

Li Zhi's Religious Syncretism, or *Sanjiao heyi* 三教合一

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Abstract

This article deals with Li Zhi's attitude toward the teachings of three religious traditions: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Li was certainly a high profile figure in the Ming intellectual scene. Despite his profile, his contemporaries could not successfully recognize or categorize his ideas; he was sometimes regarded as a Buddhist monk but sometimes as a Confucian scholar-official, regardless of his claims. And he commented on such Daoist scriptures as the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. His ambiguous multiple identities, which put him into trouble, relates to the topic of *sanjiao heyi* (Unity of the three teachings, or Syncretism of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism). It is true that Li Zhi's attitude toward the three teachings verged on *sanjiao heyi*. However, this paper argues that he should not be considered a conscious *sanjiao heyi* activist; rather, he should better be understood a “*dao*-ist fundamentalist,” due to his belief in one universal *dao*. In analyzing his various writings, this paper discusses that insofar as his primary concern was to realize the genuine *dao*, the important issue for him was not membership in a particular school or the *sanjiao heyi* movement but to practice *dao* properly. Li's quest for *dao* was not out of scholastic interest but moral and practical concern.

Keywords: Li Zhi, *sanjiao heyi*, *dao*, unity of the three teachings, syncretism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism

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1. Introduction

As is well known, Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602, styled Zhuowu 卓吾) was indeed a high profile figure in the intellectual history of China and a sincere follower of Yangming learning (*Yangmingxue* 陽明學). However, after his having committed suicide while imprisoned, he was denied and intentionally forgotten not only by Cheng-Zhu scholars but also by other Yangming scholars. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), one of the greatest Yangming scholars in early Qing 清 dynasty did not include this high profile figure's biography in his voluminous work, *Mingru xuean* 明儒學案 (The Records of Ming Scholars).¹ Another great Confucian mind, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682), left this scathing comment on Li Zhi:

From ancient times till now, (morally) petty men never have scruples [about doing anything bad], but [among them] no one is worse than Li Zhi in daring to contradict the sages. Although we enforce the strict order from the emperor, the popularity of his books among people is still the same as before.²

Gu's words reflect the fact that Li Zhi was identified as a heretic by the government and ruling class including some Confucian scholars. Li's books were banned twice during the Ming dynasty 明 (in 1602, before Li Zhi's death, and again in 1625, after his death); however, notwithstanding the ban, many people still embraced Li's works.

Although the true reason why Li was arrested and his works were banned is not entirely clear,³ it seems plausible that Li's idiosyncratic works

1 However, due to Li's large social influence and relationship with other scholars, it is still possible to find the passages related to Li Zhi in the *Mingru xuean*. Eleven passages are found in the *Mingru xuean*. Refer to Xiamen Daxue Lishixi, *Li Zhi yanjiu cankao ziliao*, vol. 1, 79-82. For a selective English translation, refer to *The Records of Ming Scholars*, edited by Julia Ching and Chaoying Fang.

2 Gu Yanwu, *Rizhilu* 日知錄, *juan* 18; Xiamen Daxue Lishixi, *Li Zhi yanjiu cankao ziliao*, vol. 1, 84: “自古以來，小人之無忌憚，而敢於叛聖人者，莫甚於李贄。然雖奉嚴旨，而其書之行於人間自若也。” In all translated quotations, for grammatical clarity, I used the square brackets “[]” in order to insert the words that are not seen in the original texts. The round parentheses “()” were used in order to provide readers with additional information about the words that come before/after the parentheses. The additional information includes expressions to nuance or contextualize the following words, birth and death years, styled names, and English translations of the original book titles.

3 As can be seen in the burning of books and burying of scholars (*fenshu kengru* 焚書坑儒, 210

and attitude toward the established social order and belief could have been an embarrassment to the elite group at the time. Li's idiosyncratic works and attitude originated from his unique view on or attitude toward "learning" (*xue* 學) and "teachings" (*jiao* 教) which aims to acquire and practice the ideal norms for self and society. In other words, his understanding of the three teachings (that is, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) could have provided the underpinning of his stance about the social order and culture at the time. However, Li's view on the three teachings and their relationship was so elusive that even his contemporaries could not successfully recognize it. He was sometimes regarded by his contemporaries as a Confucian scholar-official but sometimes as a Buddhist monk. Furthermore, he commented on the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, claiming that Confucians must read Daoist classics as well. The following dialogue succinctly shows the inability of many of Li's contemporaries to successfully understand what he really wanted to mean:

The prosecutor asked, "Why did you write those many delusive books?" Li Zhi replied, "Yes, this criminal has written many books indeed, and they are all in existence and beneficial to the sagely learning (Confucianism), not harmful at all."⁴

As many scholars have pointed out, Li's ambiguous multiple identities, which put him into trouble, are related to the topic of *sanjiao heyi* (Unity of the three teachings, or Syncretism of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism). In fact, there were many *sanjiao heyi* activists in history. For example, Mou Rong 牟融 in the Later Han, Zhang Rong 張融 (444-497) in the southern Qi 齊, Wang Tong 王通 (584-617) in the Sui 隋, Liu Mi 劉謐 (n.d.) in the Yuan 元, and Lin Zhaoen 林兆恩 (1517-1598) of the Ming were representative espousers of the thesis of *sanjiao heyi*.⁵ Although

BCE), the four anti-Buddhist persecutions, and the ban of false learning (*Qingyuan weixue zhi jin* 慶元偽學之禁, 1195-1202), persecutions of clergy and intellectuals were more socio-political than purely ideological although persecutors tried to vindicate their persecutions ideologically. However, Li's case differed from other representative examples in that he did not belong to a specific political party nor threaten the economic and political control of the regime. We can conjecture that Li's conflict with Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524-1596, styled Tiantai 天臺) might have contributed to his impeachment by Zhang Wenda 張問達, a student of Geng.

4 Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道, "Li Wenling zhuan" 李溫陵傳, *Kexuezhaijinji wenchao* 珂雪齋近集文鈔; Xiamen Daxue Lishixi, *Li Zhi yanjiu cankao ziliao*, vol. 1, 13: 金吾曰, "若何以妄著書?" 公曰, "罪人著書甚多, 具在, 於聖教有益無損."

5 Liu Mi and Lin Zhaoen need an additional mention; Liu Mi's *Sanjiao pingxin lun* 三教平心論 was contained in the *Sanjiao pin* 三教品 edited and prefaced by Li Zhi, and Lin Zhaoen was a contemporary of Li Zhi. However, Li Zhi can hardly be regarded as having treated *Sanjiao heyi* as his prime agenda. This becomes obvious when Li Zhi is compared with Lin Zhaoen,

Li's attitude toward the three teachings verged on *sanjiao heyi*, he did not claim the typical *sanjiao heyi* positions that relied on such notions as a "stable tripod" (*sanjiao dingli* 三教鼎立), or "compartmentalization of the teachings" (*sanjiao dingfen* 三教鼎分). Neither did Li assert the Confucian assimilation of Buddhism and Daoism (*kongzong guiru* 孔宗歸儒) like his contemporary, Lin Zhaoen although his essay, "Argument on Reducing the Three Teachings into Confucianism" (*Sanjiao guiru shuo* 三教歸儒說) ostensibly attempts to do so.⁶

Then what would be Li's position about *sanjiao heyi* exactly? In analyzing his occasional writings on true learning and the relationship among the three teachings, this paper argues that he should not be considered a conscious *sanjiao heyi* activist; rather, he can be described a 'dao-ist fundamentalist,' due to his belief in one universal *dao*, which, for him, relates directly to the issue of the heart-mind, and that insofar as his primary concern was to realize the genuine *dao*, the important issue for him was not membership in a particular school or the *sanjiao heyi* movement but with the proper practice of *dao*.

One may instantly surmise that Li's view on the three teachings, or his stance of *sanjiao heyi* could originate from the Yangming school. While this may be true, it would be more productive to ask to what extent Li is the same as or different from the typical position of the Yangming school about teachings other than Confucianism. Thus this paper discusses and tries to map his occasional writings on the three teachings, or *sanjiao heyi*. In doing so, this paper will hold that Li's view on the three teachings takes another step than that of the Yangming school, and that the position he adopts is possible due to his 'non-determinable and radical' Confucianism, which relates to none other than his identity as a 'dao-ist fundamentalist.'

the advocate of "the teaching of Three in One" (*Sanyijiao* 三一教), who was called "Master of the Three teachings" (*Sanjiao xiansheng* 三教先生). As seen in a "tripod" metaphor for the ideal relationship of the three teachings, Lin Zhaoen's syncretism was more a "compartmentalization" than a fundamental identification of the three teachings. (For various scholars in *Sanjiao heyi*, refer to Kubota Ryoen, *Jungjuk yubuldo samgyo-ui mannang*; and Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung and the Restructuring of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming*, 1-30. For a dedicated study of Lin Zhaoen, refer to Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China*.)

6 *Xu fenshu* 續焚書, *Sibu kanyao* 四部刊要 75; *Li Zhi wenji*, 1:72. As to the *Fenshu* and the *Xu fenshu*, I quote only from the *Sibu kanyao* edition that uses the traditional characters. But for other works of Li Zhi, I will quote from the *Li Zhi wenji* edition. Hereafter *FS* for the *Fenshu*, and *XFS* for the *Xu Fenshu*.

2. Buddhism, Daoism, and Awakening to the Fundamentals in Learning

Li Zhi describes his spiritual and academic journey as follows:

I) I read books regarding the sages' teaching from my childhood; nevertheless, I could not understand the sages' teaching. Although I paid respect to Confucius, I did not know Confucius and why his teaching is respectable. This is like a dwarf watching a performance [in a crowd of normal people]; he just listens to others' talks and acclamations, following and imitating them. I was like a dog before my fiftieth year; when other dogs bark at images and shades, I followed them and barked. If people had asked me about the reason why I barked, I could have just ridiculed myself without being capable of answering.

II) After I was fifty years old, I declined in health and came close to death. Since my friends suggested I read Buddhist scriptures, I browsed them and fortunately came to understand the origin of life and death slightly. Based on my understanding of Buddhism, I again studied the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong* exhaustively and gained the core meanings [of the two books], which were compiled into the *Daogulu* 道古錄. After that, I followed a specialist on the *Zhouyi* and read it for three years. I made an effort day and night and published the *Yiyin* 易因 that elaborated on the meanings of the 64 hexagrams in the *Zhouyi*. Ah, now I understand our Confucius and do not bark [vainly as a dog does]; I have grown up to be a tall man where I once was a dwarf. How can I depreciate the merits of my teachers and friends although my determination was strong (enough to achieve such a growth)?

III) Since I already regard myself as understanding sages, I want to share my understanding with Buddhist believers. What I want to push ahead is to extend my friendly heart to Buddhist believers, letting them know the one everlasting *dao* that cannot be two or split. [My idea is] indeed the same as what our emperor Taizu 太祖, *Gao huangdi* 高皇帝 showed in his publication, and I already contributed a detailed [writing about it (preface)] in an edition of the *Sanjiao pin* 三教品. Generally, if even Buddhist believers must appreciate [the one *dao*], how much more so must Yang Dingjian 楊定見, who is single-minded and passionate to learn Confucius! Let us push on together! If we have such a comrade as Dingjian, then Confucius would be shown in every direction; if our words are faithful and trustworthy and our deed is sincere and reverent, our practice of *dao* will pay off even in barbarian areas. So then what kind of worry can we have in Chu 楚 province?⁷

In the first passage, Li Zhi speaks of his lack of understanding of the three teachings in the past. He also describes himself, "I had been so

7 "Shengjiao xiaoyin" 聖教小引 (Preface to an Anthology of the Sagely Teaching), in *Xuhui* 序彙 (Collection of Prefaces), *XFS* 2:66-67.

tenacious and recalcitrant from my childhood. I did not believe in [Confucian] learning, *dao*, [Daoist] immortal, and Buddha. Hence, when I saw *dao* practitioners, I detested them; when I saw [Buddhist] monks, I detested them; when I saw Confucian teachers (*daoxue xiansheng* 道學先生), I detested them more.”⁸ Although the two records seem inconsistent, they can be understood as pointing at the same reality in that ignorance of something can lead to either a blind admiration of it or a violent attitude toward it.

Passage II) gives us valuable information on Li’s academic disposition. He began to learn Buddhism when he had a serious health condition that made him aware of the fundamental problem, which he calls ‘life and death.’ Subsequently, he confesses that when he was enlightened on the Buddhist truth, he was able to gain a fresh understanding of Confucianism. This may suggest that Li’s Confucianism was re-structured against the backdrop of Buddhism. However, as is shown below, his absorption of Buddhism was possible on the basis of Confucianism, too. And such circulation of philosophical understanding in Li Zhi already began even before his fiftieth year:

I could not but make use of a petty official’s poor salary to support myself, so I could not avoid interacting with the mundane world. However, though I observed all my duties in my official capacity, I enjoyed myself in my private life. Unfortunately, when I was forty years old, I was tempted by Li Fengyang 李逢陽 and Xu Yongjian 徐用檢; they told me about the words of Master Wang Longxi 王龍谿 (溪) (Wang Ji 王畿, 1498-1583)⁹ and showed me the book of Master Wang Yangming. So I came to know that people who are enlightened on *dao*, i.e., the true men *do not die*, and that they are, in fact, the same as the true Buddha and the true immortals [of Daoism]. Although I was tenacious, I could not help believing them.¹⁰

Li’s appreciation of the value of Buddhism and Daoism followed his encounter with the teaching of Wang Yangming (and Wang Ji), whose teaching was apparently more generous to the teachings of other traditions than any other Neo-

8 Li Zhi, “Houyu” 後語 (Postscript), in *Yangming xiansheng nianpu* (A Chronology of Master Yangming) *juan 2*; *Beijing tushuguan zang zhenben* 北京圖書館藏珍本, *nianpu congkan* 年譜叢刊 (photocopied edition) 43:331. “余自幼偏強難化, 不信學, 不信道, 不信仙釋。故見道人則惡, 見僧則惡, 見道學先生則尤惡。”

9 Together with Wang Yangming, Wang Ji was admired by Li Zhi. Refer to “Longxi xiansheng wenlu chao xu” 龍谿先生文錄抄序 (Preface to an Anthology of Master Wang Longxi’s Works), *Zashu*, *FS* 3:117, and “Longxi xiansheng gaowen” 王龍谿先生告文 (A Sacrificial Writing to the Late Master Wang Longxi), in *FS* 3:120.

10 Li Zhi, “Houyu” (Postscript), in *Yangming xiansheng nianpu*; *nianpu congkan* 43:331-332. “惟不得不假升斗之祿以爲養, 不容不與世俗相接而已。然拜揖公堂之外, 固閉戶自若也。不幸年甫四十, 爲友人李逢陽、徐用檢所誘, 告我龍溪王先生語, 示我陽明先生書, 乃知得道真人不死, 實與真佛、真仙同, 雖偏強, 不得不信矣。”

Confucians at the time. As seen in the above, he neither claims any superiority of Confucianism nor condescends to embrace the other teachings, holding that the essence of the three teachings is nothing but insight into *dao* and life and death; the highest achieved men in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism are not different from one another; they gain *dao*, and thereby “do not die.” The above record is consistent with passage II); his spiritual and academic achievement was initiated by (and thus partly indebted to) his friends mainly from the Yangming school, although the credit for his accomplishment ultimately belonged to himself.

Passage III) is tricky to understand because at the outset, Li seems to regard Buddhism as the genesis of his genuine learning; nevertheless, at the end, he says that he wants to share his knowledge with Buddhists. Is this just inconsistency? In fact, Li believes that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism fundamentally share the same truth on the fundamental issues, but many Buddhists do not know the fact, thus indicating their poor understanding of Buddhism. To this effect, even if Li said that he wanted to teach Confucianism to Buddhists, he would not regard it as inconsistent; Li would think that he still taught Buddhists the essence of Buddhism, albeit expressed in Confucian language. His appreciation of Buddhism at the beginning is nothing but his accidental experience; whether his awakening begins with Yangming learning or Buddhism does not really matter to him as far as they give him an insight into such fundamental issues as *dao* and death and life. This is why Li suggests that Confucians too have to appreciate the “one *dao*,” i.e., the unity of the three teachings. As he says, Li has elaborated on this idea in the preface to the *Sanjiao pin*:

Wenling Li Zhi says the sages of the three teachings are all exemplary (*dingtianlidi* 頂天立地),¹¹ [and so mundane and trivial] discrimination and identification of them cannot be allowed. Therefore, it is said that there are no two *dao* in the universe; the sages and wise have no two minds. [So] Our emperor Gao [i.e., Taizu] unified the universe, and thereby greatly founded the empire. He worshipped Confucius, Laozi, and Buddha as though he had worshipped one person. Accordingly, when the collection of the emperors' writings discusses the sages of the three teachings, it quite often judges things through the two sentences [“There are not two *dao* in the universe; the sages and wise did not have two minds,”] thereby observing no difference between them.

Generally speaking, once *dao* is discussed, then the heart-mind is concerned. Hence, how could there be [fundamental] differences among them? Even stupid men and women, and insects and plants cannot be outside *dao* and the heart-mind. How much

11 “Wenling” is one of Li Zhi's pseudonyms (*hao* 號). Many people used this name to refer to Li Zhi. Li liked to use many other pen names than his official name, Zhi 贇; for example, Wenling jushi 溫陵居士, Zhuowu jushi 卓吾居士, Hongfu 宏父, etc. *Dingtianlidi* literally means that a heroic person puts his pate (mind) up in the sky and yet still stands down to earth. Thus, this stands for a great aspiration or indomitable heroic spirit.

so for the sages of the three teachings! Generally speaking, it is not that people do not want to separate [themselves from others] but that they cannot although they want. And it is also not that people do not want to distinguish [themselves from others] but that they cannot although they want [in the sense that all myriad things in the universe are equally under the control of *dao* and the heart-mind].

Now all chariots use [the same sized wheels for] the uniformed track; all documents are based on the uniformed writing system; all social practices are in order. (*Zhongyong* Ch.28) In case of violation, normally punishment is meted out. [Similarly,] we should regard Emperor Gao as our teacher [i.e., standard]; his policies and teachings as rules so that we can watch whether [moral] dwarfs despise and do not obey every word of sages and whether they abandon the policy and teachings of the emperor or not. Do not denounce Laozi and Buddha; do not depreciate Daoist immortals and the enlightened. [To denounce and depreciate Daoism and Buddhism is] to copy and follow what comes from absurdity and impure words, which is also to blindly follow superficial opinions expressed near the end of the Song. [This kind of behavior can be regarded as] the present bidding defiance to the past, the lower betraying the above, and destroying the people.

After a deferential reading of the collection of the emperors Gao and Wen, I excerpted from it, compiling into the *Sanjiao pin*. Oh, the sages had policies and teachings, which are lucid and settled. Similarly, this book [of the previous emperors] is [also] clear and earnest indeed. Being born in the present world and serving in the present court, people dare to look down upon the book; [people] compiled them into books, but do not care about them again; they put them on the desk, but do not read them again. I think that the fundamental order of the empire deserves reverence and should not be made satisfied [merely] with the punishment [of violators of the constitution].¹²

Li Zhi is sure that there is only one truth, i.e., the one *dao*, around which the three teachings unfold themselves. In other words, the founders of the three teachings share the same spirit. For Li Zhi the three teachings are not fundamentally differentiated despite practical differences in detailed

12 Li Zhi, "Sanjiao pin xu" 三教品序 (Preface to the *Sanjiao pin*), in *Lishi congshu* 23:1a-4b; the same title, *Zashu* 雜誌 4, *Li Wenling ji* 10: "溫陵李贄曰，三教聖人頂天立地，不容異同矣。故曰，天下無二道，聖賢無兩心，我高皇帝統一寰宇，大造區夏。其敬孔子，敬老子，敬釋迦佛，有若一人然。故其御制文集，凡論三教聖人，往往以此兩言斷之，以見其不異也。夫既謂之道謂之心矣，則安有異哉，則雖愚夫愚婦以及昆蟲草木，不能出於此道此心之外也，而況三教聖人哉？蓋非不欲二，雖欲二之而不得也。非不欲兩，雖欲兩之而不能也。今天下車[齊軌]、書大同、修行[齊軌]，有不遵者，加以常刑。以高皇帝為師，以高皇帝之謨訓為律，乃觀場矮子敢侮[侮]聖言不遵，弃[棄]謨訓不目。非毀老佛，輕詆仙釋。唯勦襲胡元穢說，雷同宋末膚見。是生今反古，居下倍上，大戮之民也。故因敬讀高皇帝、文皇帝御制文集，錄之以為三教品。嗚呼，聖有謨訓，明徵定係，是書明白切至如此。生今之世，為今之臣，而敢以塵土視之，束而不復觀，置而不復讀。吾恐國憲可畏，不宜自甘於刑戮也與哉。" My emendation of the original text; in order to make sense, "齊軌" *qiguai* (the uniformed track) has to be put in the beginning part as shown above.

expression, as the emperor Taizu clarified. Then how and what kind of truth can they have in common? Li explains that all of them discuss “*dao*” and the “heart-mind” (*xin*) as the fundamentals of their teachings; the ideals of the three teachings, i.e., Confucian sages or gentleman, Buddha (the enlightened), and Daoist immortals are none other than people who penetrate *dao* and the heart-mind. When one can penetrate these fundamental issues in learning, she/he will be able to transcend the problem of life and death. Further, based on the insight into *dao* and the heart-mind, such ideal models are understood as being enlightened on the unity of all beings in the universe, thereby attaining the perfect harmony with all other beings.

However, Li's attention to the one *dao* should not be regarded as a sheer metaphysical concern. In the preface to the *Daojiao chao* 道教鈔, or *Excerpts from Daoist Scriptures*,¹³ Li says:

Generally speaking, if they are Buddhist believers, they know only Buddhism but do not know about Daoism. Daoism regards the lord Lao (Laojun 老君; Laozi) as its founder, whom Confucius asked about propriety earlier. Given Laozi's words for our Confucius, how can any students of any ages not admire and bear his words in mind even for a single moment? If his words are not borne in mind, arrogance, haughtiness, and intemperance will arise, so that trouble will not stop even for a single day. If I quite often have those inveterate problems, and thereby am despised by others frequently though I am [already] old and near to death, how much more does Yang Dingjian, whose physique is superior but his insight is inferior to mine, have to admire [Laozi's teaching] until his death? Although you put the *Laozi* on your desk every day, [you have to] carry it by the hands to recite it. Besides, such books as the *Wenshi zhenjing* 文始真經 by Guanyinzi 關尹子 and the *Huashu* 化書 by Tanzi 譚子 are all worth carrying. How can they have even a slight difference from Buddha's [teaching]? Accordingly, I aspired to show [such Daoist teaching] to Buddhist believers by compiling this book (*Daojiao chao*) and I wanted to show it to Yang Dingjian indeed.¹⁴

It seems clear that his intention in reading Daoist scriptures is to derive practical ethics from them. Li thinks that Daoism provides us with a practical insight into regulation of self, or self-cultivation, which is none other than the spirit of propriety of Confucianism. To escape the charge of arbitrary and far-fetched interpretation, Li draws on a legend in which Confucius asked Laozi for advice about propriety, and clarifies that the main teaching of the *Laozi* regards regulation of self. Li straightforwardly asserts that the teaching of Daoist scriptures is practically the same as Buddhism, and therefore Buddhist believers must read them.

13 As far as I know, this book is not extant.

14 “*Daojiao chao xiaoyin*” 道教鈔小引 (Preface to the Excerption from Daoist Scriptures), in *Xuhui*, XFS 2:66.

Against the backdrop of his appreciation of the three teachings, Li Zhi warns against blind abhorrence of Daoism and Buddhism which results from an equally blind admiration for Song Neo-Confucianism, particularly the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians' anti-heretical (*fan yiduan* 反異端) consciousness which is based on the idea of the transmission of orthodox *dao* (*Daotong lun* 道統論). Li Zhi thinks that to denounce and depreciate Buddhism and Daoism is to deny history and tradition; Buddhism had already become a part of Chinese cultural tradition in the time of Li Zhi, to say nothing of Daoism. From this perspective, Li Zhi is more traditional than his contemporaries. Most of the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucians also draw on the notion of Chinese tradition, but they are rather sectarian in that they try to preserve their cultural position and identity by marginalizing Buddhism and Daoism for the reason that Buddhism came from a foreign “barbarian” country and claiming that Daoism is nothing but an absurd daydream. This is what Li means by “to blindly follow superficial opinions expressed near the end of the Song.” The fundamental logic of anti-heresy in the Cheng-Zhu school is that *dao* has been received only by a restricted number of scholars, i.e., the orthodox lineage of *dao*. Li Zhi fundamentally disagrees with this sectarian idea:

Dao is present in [all] humans, just as water exists in the earth. Humans seek *dao*, just as people dig into the earth for water. Indeed there is no occasion in which water does not exist in the earth and humans do not have *dao* in them. Then is it possible to say that water does not flow [through the earth] or *dao* is not transmitted [among humans]? When people dig into the earth for water, some give up digging a well and go off, whereas some endure difficulties (lit. dirty, turbid, salty, and bitter tastes) [continuing to dig the earth]. Among people [who continue to dig the earth] there are some who are unsuccessful and so eventually stop digging the earth, but there are indeed many people who find fine wells [because water exists in the earth]. Thus, it is really a big mistake to say that *dao* has not been transmitted since Mencius died. Once one asserts this, then one asserts that the Song scholars could receive Mencius' transmission of *dao* through the teachings of Zhou Dunyi, the two Cheng brothers, Zhang Zai, and Zhu Xi as one regards these scholars as “understanding words” (*zhiyan* 知言). Alas! Needless to calculate, it is more than a thousand and some hundred years from the Qin through the Han and Tang to the Song – There was the Jin and Five dynasties in the middle. If there had been no spring of water in the earth [during this very long time], humans would have died of thirst; if humans had not been able to get *dao*, the *dao* of humans (morality) would have been already extinct. Then how have human beings been able to produce many generations? – I have never seen the extinction of human beings, nor have I ever heard about [a totally] chaotic society. Is it possible to say as if [the normal function of] the universe was prevented from being reopened until the Song came into being?¹⁵

15 “Deye ru chen qianlun” 德業儒臣前論, in *Zangshu* 藏書 32; *Li Zhi wenji* 2:595. Cf. de Bary, “Li Chih: Arch-Individualist,” 235.

However, it should be pointed out that Li Zhi does not criticize Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism in general; in so far as it deals with the issues of *dao* and the heart-mind, its essence is the same as that of Buddhism and Daoism. Once Li completely denies Neo-Confucianism, he contradicts his thought and belief – the unity of the three teachings. This is the reason Li chooses the expression “superficial opinions” rather than “all the opinions” expressed near the end of the Song dynasty; he wants to criticize only the corrupt practice and wrongful behaviors of individual Confucians rather than the whole of Confucianism and all its followers. In this sense, Li Zhi cannot be called an “anti-traditionalist” as an anti-Confucian,¹⁶ contrary to our usual impression of Li:

[Since the Han and the Song dynasty] people have become more mean and base and the ethos of society has been demoralized. No wonder that the abuses of the past still remain till today. In appearance, they are studying Confucian learning of *dao* (*daoxue* 道學); at the bottom, they are pursuing wealth and rank. Their clothing is the elegant Confucian garment, but their behavior is like that of dogs and pigs.

In general, in the world there are many people who have achieved glory, wealth and ranks without lecturing on Confucian learning of *dao*. Why should we discourse on *dao* to gain wealth and ranks? The thing is none other than the fact that those who do not discourse on *dao* but naturally achieve wealth and rank are men of [real] learning and talents, efforts and perseverance, and therefore it is impossible to not give them wealth and rank; [on the other hand,] generally, only those who are not talented and learned, so as to be unable to achieve wealth and ranks in their life time unless they use the name of the sagely learning of *dao*, are ashamed [of poverty and lowness]. This is the reason why they want to lecture on Confucian learning of *dao* by all means and regard it as the source of wealth and rank. Accordingly, now people who are without talent, learning, action, and skill but who greedy for great wealth and rank, definitely cannot but discourse on Confucian learning of *dao* [in order to disguise themselves as the worthy who deserve wealth and rank].¹⁷

The problem is would-be (Neo-) Confucian scholars, i.e., greedy but unqualified individuals rather than (Neo-) Confucianism *per se*. For Li Zhi

16 It was Cheang Eng-chew who first used this term for Li Zhi in English-speaking academia. See his *Li Chih As A Critic: A Chapter of The Ming Intellectual History*. However, in China, especially in the 1970s, there were plenty of scholars who adopted the same kind of explanation and terms, for example, “anti-feudalism” (*fan fengjian* 反封建) and “anti-Confucius” (*fan kong* 反孔). As to this trend in Li Zhi studies, refer to the next section, “Li Zhi’s Confucianism as a Non-determinable Radicalism.” One of the most representative scholars in this trend is Chai Shangshi. Until recently, Chai has maintained his explanation of Li Zhi as a strong anti-Confucian. See his “Wo yaowei zhongguo da shixiangjia Li Zhi huyuan—Li Zhi de pikong kancheng tianxia diyi,” 1-4.

17 “Sanjiao guiru shuo” 三教歸儒說 (Argument on Reducing the Three Teachings into Confucianism), in *XFS* 2:75.

their ‘behavior’ and ‘worldly intention’ are not acceptable; whatever ethics they discourse on, they do so just for their worldly profits. Due to Li Zhi’s attention to behavior and intention as the criteria of moral judgment, he shows no mercy in his criticism even when it applies to Yangming scholars he might otherwise have been thought to have been sympathetic towards.¹⁸

It seems clear that Li’s attention to the fundamental issues in learning, i.e., life/death, *dao*, and the heart-mind leads him to his “circular” understanding of

18 “Yinjiwangshi” 因記往事 (Discussing a Historical Example in Relation to the Previous Article),” in *Zhashu*, FS 4:156. “Alas! In ordinary times when there isn’t a crisis, they know how to bow and salute one another, or else they sit the entire day in an upright posture [practicing quiet-sitting (*jingzuo* 靜坐)] like a clay image, thinking that if they can suppress all stray thoughts they will become sages and worthies. The more cunning and insidious people join the meetings to discourse on the “innate knowledge” (*liangzhi* 良知), secretly hoping to gain some recognition and win high office. But when there is a crisis, they look at each other pale and speechless, try to shift the blame to one another, and save themselves on the pretext that “The clearest wisdom is self-preservation” (*mingzhebaoshen* 明哲保身). Consequently, if the state employs only this type of scholar, when an emergency arises, it has no one of any use in the situation.” (Translation adapted from de Bary, “Li Chih: Arch-Individualist,” 223.) The biggest victim of his criticism was none other than the Yangming scholar, Geng Dingxiang, whose teacher was one of the scholars that Li admired most, Wang Ji (Longxi). Li Zhi’s letter to Geng was a scathing criticism indeed, and thereby enough to ruin Geng’s reputation when it was published:

. . . Given your behaviors, you do not have a special [quality] different from others. All other people are not special and so am I, and you are not special, too. . . . All daily activities are designed for yourself and your family only, not for others. But once you open your mouth, you say ‘You take care of yourself only, but I take care of others as well; you are self-centered, but I am altruistic; I pity the hunger of people in the east and also worry about people’s difficulty in warding off the bitter cold in the west; a certain person likes to visit and teach others—this is the will of Confucius and Mencius; a certain person does not like to meet others—that person belongs to the group of people who are self-centered and selfish; a certain person behaves not so prudentially but does good to others, whereas a certain person behaves prudentially but likes Buddhism, thereby doing harm to others.’ Judging from these [words and behaviors of you], what you have spoken of is not always what you have practiced, and your behaviors may not be what you have said [as good deed]. How different it is from the words of Confucius, “His words must reflect his actions [to be taken], and his actions must reflect his words [to have been spoken]” (*Zhongyong* 13:4) Is it alright to call your [hollow] words the teaching of sages? Thinking of this over and over again, you do not seem any better than petty men in the marketplace. . . . However, judging from my observation of you, you do not have a good mind to transmit and cherish *Dao*. Who has succeeded to your way of learning, accepting and grasping it since you advocated it? I am not sure of other places, but in this village, Xinyi 新邑, who is the successor of your way of learning? People pretend to obey you in your presence, but they disobey you behind your back. (“Da Gengsikou” 答耿司寇 (Reply to Geng Dingxiang), *Shuda*, FS 1:29-39.)

the three teachings or (a religious) syncretism; whichever teaching one comes across first will be acceptable so long as it provides profound insight into the fundamental issues, so that one can better understand the other teachings as well. And it needs to be clarified that his syncretism is not an eclectic compromise of the three teachings, but rather a sort of radicalism or fundamentalism for self-criticism or reflection as a sincere learner of *dao*, who is expected to practice *dao* out of practical rather than theoretical concern. This is well shown in Li's criticism of other Confucian scholars; to study Confucianism and proclaim oneself as a Confucian does not guarantee one's excellence in learning because the excellence and trustworthiness of one's learning should be based on one's behavior. How such common fundamentals as *dao* and the heart-mind get connected with his practical concern in learning will be discussed in the following sections.

3. Li Zhi's Confucianism as a Non-determinable Radicalism

As discussed previously, Li Zhi's syncretism originates from his awakening from blind admiration and abhorrence of the three teachings. A possible question to ask is how he identifies himself. If, as he claims, the three teachings have the same purport would it be a problem to call him a Confucian or a Buddhist or a Daoist?

The above question appears elusive because Li Zhi clarifies his identity as a Confucian but also simultaneously takes up an ambiguous position to remind us of a Buddho-Daoist and, further, a Chinese legalist (*fajia* 法家)¹⁹

19 The legalist aspect of Li Zhi was emphasized in 1970s, in which period, due to the hard driven political movement in China—Anti-Lin Biao 林彪 (1907-1971) and anti-Confucius (*pilin pikong* 批林批孔), the history of Chinese philosophy was regarded as consisting of the supposed struggle between Confucianism and Legalism (*rufa douzheng* 儒法鬭爭). Generally, Qing Si's two articles are regarded as the first instances of the re-evaluation of Li Zhi as a Chinese legalist; Qing Si 慶思 (pseudonym), "Li Zhi fanlixue panshengdao de douzheng," and "Zunfa fanru de jinbu sixiangjia Li Zhi."

For this trend in 1970's China, refer to Noriko Mori, "Chūgoku niokeru ritakugozō no henzen," 124-132; Shin Yong-Cheol, "Junggong-e isseoseo Li Zhi sang-ui jeongchijeok suyong," 199-216; Yu Dong-Hwan, "Li Zhi-ui cheolli inyokgwan yeongu," 10-13. Mori tries to consider an interpretive possibility of Li Zhi as both a Yangming scholar and legalist, suggesting that a reading of "Li Zhi as a sheer legalistic scholar" is not plausible. On the other hand, Yu points out that the emphasis on Li Zhi as a legalist was apparent until 1975 and that since 1976, the evaluation of Li has become more various than before. For a comprehensive survey on publications during this period, refer to Chan Hok-lam, *Li Chih 1527-1602 in Contemporary Chinese Historiography: New Light on His life and Works*, 195-207.

or utilitarian.²⁰ In fact, this question of Li's identity as a scholar has been of concern to students of Li Zhi. Undoubtedly, Li Zhi was regarded as neither a monk nor a Confucian by pharisaic Confucians and Buddhists; he lectured on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to Confucians, monks, and even women with his hair shaved. Both higher monks and Confucian scholars of the time could not fully understand such idiosyncrasy. In response, Li counters with not only direct criticism but also humor:

All people regard Confucius as a great sage, and I regard him as a great sage, too; all people regard Laozi and Buddha as heretics, and I also regard them as heretics. But people don't really know what great sages and heretics are. This is because they get used to what they have heard from their parents and teachers [about sages and heretics]. Nor do their parents and teachers really know what great sages and heretics are; they are just used to what they heard from the scholars and elders. And the scholars and elders do not really know either, except [their conjecture that] Confucius said something relevant to these things; "Sagehood is not that which I (i.e., Confucius) am capable of" (*sheng ze wu bu neng* 聖則吾不能, *Mencius* 2A:2), which is interpreted as just an expression of modesty, [not denial of the 'fact' that he is a sage], and "focusing on the extremes (*gong hu yiduan* 攻乎異端, *Analects* 2:16)" is interpreted as referring to [digging into] Laozi and Buddha. The scholars and elders had made a conjecture and asserted these things; parents and teachers repeated and recited them, and children have blindly listened to them. All words from ten thousand mouths are the same, so that I cannot overrule the words. This has been the way in which the same words have been transmitted and repeated for thousands of years; nevertheless, people do not know it by themselves. However they do not hold, "We just vainly cram in the words," but hold, "We know the [great] figures [who said such true words]," and do not hold, "We are forced to say 'we know' about what we do not really know," but hold, "We say 'we know' only about what we already know." So [I dare say] people today do not use their eyes (thinking faculty) [to judge their status] although they have eyes. What kind of person am I then? Can I dare to say I use my thinking faculty? I follow people, thereby regarding him as a sage and paying homage to him. Accordingly, I follow the way people do, thereby setting [the image of] Confucius on a pedestal at the Buddhist monastery, *Zhifoyuan*.²¹

20 This aspect of Li Zhi relates to the so-called legalistic characteristic of him. Chinese legalism is usually regarded as marked with the focus on efficacy and utility in governance. Thus, Li's emphasis on efficacy and utility in learning and praise of practical thinkers, successful rulers, and politicians—for example, Xunzi 荀子, Shang Yang 商鞅, the merciless first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝, and the like—can be regarded as relating to Chinese legalism.

21 "Ti Kongzi xiang yu zhifoyuan" 題孔子像於芝佛院 (Hanging up the Image of Confucius in the Zhifoyuan), *Zashu*, XFS 4:100; Translation is partly adapted from de Bary's abridged translation (*Learning for One's Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought*, 232-233).

Li Zhi points out that people do not really know why the Confucian sages are great and the so-called heretic teachings are harmful. This may be the nature of “ideology” as a false consciousness, the main function of which consists not in transmission of the truth but in providing an easier excuse to control society and people. The more people believe in it, the easier rulers control society. However, so long as Buddhism is not legally banned,²² although Li Zhi shaves his hair, they cannot prevent Li Zhi from paying homage to Confucius by hanging the image of Confucius in a Buddhist temple, which can be interpreted ironically as a mockery of the attachment to the notion of orthodoxy and heresy. Li's action cannot but be regarded as a humorous and satiric performance; nevertheless, other Confucians could not retaliate against Li's action.²³ In his use of another humorous satire, Li tries to satirize institutionalized Confucianism and Confucians, who cram in the scriptures of Confucianism and rely on the prevailing ideology, i.e., the claim of Confucianism as orthodoxy without knowing the essence of Confucianism:

A would-be Confucian scholar wore high and large wooden clogs and a long robe together with a wide belt. Besides, he put on a cap embroidered with moral principles and holds a gauge stick of morality, picking up a sheet of paper and writing characters, blah and blah again. Third blah and fourth blah spontaneously came out of his lips, professing himself to be a genuine follower of Confucius. One day he

22 “Although the country recruits talented people by examining their understanding of the Six Confucian scriptures, it also collects [and publishes] every kind of Buddhist scriptures; the country educates people by the Six Confucian scriptures, but it establishes the control system for Buddhist religion, which means that becoming a Buddhist monk has never been prohibited.” (“Fu Deng Shiyang” 復鄧石陽, in *Shuda*, FS 1:12)

This may be the reason why Li Zhi thinks much of the emperor Tai's viewpoint on the three teachings, which had been the guiding doctrine of policy for religion throughout the whole Ming. As Langlois and Sun point out, for a stabilized political power, the founders of dynasties could never ignore various religious powers, and Taizu was one of the best examples of it; as a matter of fact, he had explored various religions covering shamanism to Manichaeism, and, needless to say, the three teachings. For a general introduction of Taizu's syncretism, refer to Langlois and Sun, “Three Teachings Syncretism and The Thought of Ming T'ai-tsu.”

23 This is indicated in Li's letter; insofar as he was regarded as a monk, people could not but hesitate to harm him, which must have originated from the culture at the time:

I am nothing but a heretic, and thereby not enough to live up to the Way indeed. From Master Zhu Xi's time till today, Daoism and Buddhism have been regarded as heresies, and they have been continuously rejected for hundreds years. I am not unaware of the situation; nevertheless, I have offended many people [by becoming a monk]. That is because I could not but do it; I was afraid of being killed. (“Fu Deng Shiyang,” in *Shuda*, FS 1:12)

happened to meet Liu Xie 劉諧. Liu Xie was a man of wisdom, and when Liu saw the would-be scholar, he chuckled and said, “This man does not know my brother, Zhongni 仲尼 [i.e., Confucius] yet.” The scholar abruptly hardened his face and stood up, saying, “If Heaven had not produced Confucius, the whole world and history could have been like a dark night. What kind of person are you? How dare you call Confucius your brother?” Liu Xie replied, “Then it must have been true that such ancient sages as Fuxi 伏羲 had to light up a lamp all day long to walk around [because there was no Confucius at the time].” The scholar shut up and stopped talking. How could he understand the deep meaning of Liu’s words? I heard this story and said, “Liu’s words are simple and yet proper; precise and yet full of suggestion, so that they can tear off tangling doubt and enable us to see the clear sky [i.e., truth] again. His words being so brilliant, his person can be easily imagined. Although his words came from kidding, the significant meaning will not change over time.”²⁴

Despite these criticisms, Li’s purpose was to seek a universal reason for learning rather than to deny or ridicule Confucianism. He felt that when a universal and fundamental reason to learn Confucianism was established, Confucianism will be genuinely appreciated, and open-mindedness to other teachings will naturally follow because other teachings may share the universal and fundamental essence with Confucianism. The purport of Confucius’ teaching. And if there are persons who have the purport of Confucianism without learning Confucianism, for example, the ancient sages before the birth of Confucius, their thought can be called Confucianism without Confucius and given the title, “Confucianism (*rujiao* 儒教, *rujia* 儒家).” To this effect, Li Zhi’s Confucianism can be called a “non-determinable radicalism (fundamentalism)” in that Confucianism without Confucius and Confucianism with different titles are all possible because the most important point is whether or not it is based on the truth: Further, even if the *raison d’être* of Confucianism was found with the aid of other teachings – Li mentions his absorption of Buddhism as an opportunity for his true learning, there would be no problem for Li Zhi in so far as one can genuinely appreciate

Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist teachings are all one; all of them originated from their wish to hear *dao* (*wendao* 聞道).

Confucians would not want to die until they heard *dao*. Thus, [Confucius] said, “If I hear *dao* in the morning, I will have no regret even if I die in the evening.” [*Analects* 4:8] [Confucians thought that] if they did not hear *dao*, they could not afford to die; accordingly, Confucius said to Yan Yuan 顏淵, “I thought you have already died [in vain without hearing *dao*]” [“How do I dare to die notwithstanding Master (who will tell me about *dao*) is still alive?” Yan replied.] [*Analects* 11:22] Since only their wish

24 “Zan Liu Xie” 贊劉諧 (A Praise of Liu Xie), in *Zashu*, FS 3:130.

was to hear *dao*, they viewed wealth and rank as transient affairs like floating clouds, and sometimes left behind the world as one throws away his old hat (shoes). But their view on wealth and rank, namely, to treat them as floating clouds and old shoes is to look down upon them, but not to regard them as harmful.

[On the other hand,] Daoists regard wealth and rank as excrement and dirt, and they view the world as shackles...Buddhists are even more serious than Daoists. They compare wealth and rank to the situations in which tigers and leopards are entrapped into pitfalls, and fish and birds are captured into nets, and live humans plunge into boiling water and flames. All these situations are so serious in that one cannot die even if one wants to die; one cannot live even if one wants to live.

Although there are differences among them [in their views on wealth and rank], their wish to hear *dao* and transcend the world (*chushi* 出世) is one (the same). Generally, only after one can transcend the world can one escape from the sufferings caused by wealth and rank.

... Today if one sincerely wants to discourse on the learning of *dao*, and thereby seeks Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist [common] purport of transcendence from the world and emancipation from the sufferings caused by wealth and rank, one cannot but shave one's hair and become a monk by all means.²⁵

Although the title says “the three teachings can be reduced to Confucianism,” Li holds ironically that whoever wants to attain the ultimate goal in his time has to tonsure her/his hair, to become a monk. His seemingly contradictory assertion needs to be interpreted and appreciated from his fundamental perspective. As far as the three teachings can be identified in terms of the same origin, *dao*, and the most important point is whether or not we achieve the ultimate goal, ‘*chushi*’ (transcendence or emancipation from worldly desire), the titles of the teachings are not important. In other words, the three teachings can be reduced to Buddhism and Daoism as well. In fact, as a student of Yangming learning, Li Zhi was influenced by Yangming’s open-minded view on the three teachings; as was shown, his encounter with Yangming learning was also the critical momentum for his re-appreciation of Buddhism and Daoism:

Zhang Yuanchong (1502-1563, styled Fufeng 浮峰) asked, “Laozi and Buddha are slightly different from the sagely learning (Confucianism), and their teaching can be also regarded as based on nature and destiny [from heaven]; nevertheless, Laozi and Buddha apply [a concern for] selfish profit to [learning of] nature and destiny. Consequently, they are enormously incorrect. However, their teaching seems to be effective to our cultivation to some extent, and so I am not sure if we have to combine Confucianism with [the teaching of] Laozi and Buddha to take them together.”

Master Yangming replied, ‘If you describe it as ‘combine and take,’ it is incorrect. The [Confucian] sages can exhaust nature and fulfill the destiny (*ming* 命). Thus,

25 “Sanjiao guiru shuo,” in *XFS* 2:75.

what kind of [learning] do they have not [in their minds]? Why do they have to combine things to take them? The effects (practices) of Laozi and Buddha's teaching are all the effect of our Confucianism, [if any]. In other words, if I can exhaust my nature and fulfill my destiny, thereby completing the cultivation of my body, then I can be called a Daoist immortal; if not polluted by the worldly desires, I can be called a Buddha. However, Confucians in later periods do not understand the wholeness of Confucianism. Accordingly, they [deliberately] constitute a separate theory which is different from Laozi and Buddha. Let's say that there is a building which has three rooms – as a matter of course, all rooms altogether constitute a single building. However, since all Confucians do not know the [whole range of utility of] our Confucianism, when they see Buddha, they give the left-side room to Buddha; when they see Laozi, they give the right-side room to Laozi, and they [just try to] occupy the middle room. This is to take one and discard all the rest. The sage, heaven and earth, people, and all other things are one body; therefore, Confucius, Buddha, Laozi, and Zhuangzi can be all useful to me. This is called the Great *dao*. Laozi and Buddha are self-interested and concerned about their bodies only. This is called the small *dao*.²⁶

Yangming suggests that one can appreciate and use all other teachings, depending on the degrees of one's inner cultivation, i.e., enlightenment on nature and destiny, which no doubt inculcates Li Zhi on universal reasons for learning and, as a result, open-mindedness to Buddhism and Daoism. Nevertheless, Yangming maintains a condescending air, claiming that Confucianism already has the good points and effects of other teachings, regarding the genuine Confucianism as the Great *dao* and the others as the small *dao*; i.e., their best points are at best second best. In fact, for Yangming the perils of Buddhist and Daoist practice, i.e., the immoral denial of family relationships by Buddhist monks and the pipe dream of Daoist Yoga practices (*daoyinshu* 導引術) have to be borne in mind.²⁷ Wang Ji, whom Li Zhi admires, advanced a similar though slightly more open-minded viewpoint on Buddhism and Daoism:

a) "If someone studies Daoism or Buddhism and yet is able to satisfy the criterion of "returning to one's true nature," without getting lost in wild and perverse ways, then he is a Daoist or Buddhist Confucian. If someone is a Confucian, and yet makes

26 In the Mount Xiao 蕭, Nov., 1523 (the lunar calendar), "Shunshenglu 10 nianpu 3" 順生錄 10 年譜3, *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集 4. Julia Ching's translation (excerpt) is available: *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming*, 155.

27 In Jingshi 京師, Oct., 1502 (the lunar calendar), "Shunshenglu 8 nianpu 1," 順生錄 8 年譜 一 in *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集 4. "This [Daoist practice] to gain the essential spirit is not in accordance with [the right] *Dao*" (此蕩弄精神, 非道也). "This [natural] affection [for family] has been with me since my childhood. To discard it is to destroy the original nature!" (此念生於孩提. 此念可去, 是斷滅種性矣). This article records an episode in which Yangming realized the irrelevance of Buddhist practice and monkhood, scolding a monk beside him and teaching the truth of the original nature of human being, i.e. Confucianism. Refer to Henke, *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-Ming*, 9-11.

selfish use of his learning and cannot keep to normal standards in common dealings, then he is no less deviationist or unorthodox for being labeled a Confucian.”²⁸

b) “There is only the slightest difference between our Confucian way and Buddhism and Daoism, yet it lies precisely in this: that they [the Buddhists and Daoists] are obsessed with the after-traces of [the self’s] involvement with things and identify with what is evanescent, rather than basing themselves on innate knowing as the means of finding what must be gotten for oneself.”²⁹

However, as we have already seen, taking another step forward from Yangming and Wang Ji, Li Zhi claims no superiority of Confucianism and makes Confucianism open-ended, thereby trying to highlight the fundamental and universal relevance of Confucianism. This is the “non-determinable and radical” characteristic of Li Zhi’s Confucianism.

4. Conclusion

As seen in the foregone, Li Zhi confessed that he was only able to gain a genuine understanding of learning, i.e., the “one *dao*” to penetrate into the three teachings, after facing the existential problem of “life and death,” encountered with Yangming learning and Buddhist teaching. He subsequently embraced Daoism for self-cultivation, explaining Daoist teaching as being helpful for Buddhists and Confucians.

However, his awakening to such fundamental issues as *dao* and the heart-mind cannot be thought to have begun specifically with either Yangming learning or Buddhism. For him, a chronological or logical order of his encounter with the three teachings does not matter as far as they give him an insight into the fundamental issues and are helpful to the practice of *dao*, or self-cultivation. Accordingly, Li’s syncretism is neither an eclectic compromise of the three teachings nor Confucian assimilation of Buddhism and Daoism.

His position is not the same as that of the masters which he adored, Wang Yangming and Wang Ji, who are stuck within the idea of the superiority of Confucianism. Li’s syncretism originates from his faith in the “one *dao*,” which directly relates to such practical concerns as the heart-mind and self-cultivation rather than a theoretical concern. In this sense, Li Zhi can be called a ‘*Dao*-ist

28 De Bary, “Wang Chi and Freedom of Innate Knowing,” *Learning for One’s Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought*, 142.

29 De Bary, *Learning for One’s Self: Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought*, 141. For Wang Ji’s various criticisms of Buddhism and Daoism, refer to the record by Sanshanlizhe 三山麗澤 III, *Yulu* 語錄, *Longxi wang xiansheng quanji* 龍溪王先生全集 1.

fundamentalist' and his syncretism a 'Dao-ist fundamentalism.' Additionally, as discussed, Li objected to the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian ideology of anti-heresy (*fan yiduan*) and the transmission of orthodox *dao* (*Daotong lun*); rather, for him, such deceptive ideology confines Confucianism within a limited time and space and contradicts the universal relevance of Confucian truth. For Li, Confucianism must be able to exist without Confucius and the title Confucianism (*rujiao, rujia*). This is the 'non-determinable radical, fundamental' characteristic of Li's Confucianism, which is a corollary of his Dao-ist fundamentalism.

In sum, Li's syncretism, or *sanjiao heyi*, is hard to define as either a conscious effort to mitigate any ideological tension among the three teachings or a conscious social or cultural movement. Rather, his syncretism seems most suitably defined as an individualistic expression and practice of his philosophy, identified here as Dao-ist fundamentalism.

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關於李贄的宗教的合一主義或三教合一思想

金學材

中文摘要

本文討論李贄(1527-1602, 字宏甫, 號卓吾)對儒、釋、道三教的態度。雖然李贄是明代思想界的一個著名的人物, 但是他的思想卻不被人所知。因為他難解的思想主張, 他有時被認為是佛教僧侶, 有時又被認為是儒教士大夫。除了儒教和佛教以外, 他還曾對《老子》、《莊子》等道教經典進行注解。李贄的複雜身份使他陷入困境。此情況涉及所謂宗教的合一主義 (religious syncretism) 的主題。李贄對三教的態度似乎接近三教合一主義。但是本文所要主張的是, 他不僅是一位覺悟的三教合一活動家, 而且是一位信奉唯一普遍道的“道基要主義者”(Dao-ist fundamentalist)。本文通過對其各種文章的分析, 提出以下觀點: 他主要關心的是實現真正的道, 因此對他來說, 重要的問題不是屬於某個特定的學派或實現三教合一主義, 而是能否正確地體現道。李贄對道的探求并非從純粹的理論關注開始, 而是從他的道德實踐關係開始。

關鍵詞: 李贄, 三教合一, 道, 宗教的合一主義, 儒學, 佛教