes*, section 1, chapter 1, we find the two phrases in reverse order, 各正性命。保合太和。

be harmonious and fitting. Now, how indeed must the relationship between husband and wife be like in order for things to be like this? How indeed?

On Miscellaneous Matters

雜說 *Za Shuo*

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 96-98.⁴⁷

*Obeissance to the Moon*⁴⁸ and *The Western Chamber*⁴⁹ are [created by] the skills of nature. *The Lute*⁵⁰ is [created by] the skills of an artisan. As for the skills of an artisan, they are referred to as such because they are skills seized from nature—from heaven and earth. Who knows that heaven and earth are without skill? Now heaven gives birth [to the multitude of things], the earth nurtures them, and so all forms of vegetation flourish. People see this vegetation and are fond of it. They seek out the skills and are unable to find them. Do these people

⁴⁷ Sections of this essay have also been translated into English by Eng Chew Cheang. See Cheang (1973), pp. 277-79.

⁴⁸ 拜月, more well-known as 幽閨記, is a late Yuan drama by 施惠. Li Zhi apparently wrote a commentary on this drama. Extant is a piece entitled 李卓吾先生批平幽閨記 attributed to Li Zhi. However, this work is considered by most scholars to be forged by an anonymous author.

⁴⁹ The 西廂記 is a Yuan drama authored by 王實甫 and 關漢卿. For Li's commentary on this work, see 李卓吾先生批點西廂記真本, an expanded and revised version of Li's original work is no longer extant. For an English translation of the play, see Hsiung (1968).

⁵⁰ 琵琶記, written by a Ming dramatist 高明 (ca. 1305-1368), is commonly considered to be one of the great achievements in Chinese drama. For an English translation of the play, see Mulligan (1980). For a revised and edited version of Li Zhi's commentary on this work, see 李卓吾先生批平琵琶記. Also, see Dolby (1976) for discussions on the above three dramas.

possess insufficient wisdom and so are unable to perceive the skills [of nature]? If one knows that creation in its natural form is executed without skills, then even if there is a sage or a divinity, he would not be able to recognize or know the whereabouts of the skills of nature. And so, who is able to perceive these skills? Observing the situation, we see that even though the skills of an artisan are clever ones, they have already sunk to the status of being derivative in nature. As for what is beautiful and brilliant, and the immutable heart, should we not grieve for them?

I have heard the following. As for feet that chase the winds and trail the thunder, they will not be found amidst the animals. As for the sage whose sound echoes [in the world] and whose energy is sought after by others, he is not found among pedantic scholars. As for writings that float over water, they are not found amid ordinary tales. If the story line is tightly written and the couplets are in perfect rhyme, if [the writing] follows set principles and is in harmony with regulations [of writing], if the beginning and ending echo each other and what is abstract and concrete are developed synchronously, then the multitudes of people with the maddest of maladies will all refer to it as literature. At the same time, none can refer to it as the most exquisite literature in this world.

What skill is there in the scripts of the variety plays, the best of the burlesque plays, *The Western Chamber*, and *Obeissance to the Moon*? I say, no [work] is more skillfully wrought than *The Lute*. This Mr. Gao has certainly fully

exerted his efforts in terms of exhibiting skillfulness. In terms of skill, he is the most talented among us. The author has displayed the depth of his cleverness, and left none [of such talents] unexploited. [But] when the words end [on the page], so too does the meaning. When the words are all spent, then the flavor also dissipates and vanishes. In the past I have picked up *The Lute* and strummed its [tunes]. I first strummed it and I sighed. I strummed it again and I resented [the work]. I strummed it a third time and I resented [the work], sighed, and did not keep [the work]. What is the reason for this? Could it be that it seems real, but is not real? And so the tunes do not deeply impress upon the heart? I say, although Mr. Gao's cleverness is exquisite, the strength of his energies is only sufficient to penetrate between the skin, and the bones and blood. Since [his works] can only effect people to such a degree, is [my experience in strumming those tunes] so odd?

The Western Chamber and *Obeisance to the Moon* are simply not like this. Their meaning [penetrates] to the interior of the universe. Naturally, as there are people who delight in the universe, so there are people who delight in these works. As with the natural creation of things in this world, the cleverness of this skill is, to me, simply unfathomable.

As for those in this world who are truly able to write, in comparison [to Mr. Gao], in the beginning none possess any intention to write. Their bosoms are filled with such and such indescribable and wondrous events. In their throats are such and such things that they desire to spit out but do not dare to. In their

speech time and time again they have countless things they wish to say but for which there is no proper place to speak them. These [thoughts] accumulate [to an unimaginable height] and are stored for so long that [in time] the force of [these thoughts] cannot be stopped.

If one day [one who truly is able to write] meets certain circumstances, his feelings grow. When something in particular strikes his eye, his sighs multiply. He snatches another's wine glass and with it purges his unhappiness. He pours out the grievances within his heart, and deeply feels the ill fortune that he has endured for countless years. As he has already spewed out jade and spit out pearls, illuminated the Milky Way, and created the most heavenly writings, he then becomes self-possessed, goes crazy and howls loudly, sheds tears and cries with sorrow, and is unable to stop himself. In the end he cannot bear to hide his writings in a famous mountain⁵¹ or to throw it in the waters or the fires. He would rather cause his readers and listeners to gnash and grind their teeth, and desire to kill him and to slice him up. I look at these jottings and desire to meet its author....⁵²

⁵¹ This statement echoes Sima Qian's who is recorded in the *Hanshu* 62.

⁵² The last paragraph of the essay is difficult to render, and I have not included it in this translation.

Views on the Child-mind⁵³

童心說
Tongxin Shuo

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 98-99.⁵⁴

The Farmer of the Dragon Ravine⁵⁵ in the concluding remarks to the preface of the *Western Chamber*⁵⁶ stated: "It is fitting that those with understanding must not say that I still possess the child-mind."⁵⁷

⁵³ The term child-mind finds its origins in two sources. First, in the *Zuo Zhuan*, Duke of Xian, year 31 we find a negative use of this concept: "He still had a child-mind. From this the ruler knew that he would not go on well to the end." 猶有童心·君子是以知其不能總也。For the Chinese version and English translation of this passage, see Legge (1960), p. 564. Here, "child-mind" carries the connotation of a mind that is infantile and undeveloped. The "child-mind" taken in a positive light is first found in the *Mengzi*, 4B12: "Mencius said, 'The great man is he who does not lose his child's-heart'." 大人者·不失其赤子心者也。Here, "child-mind" connotes purity and uncorruptedness. For the Chinese version and English translation of this passage, see Legge (1960), p. 322.

⁵⁴ For a published translation of this letter, see Owen (1996), pp. 808-811. Also, see Meyer-Fong (n.d.). My own translation benefits greatly from her work.

⁵⁵ The *Western Chamber* 西廂記, a 13th-century, Yuan dynasty drama by Wang Shifu 王實甫, was often considered a subversive work in traditional China and was banned during the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Those who commented on the work sought anonymity through pseudonyms. The Farmer of the Dragon Cave Mountain is an unknown commentator. For further description of the *Western Chamber*, see Nienhauser (1986), p. 407.

⁵⁶ For an English translation of this work, see Hsiung (1968).

⁵⁷ The Farmer of the Dragon Ravine is the commentator of a 1582 edition of the *Western Chamber*. The quotation is drawn directly from the preface of this edition. Eng Chew Cheang translates the relevant portion of this preface as the following:

Having leisure at my humble home, I casually punctuate

[But] the child-mind is the genuine mind. If one denies the child-mind, then this means he denies the genuine mind. As for the child-mind, free of all falsehood and entirely genuine, it is the original mind⁵⁸ at the very beginning of the first thought. Losing the child-mind is losing the genuine mind. Losing the genuine mind is losing the genuine self. A person who is not genuine will never again regain what he began with.

A child is the beginning of a person; the child-mind is the beginning of the mind. As for the beginning of the mind, how can it be lost! How is the child-mind able to be suddenly lost? From the beginning, aural and visual impressions enter in through the ears and eyes. When one allows them to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-mind is lost. As one grows older, one hears and sees the Principles of the Way [i.e., moral teachings]. When one allows these to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-mind is lost. As one ages, the Principles of the Way that one hears and sees grow more numerous with each day thus extending the breadth of one's knowledge and perceptions. Thereupon, one realizes that one should covet a good reputation,

[the text of the Hsi-hsiang chi.]....[Often] I hold the text and alone chant [the poems contained in it] during the windy and rainy days, or the beautiful moonlight nights. [In so doing,] I while away the time, and break [the strains] of poverty and sadness. *Those who understand me must not say that I still possess the mind of an infant. (italics mine)*

⁵⁸ The concept of "original mind" 本心 *benxin* finds its original source in the Mengzi 6A10: 此之謂失其本心。

and endeavor to enhance one's reputation. One then loses one's child-mind.

One realizes that a bad reputation is to be disdained, and endeavors to conceal this reputation. One then loses one's child-mind.

The Principles of the Way that one hears and sees all come from extensive reading and acquaintance with moral principles. But did not the sages of antiquity read books? Yet, even when they did not read books, their child-mind was secure and preserved. When they studied extensively, by protecting the child-mind they kept themselves from losing it. They are unlike those students for whom the more they read and become acquainted with moral principles, the more they obstruct their child-mind. Now, if by extensively reading and acquainting oneself with moral principles students obstruct their child-mind, then why did the sages so often write books and establish teachings that obstruct what these students do? Since the child-mind is obstructed, then when one speaks, one's words will not come from one's heart. When one manifests such words through governing affairs, then his governing of affairs will have no foundation. When one employs them in one's composition, then they will fail to express the truth. If the beauty does not come from within, if the brightness is not born from true sincerity,⁵⁹ then even the attempt to create one sentence of virtuous words⁶⁰ will fail in the end. What is the reason for this? Because the

⁵⁹ Li Zhi plays on a passage from the *Mengzi* 7B25: 充實之謂美。充實而有光輝之謂大。

⁶⁰ This passage draws on a passage found in the *Analects* 14.5: 子曰，有德者，必有言，有言者，不必有德。

child-mind is obstructed, then the Principles of the Way that come from outside the self become one's mind.

Now, if the mind is comprised of the Principles of the Way which one hears and sees, then what is spoken are all words of the Principles of the Way. But they are not the spontaneous words from the child-mind. Though these words may be artful, what do they have to do with oneself? How could this lead to anything other than fake people speaking fake words, enacting fake actions, and producing fake writings? Once a person is fake, then nothing he does is not fake. From this, we can see that if one speaks fake words with a fake person, then the fake person will be pleased. If one speaks of fake affairs with a fake person, then a fake person will be pleased. If one discusses fake literature with a fake person, then a fake person will be pleased. When everything is fake, then nowhere will there be anyone who is displeased. When the entire theater is filled with fakers, how can a short person [standing in the audience] discriminate between good and bad?⁶¹

And so, even the most exquisite writings in the world can be destroyed by fake people and are not then read by later generations. Is this so rare? Why is this? The most exquisite literature in the world all comes from the child-mind. As long as the child-mind is constantly preserved, then the Principles of the Way which enter in through the eyes and the ears will not dominate. Then no age will

⁶¹ The reference to a "short person" 矮人 is a reference to the common Chinese saying 矮人觀場 referring to a short person in a theater who applauds and boos with the audience although he cannot see the play.

lack great literary works and no person will lack literary talent. There will be no structurally or stylistically forced fake literature!

Why must verse necessarily be in the “old” or “xuan” style of unregulated poetry?⁶² Why must prose necessarily be like that written in the pre-Qin era? Writing evolved through the ages and became the literature of the Six Dynasties, changed and became the new regulated verse of the Tang. These changed again and developed into fantastic tales,⁶³ changed yet again and became play-scripts⁶⁴ which developed into Yuan comedies,⁶⁵ which in turn evolved into *The Western Chamber*⁶⁶ and *The Water Margin*,⁶⁷ and now has

⁶² “Old style” and “xuan style” poetry is that found in Xiao Tong’s (501-531 CE) *Wenxuan* 文選 *Literary Selections*, one of the most influential literary anthologies in Chinese history. For an English translation of this text, see Knechtges (1982).

⁶³ “Fantastic tales” 傳奇 emerge in the late Tang period.

⁶⁴ “Play-scripts” 院本 emerge during the early Yuan period.

⁶⁵ For further discussion on “play-scripts” and Yuan comedies, see Mackerras (1983), Dolby (1976), Crump (1980).

⁶⁶ *The Western Chamber* is comprised of five Yuan comedies.

⁶⁷ *The Water Margin* differs in form from *The Western Chamber* in that the former is a collection of chapters rather than of discrete plays. For an English translation of *The Water Margin*, see Jackson (1976).

become the eight-legged essay⁶⁸ of today. All the most exquisite literature from the past through the present cannot be discussed in terms of the tendencies of the ages that preceded or followed them. Therefore, I am drawn to the spontaneous writings of those with a child-mind. What need is there to speak of the *Six Classics*! Why speak of the *Analects* and the *Mengzi*!

Now, as for [the words one finds in] the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi*, if they are not excessive praise and reverence by official historians, then they are the inordinate praises of loyal subjects. If they are neither of the above, then they are what inexperienced followers and dimwitted disciples have written down of their teacher's sayings. In some cases, what they recorded had an introduction but lacked a conclusion. In other cases, we have a conclusion but are without the introduction. The disciples would write down what they happened to see. But scholars of later generations did not critically examine these writings. They declared that these books came from the mouths of sages and established them as classics. Who knows whether or not these [writings] are the words of the sages?

Even if these words did come from the sages, they were spoken to address a particular need, much like the case of prescribing a medication for a

⁶⁸ The eight-legged essay is a highly structured essay prescribed as the standard form of examination answer from the mid-15th century until the beginning of the 20th century. Essays had eight prescribed sections. Candidates for civil service examinations were given selected phrases from classical texts and then asked to write a 300-400 character commentary using the eight-legged essay format.

specific illness. The sages simply attended to specific situations and applied certain methods in order to save this dimwitted disciple or that inexperienced follower. While a particular medicine might cure one particular faker's illness, such prescriptions are difficult to administer [to all patients]. Given this, how could it be fitting to take these writings as the ultimate standards for thousands of generations? And so, the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi* have become nothing more than a crib sheet for those belonging to the School of Principle, a fountainhead for the fakes. Certainly these texts cannot shed light on matters by speaking with the words from the child-mind. Alas! How can I find a genuine great sage whose child-mind has not been lost and with him have a word on literature?⁶⁹

⁶⁹ This sentence plays on a passage from chapter 26 of the *Zhuangzi*: 吾安得夫忘言之人而與之言哉。

Mourning Madame Huang⁷⁰

哭黃宜人
Ku Huangyiren

Source: *A Book to Burn*, page 232-233.

As you came of age you bound up your hair and we became husband and wife,

Loving warmth was not forced upon each other.

This morning I heard that you had died,

I did not feel sad mournfulness.

We did not bring loving warmth [into our relationship],

What I did mourn was your virtue.

You never showed a sign of irritation,

[We] were respectful to each other for forty years.

Your cousins all praised you for being truly filial.

Your uncles and aunts worried about you exhausting yourself through
work.

Guests and friends would come visit day and night.

Your chapped hands served the fragrant dregs of wine.

Your kind heart was able to sacrifice what was yours,

You were frugal with yourself and sustained the family.

Because I desired the transcendence of Buddhism,

⁷⁰ "Mourning Madame Huang" is one of a number of poems mourning the death of Li Zhi's wife.

[I] said goodbye to you toward the end of our lives.
Going near the waters and watching the fish at play,
In the spring amidst the mountains [where] only the bird cries.
I did not rid myself of friends who were impoverished,
How much less so a wife who endured years of poverty with me!
Ji Que and Liang Hong,⁷¹
Who could be more indulgent than they were?
[Your] husband had his heart set on the world,
And deeply regrets that you were not able to follow!

⁷¹ I am uncertain as to who Ji Que is. Liang Hong 梁鴻 and Meng Guang 孟光 were a famed and harmonious couple of the Han dynasty. Liang Hong was virtuous but ill fated.

Mourning the Precious Son

哭貴兒
Ku Gui Er

Source: *Addendum to A Book to Burn*, page 108.

Your wife should again remarry. Your son, he is my grandchild.

Where has your spirit settled? Find refuge in the honorable world of the
Buddha.

You had only [begun] to grow up and you followed me.

Now I beckon your spirit.

Alive or dead, your heart does not alter.

Pull yourself out from sinking into confusion.

Recalling Madam Huang

憶黃宜人

*Yi Huang Yiren*⁷²

Source: *Addendum to A Book to Burn*, page 108.

Today I know you have passed away. You now have truly become a
Bodhisattva.

Why did you need to transform into a women's body, and then later become
known as a Bodhisattva?

I have one essay. It fully speaks of the matter of becoming a Buddha.

I read the essay over and over again. To become a Buddha is simply like this.

⁷² *Yiren* 宜人 is a traditional title given to a wife of a low ranking official.

In Praise of Liu Xie

贊劉諧

Zan Liu Xie

Source: *A Book to Burn*, pages 130.

There once was a gentleman from the school of principle who wore dignified platform shoes and walked in large strides. He dressed in a generously long sleeved robe with a wide sash. With the obligations of morality as his cap and the principles of human relations as his garments, he picked up paper and ink stick, one, two, quietly touched his lips to them, three, four, and then said to himself that he was Confucius' disciple. At this time the gentleman ran upon Liu Xie. Liu Xie was a clever man of learning. He saw the gentleman from the school of principle, wryly smiled and said, "This man does not know that I am Confucius' older brother."

The gentleman from the school of principle suddenly became flushed. He rose and said, "If Heaven had not given birth to Confucius, then the ancient period would have been like a long night. What kind of person are you that you dare to declare yourself Confucius' older brother?"

Liu Xie said, "The peculiar thing is that the worthies of ancient times up to Fuxi and Huangdi spent all their days burning paper and candles while they walked!" The gentleman of the school of principle was speechless and came to a halt. But, how could he truly understand the exquisiteness of Liu Xie's words?

Mr. Li heard and praised Liu Xie saying, "These words are simple and yet

fitting, terse and yet rich. They are able to untangle the web of uncertainty, and illuminate the heavens. His words are as they are and so we are able to learn from them and understand the man [who spoke these words]. In my opinion, although his words are those in response to ridiculous ideas, they are nevertheless exquisite. People from generations and generations in the future will not be able to improve upon them."

To Ma Lishan
與馬歷山
Yu Ma Lishan

Source: *An Addendum to A Book to Burn*, pages 3-4.

Yesterday I was edified by your letter on the chapter [in the *Book of Rites* entitled] the “Great Learning.” Because I had guests staying at my place, I did not write a letter in reply to you.

I humbly say that the “Great Learning” is a teaching for adults. Once a person has reached the age of eight, he pursues the lesser learnings and listens to the teachings of his father, older brothers, teachers, and elders. There are the rules of propriety—such as bowing and making way for each other, and advancing and retiring. There are the art of rituals, music, archery, driving a chariot, reading, and mathematics.⁷³ Also, people of our times have the wise sayings of the sages of antiquity and their worthy disciples. All of [these rules, arts, and sayings] are established for future generations. Once one has reached the age of fifteen, one becomes an adult and at that time pursues the learning fit for adults. Is it possible then that people would still be like children, day and

⁷³ In the Zhou dynasty, the sons of the elite pursued “smaller learning” beginning at the age of eight, and “greater learning” at the age of fifteen. Smaller learning in that period consisted of the six arts: rituals, music, archery, driving a chariot, reading, and mathematics. Smaller learning is taught throughout Chinese history—though at different periods the subjects studied differs slightly—up until the end of the Qing.

night willingly accepting the snot and spit of adults?⁷⁴ Therefore, the “Great Learning,” this book and its first words, are the teachings for adults.

Where does the Way of the teachings for adults reside? Each and every person possesses this Perfect All-Reflecting Buddha-wisdom.⁷⁵ This Perfect All-Reflecting Buddha-wisdom is my luminous virtue. As for this luminous virtue, above, it is identical with the Heavens. Below, it is identical with the earth. In the middle, it is identical with the countless sages and worthies. Others do not possess more of it, and I do not possess less of it.⁷⁶ Since nobody possesses an excess or a deficiency of [this luminous virtue], then even if I desire to confer it upon sages and worthies and not keep it for myself, or to give adults the chance to learn it while I myself do not, this cannot be done. If one does not pursue learning, there is no way to know that luminous virtue resides in oneself. One willingly becomes stupid but simply does not know it. Therefore it is said, “[The

⁷⁴ This reference to “snot and spit” finds its source in the *Wenxuan* 文選, the most influential anthology of pre-Tang poetry. For a discussion and an English translation of the *Wenxuan*, see Knechtges (1982).

⁷⁵ This concept finds its source in the *Prajna Paramita*. Also, see in this appendix, “Views on the Child-mind,” for further discussion on the innate moral capacity within each individual.

⁷⁶ See Peterson (1999), p. 750 for an alternative translation of these sentences. Peterson reads “To Ma Lishan” as arguing moral relativism. I address this issue in chapter three. For further readings on Li’s view toward judgments of right and wrong, see in this appendix “To Yang Dingjian” and “Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in *A Book to Hide*.”

Way of the Great Learning] resides in illuminating luminous virtue.”⁷⁷ The desire for luminous knowledge and luminous virtue is what I necessarily possess. [Such desires] are the very, very first affairs found in the Great Learning. Therefore, [“luminous knowledge” and “luminous virtue,”] in particular, are the first words [in the text].

Where does my luminous virtue really reside? I say that although one cannot see its substance, in fact it is present everywhere and fills the space in ones home, ones country, and the entire world. It is always active and is what is closest to us. Who is able to part from it? If by drawing close to the people I am able to illuminate my luminous virtue, then as for the source of my virtue’s illumination, isn’t it in fact the case that one can see it? Therefore it is said, “[The Way of the Great Learning] resides in drawing close to the people.”⁷⁸

Now, the Dao is one, and so too is learning. In our times it is said, “[The Way of the Great Learning] resides in illuminating luminous virtue.” It is also said, “[It] resides in drawing close to the people.” Clearly, these are two things. Things naturally have their roots and their branches. As for drawing close to the people in order to illuminate my luminous virtue, even if I say it is one affair, still, a single affair has its own end and beginning. Ten-thousand affairs each have the end and beginning of ten-thousand affairs. When the beginning and

⁷⁷ Li quotes from the first line of *The Great Learning*.

⁷⁸ Again, Li quotes from the first line of the *Great Learning*.

the end are distinguished from each other, then the root and the branch become evident. [One sees] there are two things. As for the Dao, it can be two! As for learning, it can be two!

If necessarily there exists the highest excellence, this is because we have stopped at and returned to [this highest excellence]. Certain people simply will not know to stop at this highest excellence. If one knows to stop at such a point, then one naturally will attain stability, serenity, peace, and foresight. Following this way [of living], all people stop when they have attained self-satisfaction.⁷⁹ If one knows to stop [at the highest excellence], then illuminating luminous virtue is not a meaningless and ineffective task since in illuminating virtue one also draws close to the people. Drawing close to the people is not empty talk and of no merit since drawing close to the people also bears the fruit of illuminating virtue. If one does not know [when] to stop, then illuminating virtue becomes the emptiness found in the miscellaneous teachings.⁸⁰ Drawing close to the people, [leads one to only] one separate and distinct branch, like one [branch among the countless] distinct branches of ordinary teachings.⁸¹ Both are wrong.

⁷⁹ The meaning of 自得 *zi de* as self-satisfaction or contentment finds one of its earliest articulations in the 62nd chapter of Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*.

⁸⁰ The term 雜學 *zaxue* is used to refer to the "Hundred Schools" of thought that flourished in the pre-Qin period.

⁸¹ The term 俗學 *suxue* finds one of its earliest articulations in the "Shanxing" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*.

It is better to directly count them as two things!

In the end, the Way of the Great Learning is found in stopping at the highest excellence. Knowing that one should stop is the highest skill. Stopping is indeed what is desired! If one studies [how to stop at the appropriate point] but at the end of one's life one does not stop [at this point], this is because one does not know to stop.

Alas! The difficulty in extending one's knowledge is in the skill of knowing when to stop. If teachers, friends, fathers, and elder brothers discuss and examine this topic together, then [people] will no longer delight in life, and despair in death. Are the countless sages and worthies different than this!

Commenting on Confucius' Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha⁸²

題孔子像於芝佛院

Ti Kongzi Xiang Yu Zhifo Yuan

Source: *A Book to Burn*, page 100.

People all consider Confucius to be a great sage. I also believe he is a great a sage. Everybody believes that Daoists and Buddhists are unorthodox. I also think of them as unorthodox. The masses do not really understand the difference between a great sage and those who are unorthodox. They become familiar with certain ideas by listening to the teachings of their fathers and teachers. But then, fathers and teachers do not really understand the difference between a great sage and those who are unorthodox. [Fathers and teachers] become familiar with certain ideas by listening to contemporary scholars and Confucians from antiquity. But then, contemporary scholars and Confucians from antiquity do not really understand the difference between a great sage and those who are unorthodox. [Contemporary scholars and Confucians from antiquity] became familiar with certain ideas because Confucius talked about them. Confucius said, "As for being a sage, I am not able to become one."⁸³ This statement is born from Confucius' modesty. He also said, "Work at

⁸² 芝 *zhi* is a fungus often considered a symbol of longevity and prosperity. Li Zhi retreated to the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha at the age of 58, and lectured there for more than ten years. The temple was located on the shores of Longtan Lake in Macheng county.

⁸³ Li Zhi quotes from *Mengzi* 2A2.

unorthodox teachings.”⁸⁴ He was undoubtedly speaking of Daoists and Buddhists.

Contemporary scholars and Confucians from antiquity speculated [about these sayings] and then spoke [Confucius’] words, our fathers and teachers passed down them down by chanting them, and young children blindly and deafly listened to them. When ten thousand mouths all utter the same phrase, none can counter what is said. When for a thousand years there is only a single stanza, no one can come to understand [the world] for themselves. Nobody says, “I merely chant the words of Confucius.” Instead they claim, “I understand Confucius himself.” Nobody says, “I stretch what I do not know to make it seem as if I know.” Instead they assert, “When you know, declare you know.”⁸⁵ Today, although people possess eyes, nobody uses them.

But who am I? How do I dare to say that I have eyes? I too simply follow the masses. Not only do I follow the masses and consider Confucius to be a sage, but I also follow the masses and worship him. And so, I follow the masses and worship Confucius while in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha.

⁸⁴ Li quotes from the first part of *Analects* 2.16. For an alternative translation of this passage, see Lau (1979), p. 65.

⁸⁵ Li Zhi quotes from part of *Analects* 2.17. The full sentence is, 知之為知之，不知為不知，是知也。 Lau translates this sentence as, “To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, this is knowledge”. See Lau (1979), p. 65. Li quotes the first part of the sentence, 知之為知之.

**Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies
in the *Cangshu***

藏書世紀列傳總目前論
Cangshu shiji liezhuan zongmu qianlun

Source: *A Book to Hide*, page 7.

Mr. Li said, "As for what people consider to be right and wrong, in the beginning this matter is not determined. As for those who people take to be good and bad, there is also no set way of sorting this out. If matters about right and wrong are not determined, then this right and that wrong [idea] are both developed and are not at odds. If there is no set way of sorting things out, then the thought of this is and that is not are also both put forward and are not seen as contrary to each other. Thus, as for what is considered right and wrong these days, if one says that they are my, Li Zhuowu's, own notions of right and wrong and no one else's, this is possible. If one says that it is the right and wrong of the sages and worthies of the thousands of generations, this is possible too. If one says that I am confounding the notions of right and wrong found throughout the thousands of generations, and reviving the idea of what is wrong and right that reflect my ideas of what is wrong and right, this is possible. What I take to be right and wrong, I have faith that they are the case."

"As for the earlier three dynasties,⁸⁶ I will not discuss them now. As for the later three dynasties--the Han, the Tang, and the Sung--this period of over a

⁸⁶ Li is referring to the Xia (2205-1767 BCE), Shang (1766-1123 BCE), and the Zhou (1122-255 BCE) dynasties.

thousand years was unique in that the people were without a conception of right and wrong. Could it be that those people did not have a concept of right and wrong? Because all these people took Confucius' notions of right and wrong for right and wrong, they then never had notions of right and wrong. And so, as for my judging people to be good and bad, how can I stop doing that?

Disputations between what is right and wrong are like the changing of the four seasons. Day and night alternate and never become one. Yesterday it was right and today it is wrong. Today it is wrong and tomorrow it is right again. Even if Confucius were reborn again in these times, we wouldn't know what judgments of right and wrong to make. Thus, how can people quickly dispense of blame and praise based on his *Spring and Autumn Annals*?"

"I am old now and have little to do, I thereupon have looked through the table of contents of earlier historical works. My book begins from the Spring and Autumn period, and ends with the Song and Yuan dynasties, and is divided into annals and biographies, two different categories. This book is for my own pleasure.⁸⁷ I have entitled it *A Book to Hide*. What meaning does this title, *A Book to Hide*, hold? The title refers to the fact that it can only be read for my own pleasure and should not be shown to others. Therefore, it is entitled *A Book to Hide*. But what am I to do if a few meddlesome friends insistently ask to borrow

⁸⁷ Li's statement contrasts with Sima's who is recorded in the *Hanshu* 62 as saying, "If [my book] may be handed down to men who will appreciate it, and penetrate to the villages and great cities, then though I should suffer a thousand mutilations, what regret would I have?" For English translation, see Watson (1969), p. xiii.

this book? How am I able to stop them? I only say as a warning, if you read this, judge it based on your own opinions. As long as you do not use Confucius' *Spring and Autumn Annals* to dispense of punishments and rewards, then it will be fine."

An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar-Officials

德業儒臣後論
Deye Ruchen Hou lun

Source: *A Book to Hide*, page 544.

Mr. Li said, "As for a sage's learning, 'it is completed without action.'⁸⁸ However, as for those today who speak of nonintentional action,⁸⁹ they speak of nothing more than mindlessness.⁹⁰ Since it is referred to as the mind, how can we say that it is nothing. Since it is referred to as action, then again, how can we have action without a mind? If a farmer acts mindlessly, then the fields will certainly become overgrown. If an artisan acts mindlessly, then the implements will certainly be of crude quality. If a scholar acts mindlessly, then his studies certainly will be neglected. Thus, how can one attain anything if one is mindless?"

One who has explained [this idea of] mindlessness has said, "What we speak of as [mindlessness or] acting without a mind is simply acting without a *self-interested* mind. It is not really acting without a mind." [But] self-

⁸⁸ Li quotes from the *Doctrine of the Mean*: 無為而成. Legge translates the text as, "Without any effort, it accomplishes its ends." For Chinese text and English translation, see Legge (1960), p. 420.

⁸⁹ The term used here is *wu-wei* 無為. *Wu-wei* has been conceived variously by thinkers throughout Chinese history. Throughout this essay I will translate the term as "nonintentional action." For a study of the various meanings of *wu-wei* in early Chinese thought, see Slingerland (1998).

⁹⁰ I translate 無心 *wu xin* both as "mindlessness" and "without a mind."

interestedness is a person's mind. Humans necessarily are self-interested, and their minds are comprised of these interests. Without self-interest there is no mind. If a farmer self-interestedly desires to bring in a harvest in the fall, he will exert all his efforts in tilling the fields. If one who governs a household self-interestedly desires to grow wealthy, he will exert all his efforts in managing his estate. If one who pursues learning self-interestedly desires the rewards due to an official, he will exert all his efforts in preparing for the civil service examinations. If a bureaucrat is not given emoluments, even if he is summoned to take an official position he will not accept. If a person is not esteemed with a high rank, then even if he is urged to take the position, he will certainly not respond. Even with a sage like Confucius, if he were not given the position of the Minister of Justice and the duty of an acting prime minister, certainly he would not settle down in the state of Lu for even one day. This is the way things naturally are.

[The merits of selflessness] cannot be spoken about without foundations. And so, those who defend selflessness are all akin to ones who talk about drawing cakes in order to satisfy one's hunger, or ones who speak as does a short person [in the back of a crowded theater]. Such [talk] is only interesting as gossip to be overheard by one's neighbors. These views are without foundation. They are of no benefit, mislead the masses, and are unworthy of attention.

Following the idea of things being "fully obtained without intentional

action," Dong Zhongshu⁹¹ advocated the teaching of rectifying rightness and illuminating principles. Zhang Jingfu⁹² advocated that sages study the idea of acting without intentionally acting. If one desires to rectify rightness, it is because this profits him. If he does not seek profit, it is [still] possible that he does not rectify himself. When my principles are upheld, then their utility is obtained. If I do not calculate utility, then whenever will my principles be upheld?

These days it is said, sages study the action of nonintentional action. If it is the action of nonintentional action, then why ever is it considered the action of sages? Confucius said, "As for a benevolent person, he first contends and later reaps benefits."⁹³ He said, "He first addresses what must be contended with and then speaks of the rewards he deserves." It cannot be said that Confucius wholly forsook rewards or hastily acted without intention. [In regards to Dong and Zhang], Confucius chastised them because what they said did not reflect what they did. Confucius desired the type of person who acts in accord with his

⁹¹ 董仲舒 (179-104 BCE) was an influential scholar-official during the Han dynasty. For a short bibliographical sketch, see Giles (1898), p. 791.

⁹² Also known as Zhang Mushi 張木式 (1122-1180), Zhang Jingfu was a friend of Zhu Xi's.

⁹³ Li quotes from the *Analects* 6.22. 仁者，先難而後獲。Lau translates the passage as follows, "The benevolent man reaps the benefit only after overcoming difficulties." See Lau (1979), p. 84.

words.⁹⁴ If one acts in accord with one's words, then one's words will rest upon a foundation. To speak of mindlessness and the absence of a selfish mind in referring to the action of nonintentional action is to indulge in empty talk. Scholars [who engage in such empty talk] simply never see action as coming before [words].

As for the times before Fuxi,⁹⁵ there is no room to discuss that here. As for after the times of Shun, in general, all sages acted intentionally. As for the prosperity and power brought by Jiang Taigong⁹⁶ and the rituals and music established by the Duke of Zhou, although each employed different methods, the action exerted was of equal degree. Confucius deeply revered the Duke of Zhou,⁹⁷ and so when Confucius was minister in the state of Lu for a three month period, he grandly set about instituting rituals and teachings. Although he did not engage in nonintentional action as did those before the times of Yao and the Yellow Emperor, was he the only one who did not practice the intentional acting of the great sages?

As for a peaceful existence, is it necessarily found in acting without

⁹⁴ Li quotes from part of *Analects* 2.13: 先行其言，而後從之。

⁹⁵ Fuxi 伏羲 is a legendary monarch of antiquity.

⁹⁶ Jiang Taigong served as an advisor to the Emperor Wen. Taigong is known for his efforts that helped make the Zhou dynasty prosperous.

⁹⁷ Literally, "Confucius dreamed of the Duke of Zhou." For a reference to Confucius dreaming of the Duke of Zhou, see *Analects* 7.5.

intention and accepting what follows? But students simply do not know what is acting with intention, and what is acting without intention. Some take the characteristics of acting with great intention, but are unwilling to exert all their efforts. [They spend their time] worrying whether other people think of them as wealthy, prosperous, and efficacious. Others truly are able to act nonintentionally but still, they cannot refrain from using the methods of intentional action. This is because [they think about] the pleasures gained from intentional action. And so, scholarship never comes to fruition, nothing is attained, and intentions are without a single aim. In the end, it is difficult to complete anything. From the time of the emperors Han Wen⁹⁸ and Han Wu⁹⁹ and thereafter, it has generally been like this. Han Wen was a sage who embraced nonintentional action. He considered himself to be the same as the common people but because of Han Wen's work, he enabled emperors following him, Han Jing¹⁰⁰ and Han Wu, to act intentionally as was necessary. Although people consider Han Wen to be an emperor of intentional action, these remarks are of no merit and should be ignored as wind blowing past one's ear.

Even though Jia Yi¹⁰¹ sobbed bitterly and many times sighed deeply with

⁹⁸ Han Wen was emperor from 179-157 BCE.

⁹⁹ Han Wu was emperor from 140-87 BCE.

¹⁰⁰ Han Jing was emperor from 156-141 BCE.

¹⁰¹ Jia Yi (200-168 BCE) was a child-prodigy who served briefly as advisor to Han Wen. For further discussion on Jia Yi, see Hsiao (1979), pp. 473-483.

remorse, what good did that do? If a child who desires nothing more than a simple life finds himself living in the times of Han Wen, then pure and possessing few desires, he will happily find himself like a fish in water. If Jia Yi was born in the times of Han Wu, then his policy of the “Three Orders” and the “Five Lures” would have immediately gained him worldly success. It would have been considered in court in the morning and by night Jia would have found people paying respect to him and the emperor offering emoluments to him.

Why did Han Wu, as a sage, so thoroughly embrace intentional action? In his time the territory he governed over was expanded to more than twenty thousand *li*. This more than doubled the amount of land that Han Gao¹⁰² bequeathed to later generations. The people labored hard, property suffered from overuse, and some in agitation accused Han Wu of being wasteful. But Han Wu in return exerted all his efforts. Because of [his efforts], through the reigns of the emperors Zhao, Xuan, and also Yuan, Cheng, Ai, and Ping¹⁰³--a total of over eighty years--the borders were never closed and military chariots were never used. Even when a child served as emperor,¹⁰⁴ still, the chieftan of the Huns arrived at court to kowtow and pay respects to the emperor. I believe that although the dynasties during this period often changed, the people still

¹⁰² Han Gao was the first emperor of the Han, ruling from 206-195 BCE.

¹⁰³ Li lists some of the emperors from the Han who ruled between 86 BCE-5 CE.

¹⁰⁴ This child emperor sat on the imperial throne from 6-8 CE.

lived in peace as in antiquity. Later generations knew that their prosperity was bestowed upon them through the work of Han Wu. But he himself did not know what he had done.

Drawing on one's strengths rather than dwelling on one's weaknesses, one reaps immeasurable advantages. The merits of intentional action are indeed superb! But then, why is there mutual admiration between those who act intentionally, and those who do not? People of today, they certainly all have done something that has brought them fame and is considered admirable. But these people are dragged into their pursuits through prejudices, and drawn into following conventional theories. They cannot help but desire to join the masses and muddle through life in order to seek "perfection." They are motivated by the desire to avoid being ridiculed and slandered by others. Because the world is in such a condition, in the end nothing is accomplished. Intentional action or nonintentional action, both are unacceptable!

Sima Xiangru¹⁰⁵

司馬相如

Sima Xiangru¹⁰⁶

Source: *A Book to Hide*, pages 624-26.

Sub-commentary:

Today those who know of Zhuo Wangsun's daughter appropriately see her to be a great joy for him. What is he ashamed about?

She properly saved herself and did not lose herself.

Commentary:

Mr. Li said, critics consider Xiangru's poetry to have been the most superb ever. [But] if he had not encountered Emperor Wu¹⁰⁷ of the Han dynasty, his writings could not have been enjoyed by others. Therefore it is said, "Who is the creator of this work? Who can one find to read one's work?"¹⁰⁸ If those who listen are few, then even if the writer's talents are many, his writings are not appreciated. Never mind finding an emperor who understands and is fond of one's writings. And so, it was a rare opportunity for Xiangru to have met [an emperor].

¹⁰⁵ Li's "*Sima Xiangru*" is a commentary on chapter 117, "The Biography of Sima Xiangru" as found in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian of China*. For a translation of Sima Qian's writing, see Watson (1961), 297-342.

¹⁰⁶ Sima Xiangru (179-118 BCE) is a famous poet of the Han dynasty.

¹⁰⁷ Emperor Wu ruled from 140-87 BCE.

¹⁰⁸ Li quotes from the chapter entitled "The Biography of Sima Qian, Number 32" in the *Hanshu*.

As for poetry, after Xiangru's time nothing has been superior to the writings of Yang Xiong.¹⁰⁹ As for essays, nothing surpasses the writings of Han Yu.¹¹⁰ Xiong, though, was not even heard of in the Han dynasty, and Yu was not known in the Tang. And yet, in the time of [Yang Xiong and of Han Yu], people were selected to serve as officials based on their poetic talents. The emperor had a fondness for music, ministers and lords worked together harmoniously, and songs were ceaselessly Song. It would be fitting to refer to these times as those of the highest flourishing of literary culture. They were periods of elegance and grace. If [even] today we were to look at Han Yu's writings, we would not find them difficult to understand. How is it that his writings had to wait quietly for over a hundred years before Mu Bochang¹¹¹ came along? Only after Mu expressed admiration for Han Yu's poetry did others recognize Han's talents. If we were to read the "*Shang Lin*," the

¹⁰⁹ Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53 BCE-18 CE) was a scholar of philology, poetry, acupuncture, and music. He excelled in poetry and was known for modeling his work after that of Sima Xiangru.

¹¹⁰ Han Yu 韓愈 (768 -824 CE) was an official and a tremendously influential writer. He is considered one of a trio of literary giants, the two other being Li Bai and Du Fu, from the Tang dynasty.

¹¹¹ Mu Xiu 穆修 (976-1032 CE), cognomen Mu Bochang 穆伯長, was a Song dynasty essayist.

addendum to *Sir Emptiness*,¹¹² what would we think of it today? And so I say, Emperor Wu is not really a hero of his times. This is not erroneous.

While [the meeting of Emperor Wu and Xiangru] was quite uncommon, there was yet another meeting that was also remarkable. When Xiangru resided in Linqiu, the wealthy people of Linqiu such as Cheng Zheng and Zhuo Wangsun¹¹³ owned nearly all of southeast China, but were almost wholly illiterate. When the magistrate, [Zhuo Wangsun], invited Xiangru to play, Xiangru simply strummed for himself. Who understood that Xiangru played the zither to convey his feelings? The guests were all dressed in the most refined of clothes. But what is the magnificence of that? In seeing Xiangru, they only saw gold, and could not see him as a person.¹¹⁴ They only saw Xiangru's poverty, and did not see his wealth. If it was not for the lady Zhuo,¹¹⁵ who would have been able to appreciate Xiangru's [virtues and talents]?

¹¹² It was through reading Sima Xiangru's lyric poem *Sir Emptiness* 子虛 that Emperor Wu recognized Sima's talent and thereupon employed him in the imperial court.

¹¹³ Zhuo Wangsun, then magistrate of Linqiu, was the father of Zhuo Wenjun who, in Chinese history, is famous for marrying for love.

¹¹⁴ This allusion comes from the chapter entitled "Quyou" from the *Lushih Chunqiu*.

¹¹⁵ Li is speaking of Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君.

Xiangru played Liang Hong to the lady Zhuo.¹¹⁶ If at that time the lady Zhuo, like Meng Guang, had asked her father for permission to marry, I am certain Wangsun would not have granted her wishes. Alas, Wangsun was merely a utensil, a petty man.¹¹⁷ It was not worthwhile to talk with him about such matters. For nothing he would have given up on the beautiful couple. For nothing he would have turned his back on this most perfect of destinies. Would it not have been better to sever himself from this destiny early on and endured the small shame in order to attain a greater aim?

Does the *Book of Changes* not say, "The same sound echoes each other, the same ether seeks each other." The same light illuminates each other. [Does the *Book of Changes* not say,] "The cloud follows the dragon, the wind follows the tiger." And the returning male phoenix seeks the female phoenix. How could this be false? This, [the meeting of Xiangru and Wenjun, is the second fortuitous meeting that] was utterly remarkable.

Is it not lamentable? Those of talent from antiquity to the present times meet with an unkind fate and enjoy few moments of harmony. Why is it that only this Xiangru was so fortunate as to wander in this world embracing two remarkable opportunities? I lament it, and privately criticize this. I dare not

¹¹⁶ Liang Hong 梁鴻 and Meng Guang 孟光, commonly referred to as Liang-Meng, are a fabled couple from the Han dynasty. The term Liang-Hong is often used to describe an idyllic pair. One of the first texts to mention this pair is the 逸民傳 chapter of the 後漢書.

¹¹⁷ This reference to a human as a mere utensil comes from the *Analects* 13.21.

·
speak [of my woes] to others.

Preface to Writings from *Collection of Essays Begun at the Lake*

初潭集序
Chutan Ji Xu

Source: *Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*, pages 1-2.

Why is this book entitled *Begun at the Lake*? I collected these materials while living at Dragon Lake at the time that I first shaved my head. I thus call this book *Begun at the Lake*. There are reasons that I shaved my head. Although I have shaved my head and become a monk, in fact I am a Confucian. Therefore, I have primarily collected Confucian texts [for my book]. I have made my first task that of collecting Confucian texts and through virtuous actions completed this task. As for those who are good at reading Confucian texts and are good at speaking about virtuous actions, in fact there is none who is better at this than Zhuo Wu.

In the preface [to *A New Account of Tales of the World*]¹¹⁸ it says, “If one acts virtuously, one will have words to speak. If one does not act virtuously, what one says will be incomplete. If one acts virtuously, one will be able to participate in politics and engage in studies. If one does not act virtuously, one will not be able to participate in politics or engage in studies. As for the term ‘virtuous

¹¹⁸ *A New Account of Tales of the World* 世說新語 *Shishuo Xinyu* was compiled by Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (403-444 CE) staff in 430 CE. The book depicts admirable characters from the 2nd through the 4th century CE. Originally it was eight scrolls in length and later with the addition of commentary by Liu Chun, was expanded to ten scrolls.

actions,' it refers to speech, politics, and writings. It is with these vehicles that one carries out, [virtuous actions]. If [speech, politics, and writings] are carried out within the inner chambers [proper relations] are established between husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger brother. If [speech, politics, and writings] are carried out outside the inner chambers, [proper relations] are established between friend and friend, and ruler and subject. How is one able to omit one [of these relations] and approve [of the others]?"

Now we consider the relation between husband and wife and speak of [the carrying out of virtuous actions]. We put forth the relation between husband and wife as the beginning [of all things]. Furthermore, we look at [these relations] from the viewpoint of Xu Yun¹¹⁹ and his new wife surnamed Ran. Observe that [when Xu Yun's wife] desired to chastise him for coveting beauty, she first transformed his behavior by uttering the single phrase, "The gentleman is virtuous in all the various ways." [With these words] she caused her husband, Yun, to change his feelings [toward her]. After this, the two deeply respected each other. What is said can be so succinct!¹²⁰ [Ran] also knew that an enlightened ruler could not be persuaded to yield through appeals to his feelings

¹¹⁹ For a number of stories on Xu Yun and his wife (3rd century CE), see Mather (1976), pp. 343-345.

¹²⁰ According to *A New Account of Tales of the World*, on the marriage night of Xu Yun and his wife Ran, Xu Yun found his wife too homely and did not desire to enter her bedroom. When he finally did enter, Ran chastised him with the words, "A gentleman is virtuous in all the various ways." Upon hearing this, Xu Yun's feelings toward the virtuous Ran changed. See Mather (1976), p. 343.

but rather, could be more easily forced to [change his mind] through an appeal to reason.¹²¹ [Ran also] knew that there was no need to prepare in advance for the future of her two sons. Instead, she simply taught them to speak frankly. At the time when Yun was taken in [by the Prince], [when Ran heard the news] she still continued sewing and she did not stop....One wife is able to masterfully manage these three incidents.¹²² How much more could a gentleman.

And so, those who followed Confucius listed four categories and placed virtuous actions as the most fundamental. It is said that virtuous action encompasses the other three categories. If it were not for these three other categories, then how would virtuous actions ever be manifested! [I] say, if one [understands the relationship] between husband and wife, then the five constant virtues¹²³ can be understood. Could it be that one dispenses with the five

¹²¹ According to *A New Account*, while Xu was serving as a clerk in the Board of Civil Office, he tended to appoint those from his own village to office. Because of this, the emperor called Xu to court. Before leaving for court, Xu's wife wisely advised Xu to appeal to the emperor's reason, not his emotions. See Mather (1976), pp. 343-44.

¹²² According to *The New Account*, upon hearing that Xu Yun was to be punished by Prince Jing, Ran's facial expressions did not change and she continued her work at the sewing machine. Xu's servants wanted to protect and hide Xu's two sons. Ran told them not to worry about the children. Later when the Prince dispatched a messenger to inquire about the sons, Ran wisely advised her sons to speak frankly. The messenger saw that the sons possessed no exceptional talents, were thus of no threat to the empire, and so their lives were preserved. See Mather (1976), p. 344.

¹²³ The five constant virtues are benevolence, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and trust.

constant virtues and separately pursues speaking, participation in politics, and writing! This is not [a particular] viewpoint. This is Mr. Kong's views. This is something that is easy to understand and easy to do. Since childhood I have studied the teachings of Mr. Kong. Therefore, I have taken his teachings and collected them in this book. This book truly can be approved of. Why is it that it can be approved? I say, it can be approved of because it is simple.

[By] Li Zhi at the Wen Hills.

An Additional Discussion

初潭集序

You Shu

Source: *Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*, pages 3-4.

The ruler of the prefect of Lin wrote *A New Account of Tales of the World* which narrates the lives of particular people from the end of the Han through the Wei and Jin periods, a total of two hundred years. As for the length of history ranging from antiquity through the present, [this book] is certainly not complete. Mr. Jiao's *Leilin* begins from the times of Fuxi and Huangdi, and covers through our times. It is complete. It gives us what is not found in *A New Account*. Could it be the case that because we have *A New Account* then we do not print this book? [The *Leilin*] manifests profundity. It manifests profundity, and so the *Leilin* is a book that still has not been published. Now when I look at the two books, although they are from time periods a thousand years apart, they are both like pieces of gold, or the oneness of a prosperous spirit. Scholars pick the books up to read them and find that they please the eye and bring joy to the heart. [These books] truly enables them to reflect and further develop themselves. It enables people to become responsive and receptive. This is not speaking nonsense. These writings possess an ineffable quality and can penetrate to the midst of what is true.

When the eye [of the gentleman in the painting] was dotted, his stern face

was given life and spirit.¹²⁴ When three [cheek] hairs were added to [Pei Kai's portrait], one truly began to sense his spirit. To such a degree did [Gu Kaizhi] convey the unconveyable.¹²⁵ If one says that Gu used nonintentional action and obtained these results, how right one is!

....Zhuowu says, "As for these books, if one binds them together, they are like a string of jade. If one separates these two books, they are like a pair of pearls. *A New Account of Tales of the World* and the *Leilin* exist together in this world, there is no question about this. When Liu Xiaobiao commented on *A New Account of Tales of the World*, he commented on the best [version] of *A New Account of Tales of the World*. The *Leilin* expands on *A New Account*, and [yet still is] *A New Account*. They both are *A New Account*. However, the *Leilin* is complete. Since I refer to it as the expanded version of *A New Account*, if we take *A New Account* and bind it together with the *Leilin*, then we will take what is lesser and have it follow at the heels of what is more substantive. We will take what is substantive to offset what is lesser. Together, they will be a string of jade. And so, how can we combine these works and not approve of it?

¹²⁴ According to the story, the painter Gu Kazhi wanted to paint Yin Zhongkan's portrait. Yin told Gu that his features were ugly and he would not make a good subject. Gu responded that it was precisely because of his features, and in particular his eyes, that Gu wanted to paint Yin. See Mather (1976), p. 367.

¹²⁵ According to the story, in looking at his portrait of Pei Kai, Gu Kaizhi added three cheek hairs. With this slight touch, Gu brought out Pei's true spirit. See Mather (1976), p. 367.

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