

Adaptive Pursuit of Harmony in Times of Crisis: Wang
Yangming's (1472–1529) Contribution to the Syncretization of Chinese
Thought in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Religion

Joint Master's Program

University of Manitoba/Winnipeg

Winnipeg

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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to a number of individuals for their critical comments and support in preparing this thesis. First and foremost, I am especially grateful to my thesis advisor professor Albert Welter for his guidance and inspiration. Second, I am indebted to the members of my graduate committee, Ludmila Zamah (The University of Winnipeg), Emma Alexander-Mudalier (The University of Winnipeg), and David Drewes (University of Manitoba), who's critical responses enriched this project. Lastly, I would also like to thank my husband Boris for drawing all the maps in the appendix.

To my family.

Abstract

The pursuit of harmony has always been a great concern of Chinese thinkers. In this process, especially prior to the Ming dynasty, a significant “borrowing” of their basic philosophical elements and their mutually syncretic metamorphosis was a common practice among three religious communities, particularly disseminated during times of crisis. The work of Wang Yangming proved to be an epitome of this philosophical “collaboration”, capable of producing new synthetic teachings that directly or indirectly linked two or more polarized teachings. He succeeded in modifying the existing Buddhist idea of inherited Buddha Nature to be now understood as an innate insight, while also promoting the practice of meditation, as a clear example of Chan and Daoist influence. Wang Yangming is probably best known for his emphasis on the simultaneity of the two functions – knowledge and action, viewed as a reinterpretation of non-Confucian ideas in a new Neo-Confucian framework.

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Adaptive Pursuit of Harmony in Times of Crisis: Wang
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Preface

The pursuit of moral, physical, and social perfection has always been a great concern of Chinese thinkers and ideologists. This desire can be understood as a yearning to return to their perceived harmonious ancestral origin. Although approached from different starting-points, Confucianism and Daoism,¹ as Chinese indigenous philosophies, and Buddhism, as their adopted new spiritual character, strived to promulgate an idea of self-enrichment as their continuous and permanent activity. In this process, especially prior to the Ming dynasty (15th century) when their religious identity became more identifiably structured, a significant “borrowing” of their basic philosophical elements and their mutually syncretic metamorphosis was a common practice among these three religious communities.² Early Ming China was

¹The basic Confucian cosmology is linear, in the sense that cosmology itself is understood as “principles of order that support integrated forms of being.” The Confucian point of genesis was perceived as a result of chaotic beginnings to incorporate the evolution of humanity sequentially to reach this “order”, which was achieved by the embrace of “fundamental humanism, organic naturalism, concrete rationalism and self-cultivating pragmatism.” The Daoist and Buddhist cosmology show a circular pattern where the organic harmonious unity was disintegrated and in need of restoration to its original nature. Marshal Sahlins, “Foreword” to Gregory Schempp’s *Magical Arrows: The Maori, The Greeks, and the Folklore of the Universe* (Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1992): x-xi; Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Religious Dimensions of Confucianism: Cosmology and Cultivation,” *Philosophy East and West* 48, No. 1 (1998): 17; Livia Kohn, “Daoist Monastic Discipline: Hygiene, Meals, and Etiquette,” *T’oung Pao, Second Series* 87, Fasc. 1/3 (2001): 158.

² In the initial stage of this project it is important to note, first, that in the last millennium Chinese society was commonly perceived as a society where three of its major religio/philosophical traditions, Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism had shaped the intellectual and as well pragmatically constituted the essence of the Chinese tradition. Although this statement is true, this does not mean that other traditions have not been present or in any way failed to contribute to Chinese culture. However, when attempting to characterize “Chinese traditions” I will mainly discuss the interactions among these three traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) unless otherwise stated. Secondly, even though I have called these three traditions under their fixed distinctiveness of “Confucianism”, “Daoism” or “Buddhism”, as they are generally identified as such, these identities are not by and large permanent and clearly defined (this statement will be further argued as a part of this project). Thirdly, similarly to the previous statement, the understanding of terms such as “religion” and “philosophy” should be taken as a generalized terminology. By Western perception (the perception that was largely influenced by

characterized by strong, prosperous and progressive society. The power that fueled this dynasty's early success was an adherence to Neo-Confucian state orthodoxy. Neo-Confucian teachings had successfully reorganized the power-structure of Ming China by masterfully employing the notion of syncretic tendencies, which helped preserve numerous contested elements found in Buddhism and Daoism. One of these elements was a philosophical construction of *yin* and *yang*, which were perceived as constructive pieces in the balance of *Nature*,³ and united in the fundamental principles of Chinese medicine, alchemy, astronomy and cosmology for almost two millennia.⁴

This project will focus on the notion of syncretization⁵ found in the period of early-mid Ming, often defined as a process of religious and philosophical “collaboration” that was capable of continuously producing a new way of synthetic

Greek and Roman traditions) there is a fine line between the understanding of “religion” and “philosophy”. This “line” is even further ambiguous in the case of Chinese tradition. The term “religion” in Chinese tradition or *Zongjiao*, is derived from the Japanese translation of the English term, which was presumably formed to refer to a “bond between human beings and divinity” (according to its Latin root). While the Western understanding presupposes the earthly and transcendent connection, the term *Zongjiao*, meaning “lineage-teachings”, as nicely described by Julia Ching, refers to “transmitted teachings of certain lineages or traditions, which COULD be spiritual” (emphasis mine). Furthermore, “Chinese teachers/masters are usually careful in giving their lineage; the names of those masters from whom they received their teachings. The accent is very much on ‘receiving’ rather than inventing.” This understanding will ultimately encourage us to look into rhetoric of “religion” and into a field of Religious Studies in general, with an enhanced lens than used in the past, which mainly focused on the “definitions” brought up by Judeo/Christian traditions. Julia Ching, “The Ambiguous Character of Chinese Religion(s),” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 11, No. 2 (2009): 213. All three of these main points will be further described throughout this project.

³ The term “Nature” is taken here to define the understanding of 性 [*xing*], which could be further accepted to include the terms of “original nature” -原性 [*yuan xing*], “one’s own nature” - 本性 or 自性 [*ben xing* or *zi xing*], “mind nature” -心性 [*xin xing*], and also “Buddha Nature” -佛性 [*Fo xing*]. More detailed elaboration of the concept of “nature” is done in the chapter five.

⁴ Nathan Silvin, “Chinese Alchemy and the Manipulation of Time,” *Isis* 67, No. 4 (1976): 515; “Science and Medicine in Imperial China - The State of the Field,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, No. 1 (1988): 42-53; Lu Chang Wu, Tenney L. Davis, and Wei Po-Yang, “An Ancient Chinese Treatise on Alchemy Entitled Ts’an T’ung Ch’i,” *Isis* 18, No. 2 (1932): 216-225; Schuyler Commann, “The Magic Square of Three in Old Chinese Philosophy and Religion,” *History of Religions* 1, No. 1 (1961): 41-45.

⁵ The term syncretization is proposed as a newly reconstructed terminology, whose historical retrospective and evolution will be described in detail in the second chapter of this project.

teachings that directly or indirectly linked two or more polarized teachings.⁶ This was particularly seen in the work of Wang Yangming (1472-1529), who, to use a concrete example, modifies the existing Buddhist idea of “pure and inherited Buddha Nature” to be now understood as an innate intuitive insight or *liang zhi* (inner understanding or innate knowledge of good).⁷ He also promotes the practice of quiet meditation, which was a clear example of Chan (Buddhist) influence.⁸ Julia Ching, a well known scholar of Neo-Confucianism, rightfully describes Yangming’s intellectual experience with the Buddhist terminology of “sudden enlightenment” and gradual self cultivation through “a hundred deaths and a thousand sufferings”.⁹ Wang Yangming is probably best known for his emphasis on the simultaneity of the two functions – knowledge and action, which was also argued by some scholars like A.S. Cua, as a reinterpretation of non-Confucian ideas in a new Neo-Confucian framework.¹⁰ These are some of the examples which illustrate that Yangming’s teachings created new identities based on conditions already present and found in the pluralistic setting of Ming China.

In order to define syncretization within the authority of Wang Yangming’s teachings, it is important to give a brief historical/ideological overview of how the pursuit for harmony, as one of the major motives for change, defined the process of syncretization itself, especially looking at the periods of crisis that followed the fall of

⁶ Robert Baird, *Category Formation and the History of Religions* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971): 147.

⁷ Thorne H. Fang, “The Essence of Wang Yang-ming Philosophy in a Historical Perspective,” *Philosophy East and West* 23 (1973): 73; Ivan Strenski, “Gradual Enlightenment, Sudden Enlightenment and Empiricism,” *Philosophy East and West* 30, No. 1 (1980): 18. A more extensive analysis of this concept - *liang zhi* is done in the section 5.2 of this project.

⁸ Wing-tsit Chan, “Chan Jo-shui’s Influence on Wang Yang-ming,” *Philosophy East and West* 23 (1973): 15-16; Rodney Taylor, “The Sudden Gradual Paradigm and Neo-Confucian Mind Cultivation,” *Philosophy East and West* 33, No. 1 (1983):18.

⁹ Julia Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976): 46.

¹⁰ A. S. Cua, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: A Study in Wang Yang Ming’s Moral Philosophy* (Honolulu: university of Hawaii, 1982): 17, 43.

the Han dynasty. It is important to establish, how was Wang Yangming's philosophy situated in the broader Neo-Confucian milieu? How was his notion of syncretic philosophy accepted or argued in the different fractions of Neo-Confucianism? In what way were the arguments of Chan Buddhist, Daoist and classical Confucians similarly constructed? How were Wang Yangming's adaptations further modified or permanently fixed in the later Ming period?

This project is divided into seven chapters. In chapter one – "Introduction", I will attempt to describe why it is important to redefine some basic parameters of syncretization in Wang Yangming's philosophy through the lenses of contemporary scholarship. Although Wang Yangming's teachings were introduced and partially translated in the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and, subsequently, additional portions in the last three decades, there is no available complete English translation of his work. For this reason alone, I try to call for a new and critical examination of Wang Yangming's contribution to Chinese philosophical memorandum, and the larger recognition of his influence in the present revival of Confucian ideas in East Asia.

Chapter two – "*Syncretization* vs. *Syncretism*: Theoretical Groundings" offers a brief description and historical guidance for the usage of the terminology of *syncretism*. At the same time I strongly argue against the effectiveness of the majority of previous definitions of syncretism that tend to analyze philosophical "borrowing" among different traditions as a final and concrete product. I propose that the term *syncretism* be expressed as either "*syncretization*" or "*syncretic tendencies*" - the perpetual movement which is born as a response to any influence found outside of the group in question.

Established official chronological records have proven to be a valuable window into Chinese history, which was filled with interchangeable periods of peace and warfare, periods of stability and harmony, followed by times of conflict and disunion. By observing closely this linear evolution it is possible to recognize some distinctive patterns, especially those related to the development of Chinese philosophy. The periods of instability, which were usually subsequently followed by a dynastic change, were also seen as periods of increased scholarly and cultural debate among participants of the three major Chinese philosophical traditions, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Chapter three - “General Assumptions of the Pursuit of Harmony and Historical Analysis of the Times of Crisis in China” and its two subchapters, offer the analysis of two dramatic periods of Chinese history: Late Han [漢朝] to Sui Dynasty [隋朝] (2nd - 5th century), and Late Tang [唐朝] (9th-10th century), which serve as strong support for the argument of increased syncretization in times of crisis.

In chapter four – “Setting the Stage in the Song and Crisis in the Ming: The Need to Accommodate,” follows upon the chronological analysis found in the previous chapter, focusing on the historical indicators that rise in the Ming period. In addition to recognizing some elements in the evolution of syncretization and the development of philosophical thought in the Ming Dynasty [明朝] (14th-17th century), in this chapter I will try to set the stage and explain the unique historical, cultural, political, economic, and religio/philosophical circumstances in which Wang Yangming was born. I suggest that these conditions served as necessary catalysts for the development of the philosophically accommodating syncretic tendencies that characterize his thought.

Chapter five – “Wang Yangming’s Approach to Harmony: Redefining the Old Tradition by Modes of Syncertization and Inclusive Reinterpretation of Contested Buddhist and Daoist Ideas,” consists of a brief portrait of Wang Yangming’s biography, including the information found in the work on Wang Yangming done by Frederick Goodrich Henke, Wing-tsit Chan, William Theodore de Bary, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Shu-hsieh Lin, A. S. Cua, Heup Young Kim, and others. This biography will not simply serve as a mere revisiting of writings done by the other scholars, instead it will demonstrate the process of evolution, adaptation and projection of Wang Yangming’s ideas, which he had “borrowed” from other traditions. This would explicitly prove how syncretization effected the development of his philosophy. Although Wang Yangming’s philosophy offers a complex set of ideas redefined in a new Neo-Confucian discourse, only the major concepts are analyzed in the section entitled as “Essence of Wang Yangming’s Neo-Confucian thought”. By employing the methodology of primary text criticism, and redaction and comparative analysis of several Buddhist and Daoist texts, I attempt to define: 1) Wang Yangming’s contribution to understanding “Nature”, and 2) his interpretation of meditative practices and their necessity in practical living. The primary texts include excerpts from *Chuanxilu* [傳習錄] or *Introduction for Practical Living*, *Gongyi* [公移] or *Miscellaneous Writings* including *Wang Yangming’s Letters*, *Da Xue* [大學] or *Preface to the Ancient Edition of the Great Learning*, *Yi Jing* [易經] or *The Book of Changes*, *Lun Yu* [論語] or *The Analects*, *Liùzǔ tánjīng* [六祖壇經] or *The Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch*, and etc.¹¹

¹¹ These titles represent only a limited selection of the primary texts used in the fifth chapter.

The last chapter of my work represents a cumulative summary of the most important arguments in this project, including a new terminology of syncretism and examples of this adaptive process present in the work of Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming. It will be shown that the process of syncretization in Wang Yangming's philosophy is generated through a permanent progression of fluid acceptance of often highly disputed premises found in Buddhism and Daoism. Although Neo-Confucianism as a branch of Confucianism will be in more detail described later, it is important to give a general characterization of what is often erroneously perceived as the ossified notion of Neo-Confucianism. First of all, Neo-Confucianism is a Western appellation developed during several centuries as a new and complex system of thought. Neo-Confucianism stands as a general term for what was in China known as the *School of Principle* or *Lǐxué* [理學], the *School of Nature and Principle* or *Xìng lǐxué* [性理學], the *School of the Way or Moral Principles* or *Dàoxué* [道學], and the *School of the Mind* or *Xīnxiué* [心學]. For the reason of its overwhelmingly generalized approach to Neo-Confucianism, it is important to note that this philosophical venue must be understood both in the context of time and in terms of the enquiry and response to already inherited Confucian tradition. Benjamin Schwartz nicely summarizes this statement by saying that the rise and development of these schools was largely due to a set of problems that each of these schools were attempting to answer, in addition to the importance of relationships of the followers of the particular school to their founders. In general, historically and philosophically Neo-Confucianism as a terminology itself must

be understood through the lenses of continuous change and development, very similar to syncretization itself, in more detailed addressed in chapter two.¹²

Chapter One: Introduction

Changes and amendments are common to any act, and are part of all major human achievements. According to Michael Pye philosophical and religious ideas also undergo through changes;¹³ if these modifications exceed the original character of that idea it is suggested that a new foundation or a new teaching has been developed; at the same time, these adaptations could be initialized by a conscious or less cognizant aspiration for modification, which would result in a schism or syncretization of that idea respectively. While new ideas and schisms in philosophy [and religion] were studied in details, the character of syncretization as a subtle mode of adaptation was often left unanalyzed. For this reason, this project will focus on the character of syncretization, and in more particular on the syncretization present in the work of Wang Yangming.

From the emergence of Zhu Xi's "the principle"- Neo-Confucian philosophy in the late twelfth century until its heterodox branching developed in the work of Wang Yangming, this period of four centuries could be characterized as a time of syncretic fluidity. This era of adaptive ideological flexibility was never understood to be exclusively propagated in the Ming period, but was rather seen as a philosophical development found throughout history, however, Wang Yangming's teachings portray

¹² Benjamin Schwartz, "Some Polarities in Chinese Thought" in *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization*, ed. Arthur Wright (New York: Atheneum Press, 1964): 3-15.

¹³ Michael Pye, "Syncretism versus Synthesis," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6, No. 3 (1994): 222

this tendency in a more noticeable way. The new Neo-Confucian philosophy had not only influenced China, but also Japan, Korea and other traditions in East Asia, and still continues to exceed and exchange its boundaries with other philosophical movements it comes in contact.

Although syncretization in general possesses several distinctive characteristics, I will argue for the three main ones. First, syncretization should be looked as a continuous process of adaptation and not as a final product. Second, syncretization is more “visible” in the time of crisis (political, cultural, financial, etc). And third, because the progression of syncertization could be further defined as a type of survival mechanism, this method encourages the integration often extremely opposed elements. In order to prove my argument, I will use the core teachings of Wang Yangming, who is already labeled as a syncretist, and analyze it by these three criteria. My first argument, which claims the character of syncretization as a permanent continuing process of adaptation I will test it against one of the most important concepts in Chinese tradition - the concept of xing [Nature]. Chapter five, section two will include a brief summary of this evolution, in which the Classical¹⁴ Confucian views, Zhu Xi’s and Wang Yangming’s views on Nature will be identify. In order to evaluate my second hypothesis that times of political and social crisis were more suitable grounds for increased syncretisation, I will briefly present the portrait of Chinese history focusing on the known periods of crisis. This is preceded by the argument in which the notion of syncretisation is evaluated against the older term syncretism, which has proved to be inadequate for the majority of descriptions found in religio/philosophical discourses. Chapter three and

¹⁴ From the large opus of Confucian teachings in the classical period, the work of Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi is considered.

four will summarize the conditions present in China during three periods; the crisis in late Han period, late Tang dynasty and circumstances in early Ming that contributed to rapid exchange of ideas in order to search for stability and harmonious existence. And in the third hypothesis I will argue that syncretization often encourage inclusion of opposite and highly contested elements among traditions in contact. To prove this statement in chapter five, section three, I will evaluate the character of meditation proposed by Wang Yangming as one of the aids of self-cultivation, and contrast it to teachings on meditation proposed by Daoists and Buddhists. As Julia Ching states, “Neo-Confucian philosophy [including Wang Yangming’s] would not have appeared in the form it did were it not for Buddhist stimulus, even if it defined itself in opposition to both Buddhism and Taoism;”¹⁵ ultimately proving that syncretic tendencies are largely depended on time, place and the characteristics of traditions which are in contact.

From the third to the fifteenth century China witnessed the rise and fall of several dynastic houses; it survived times of political disintegration and subsequent unification, while at the same time it fought to preserve and redefine its ideological and cultural uniqueness, particularly against the rising popularity of Buddhism. Although initially foreign in its origin, Buddhism was now perceived as a part of a greater Chinese religious collage, which continuously searched for its particular place among Chinese indigenous traditions of Confucianism and Daoism.¹⁶ The process of Buddhist

¹⁵ Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (New York: Orbis Book, 1993): 205.

¹⁶ In spite of the strong anti-Buddhist rhetoric especially promoted by early schools of Neo-Confucianism (Zhu Xi’s School of Principle and Su Shi (1037-1101) School of Way), a significant number of Chinese intellectual elite were searching to harmonize some strongly opposed metaphysical, ethical, and methodological elements found in these three traditions. Lin Ts’un-yan writes, “Scholars of the late Song and Yuan period [and onward] were interested in the theory of amalgamation. A poem written by Li Dao-ch’un [13th century literati] states, ‘To be an immortal, a Buddha, or Confucius sage, there is but one teaching transmitted to us.’ However, it is important to note that followers of this branch of

acknowledgement, critique, modification and finally rightful acceptance to a new habitat continued throughout many centuries, but reached its zenith during the work of Lin Zhaoen [林兆恩] (1517-1598), known as the Master of the Three Teachings.¹⁷ Following the strong current of syncretic tendencies, Lin Zhaoen searched for compatibility among Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist philosophies based on their central preoccupations with harmony and self-cultivation. For this reason his ideal philosophy consisted of Neo-Confucian ritual vows to Heaven, a meditative chanting indicative of a Pure Land *nianfo* [念佛],¹⁸ and practices similar to earlier Daoist esoteric ritual activity.¹⁹ Contrary to Lin Zhaoen who explicitly promotes the equal value and contribution of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism in his new philosophical

philosophy, later known as the *School of Three Teachings* or *Sān jiào fù* [三教傳], established with Lin Zhaoen (16th century) were continuously considered as in a minority in comparison with the teachings of the state orthodoxy. It should not be forgotten, as Timothy Brook summarizes, that recognition of Buddhism must be quite visible through the “establishment” of Neo-Confucianism itself, where even “thinkers such as Zhu Xi, who experimented with elements of Buddhist ontology and epistemology were able afterwards to create a coherent new world view.” Timothy Brook, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and Their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21 (1993): 17.

¹⁷ Lin Zhaoen was born in an influential family in Putian city, located in today’s Eastern Fujian province. He was called a *yituan* [異端], a heretic, by many of his contemporaries. However, a short biography of him was included in the *Nan lei wen an* [南雷文案], the collection of essays written by a great Confucian scholar Huang Zongxi [黃宗羲] (1610-1695), entitled *A Biography of Lin of the Three Teachings*. The reason that Zongxi chose such a label serves as a proof that “the theory of amalgamation of the Three Teachings had by his time been generally accepted, and the writings of many Confucian scholars often cited quotations from this work”. Lin Zhaoen was the first one who formally promoted the principle of syncretization in the Three Teachings, as a “single philosophical entity in which the three of them could still exist”. Although, according to him, the superiority was given to Confucianism, the other teachings merged their identity into this complex new teaching. Liu Ts’un-yan, “Lin Chao-en (1517-1598), the Master of the Three Teachings,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series 53, No. 4/5 (1967): 260-261.

¹⁸ Robert H. Sharf, “On Pure Land Buddhism and Ch’an/Pure Land Syncretism in Medieval China,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series 88, Fasc. 4/5 (2002): 300.

¹⁹ For further information on Lin Zhaoen see Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

construction, Wang Yangming's syncretic modes are more subtle and much more intriguing.

Chapter Two: Syncretization vs. Syncretism – Theoretical Groundings

The development of modernism and post-structuralism in the twentieth century encouraged,²⁰ or rather demanded critical assessment of intellectually inherited knowledge on the basis of their relationship with the Ultimate Truth.²¹ The terminology of *syncretism* was among numerous definitions that were re-enacted in order to fit these new hypotheses.²² The understanding of religious *syncretism* was usually looked at through the lenses of common patterns, particularly in connection to Christianity. The development of comparative religion of the twentieth century looked upon the *syncretism* of other religious traditions, Chinese included, as less compatible to these patterns. By this, the notion of 'syncretism' was mainly used as a tool, or analytical

²⁰ For an interesting analysis of post-structuralism concepts, methodology, and development see Jane Tomkins, "A Short Course in Post-Structuralism," *College English* 50, No. 7 (1988): 733-747.

²¹ "The notion of modernism developed at the turn of the last century, and the post-modernism that was expressed subsequently, turned all philosophical and developmental discourses in the direction in which they searched for a scientific and materialistic recognition of their origins in the former, and their reaction, mostly rejection to this understanding of the *primordium* in the later." New philosophical trends, especially those close to Paul Feyerabend, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, rejected all previously defined presuppositions. For more detailed information on the philosophy of some post-modernists and deconstructuralists see, Paul Feyerabend "Problems of Empiricism," in R. Colony (ed.) *Nature and Function of Scientific Theory* (University of Pittsburg Press, 1970): 275-353; Michael Patrick Lynch, *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001): 291; Michel Foucault, *An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

²² While it is important to re-approach our general perceptions of the world through the terms of our present parameters, it is also equally important to acknowledge the value in our "old" (historically) compartmental system of knowledge that brought us here. For this reason, the term *syncretism* is indispensable as a historically recognized construction, while its present applicability is debated. It is important to note that the terminology closely analyzed in this paper, such as 'history', 'religion' and '*syncretism*' itself, continue to depend on the general limitations demanded by its origin founded in Western tradition, and could not, at least in its particularity, be applied universally.

category in comparative methodology. This analytical tool was employed in order to define and sequence the relationship of “other” traditions and their comparison to “universalistic religion/tradition” or in the words of Luther H. Martin “world theology”. This quest, although promoted as “universal”, had still, however, stereotypically “measured” other traditions and their applications, with Christianity.²³

The next important factor that plays its role in the proper analysis of *syncretic tendencies* in the Chinese context is the ambiguous definition of the term *syncretism* itself. The majority of scholars that critically analyze *syncretism* apply their conclusions to the “final” product, rather than to the *syncretic tendencies* as a progression. While the notion of syncretism, some scholars argue, is guided by the ideal of an establishment of harmonious cohabitation,²⁴ “world’s theology”,²⁵ for some it lies in opposition to “purity or priority of one’s own voice”,²⁶ and is innately disharmonious.²⁷ In addition the term *syncretism* is argued for its passivity, it is also, described as “too universal” to

²³ It is interesting to see that one of the volumes of *Religious Studies News*, even in recent history (1995), uses the same comparative methodology in order to define the relationship between Christianity and other religions, entitled “Dialogue and Syncretism”. Luther H. Martin, “Of Religious Syncretism, Comparative Religion and Spiritual Quest,” in *Perspectives on Method and Theory in the Study of Religion: Adjunct Proceedings of the XVIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions Mexico City, 1995*, ed. By Armin W. Geertz and Russell T. McCutcheon (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 279.

²⁴ Baird, 147.

²⁵ Martin, 277.

²⁶ Klaus-Peter Koepping, “Syncretism and Uniqueness of Tradition in Modern Japanese Discourse,” in *Syncretism-Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 162.

²⁷ Peter Van der Veer, “Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance,” in *Syncretism / Antisyncretism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 203.

have any particular significance.²⁸ Very few scholars are willing to see *syncretism* as an evolution or succession.²⁹

How can we define syncretism and how can this definition be applied in the Chinese context? I would propose that the term *syncretism* should be expressed as either “*syncretization*” or “*syncretic tendencies*” - the ongoing activity or fluidity that is born in the reaction to any influence found outside of the tradition in question. This activity is never concluding, because its deferred reactions cannot be fully predicted and are beyond the scope of the present critique. Interpreted in Buddhist jargon it could be explained as a perpetual mode of action, “from beginningless beginning through the gateless gate to endless end.”³⁰ In this sense, *syncretic* activities will always be a part of the overall progress of humanity, which has, in its nature, innate incapability to resist change.³¹

In general, scholars offer three different approaches to *syncretization* within Chinese traditions. First, there are scholars such as Rodney Taylor and Yuet Keung Lo who are not willing to see the direct correlation between religious fluidity and *syncretism* – “*syncretism* is often mistaken for a simple borrowing and blending

²⁸ Helmer Ringgren, “The Problem of Syncretism,” in *Syncretism* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969): 7.

²⁹ For Michael Pye this process is a very brief period of fluidity before these affinities are turned into a final product again – “assimilation, dissolution then a ‘new religion’.” However, Albert Welter fully recognizes religious dynamics among different traditions, but does not explicitly apply the terminology of *syncretism*. Pye, 220-223; Albert Welter, “Confucian-Buddhist and Buddho-Confucians: Remapping the Early Song Intellectual Terrain,” *University of Winnipeg*. Paper prepared for the XVIIth European Association of Chinese studies, Lund University (August 6-10, 2008): 40 pages.

³⁰ Harry Thomsen, “Non-Buddhist Buddhism and Non-Christian Christianity in Japan,” in *Syncretism* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1969): 136.

³¹ This description of *syncretization* is a product of a group effort and could be further recognized as a “definition of *syncretization* 2009”. I greatly appreciate the contribution of Albert Welter, Tim Johnson, Tanya Zeghers, and Jared Rombough, to this conclusion.

process, irrespective of their contextual truth claims.”³² However, it is important to remember there is no “simplicity” in “borrowing and blending”, and that there is a constant stream of reactions that follow any religious/philosophical discourse. For this reason there is not only one “type” of (i.e.) Buddhism, but there is Indian, Chinese, or Japanese Buddhism(s), (and many more sub branches), which are being syncretized and “created”, even as we speak, through the constant process of negotiation with outside influences.

Second, there are some scholars, such as Tang Yi-jie and Edward T. Ch’en who believe that *syncretic* forces are undeniably present within the Chinese religious milieu, who, nonetheless, place their reservation towards values accrued in this process. Although ultimately promoted as a “two-way” direction of influence, where all traditions in contact are expected to see some kind of change in the process, there is actually only a “one-way” direction of influence depending on the perceived hierarchy among different traditions in question.³³ For these scholars even less objective solutions

³² In the case of Neo-Confucian philosophy, Taylor claimed that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism “remained separated”; and that their responses to each other’s critique could not be called *syncretic*, because they did not approach their debate from the starting-point of “equal importance to proposition and praxis.” Lo, who is also concerned with the notion of the “ultimate truth”, and who sees “borrowing” only as a form of eclecticism, argues that there is no syncretism unless the final product (a noun) is defined as an “ultimate transformation.” Rodney L. Taylor, “Proposition and Praxis: The Dilemma of Neo-Confucian Syncretism,” *Philosophy East and West* 32, No. 2 (1982): 195; Yuet Keung Lo, “Change beyond Syncretism: Ouyi Zhixu’s (藕益智旭) Buddhist Hermeneutics of the Yijing (易經),” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, No. 2 (2008): 289-290.

³³ Tang Yi-jie distinguishes between superior and inferior participants of *syncretism*, arguing that “foreign ideologies *must* first adapt themselves...meet certain social needs... [and] have superior ideology” in order to “become a constituent of Chinese philosophy.” He acknowledges positive outcomes of *syncretism* only under specific conditions, which are usually visible in one direction – transition from inferior toward superior. In a similar tone, Edward T. Ch’ien talks about a “principle of hierarchy” upon which *syncretism* is predicated. Tang Yi-jie. “The Relationship Between Traditional and Imported Thought and Culture in China: From the Standpoint of the Importation of Buddhism,” *Journal*

for the acceptance of syncretism is dependent on the recognition of common elements among these traditions. In this case the negativity toward *syncretism* lies because it creates a sentiment of delusion, which is based on the conditionality of these common elements.³⁴ On the other hand, this group of scholars does see syncretization as a continuation, and not simply as an end result of this change.³⁵ However these scholars see syncretization depended on reconciliation of hierarchy and common elements as a requisite to continue evolving progression.

The last groups of scholars who analyze *syncretic tendencies* within Chinese traditions advocate the three-fold characteristics of this process. First, syncretism is described with a recognizable character of *syncretization*.³⁶ Welter explains this process as follows, “this blurring [*syncretization*] is not simply a by-product of this period, but an ongoing phenomenon.”³⁷ Second, *syncretization* results in mutual responses among parties involved in the process, which are not necessarily initiated by a hierarchy of their value systems. “[*Syncretization* is] evident in the frequent engagement between Confucianism and Buddhism in the Song and Ming, and the persistent efforts of Neo-

of Chinese Philosophy 15 (1988): 421; Edward T. Ch’ien, “The Neo-Confucian Confrontation with Buddhism: A Structural and Historical Analysis,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 15 (1988): 347.

³⁴ Ch’ien uses the examples of *ti* [體] (substance) and *yong* [用] (function), the terminology present in both Buddhist and Neo-Confucian metaphysics, to prove his point. Even though both traditions used the same median point of contact – philosophical terminology, the provisionality of this connection soon loses its value, he argues, because *ti* and *yong* remained doctrinally differently interpreted.

³⁵ Ch’ien recognizes evolution within the progressive tendencies of *syncretism*. In his comment on Neo-Confucianism he states, “Neo-Confucianism was a historically constituted discourse, and as such it did not remain static, but experienced changes over time.” Ch’ien, 348.

³⁶ Chün-fang Yü, one of the scholars that I would assign to this group, uses the term “process”; while Albert Welter, although he does not use syncretism/syncretization terminology per se, does define religious fluidity as an “ongoing phenomenon”, “persistent effort” and “frequent engagement” between the three major Chinese religious traditions. Chün-fang Yü, “The Cult of Kuan-yin in Ming-Ch’ing China: A Case of Confucianization of Buddhism?,” in Irene Bloom and Joshua Fogel, eds. *Meeting of Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interactions in East Asian Traditions of Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 145, 151; Welter, 18.

³⁷ Welter, 18.

Confucians to define and redefine the boundaries between them,”³⁸ – “the influence went both ways.”³⁹ From the Chinese example it is also possible to argue that this reciprocated engagement among religious traditions could be highly selective, flexible, inconsistent, and essentially dependent on the common questions such as, *who*, *where*, *when*, and *how* the response was formulated. Lastly, *syncretization* in the Chinese context is seen as a positive quality of the religious/spiritual/philosophical evolution. Released from the pressure to compartmentalize ultimate boundaries between the three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, the power of *syncretic tendencies* has brought up a variety of intellectually less defined categories such as “Confucian-Buddhist”, “Buddho-Confucians”,⁴⁰ or “Confucianization of Buddhism”,⁴¹ and many other subcategories found among religious practitioners in the broader Chinese society.⁴²

Formerly, the term *syncretism* was habitually used to describe one of the attributes of the “intellectual debate” in China, and mainly to presuppose three important end-results. First, that there were somewhat clear distinctions between the three main Chinese traditions; second, to reflect the common biased interpretation of the religion[s] of “Others”, which were understood to be unstable and changeable for their lack of grounding on the principles of Ultimate Truth;⁴³ and third, to reflect somehow

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Yü, 166.

⁴⁰ Welter, 23.

⁴¹ Yü, 167.

⁴² This argument is well-supported by examples found in the work of Albert Welter and Chün-fang Yü. While Welter focuses on these types of *syncretization* patterns within the literati class, Yü identifies the same within “domesticated religiosity” and popular religion.

⁴³ It is important to recognize some important factors that contra-productively play their roles in the understanding of syncretism in the Chinese context. First, historically prior to the twentieth century, the Western perception of religious syncretism, as described by Shaw/Stuart and Van der Veer, largely depended on their own capability to associate the notion of Ultimate Truth with Christianity. While

an ambiguous definition of the term *syncretism* itself. For this reason, this project has offered a revision of already scholarly established definitions of *syncretism*, and in addition to this innovative redefinition, following chapters will depend on this new definition while articulating the historical and cultural stage within a particular period. Finally, the application of *syncretization* in the work of several Chinese thinkers and active participants in this so-called “intellectual exchange” between Chan Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism in the Sung/Ming period will be explored. They include Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157) [宏智正覺], Linji Yixuan (d.u.–866) [臨濟義玄],⁴⁴ Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) [大慧宗杲], and Wang Yangming (1472-1529) [王陽明]. In fifth chapter the notion of *syncretization* will be evaluated in greater depth through the practice of *Samadhi*, generally understood as meditation, which defines experiences of relaxed attentiveness that are a necessary means of self-development.⁴⁵

changes brought by rationalism and later modernism offered a variety of other approaches to Western spirituality/philosophy, the same did not always apply to awareness of the “Others’ religiosity”. In fact, the existing “Orientalist” attitudes were present in the scholarship which analyzed Chinese religious traditions long after the fall of colonialism in Asia. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, “Introduction: Problematizing Syncretism,” in *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994):4; Van der Veer, 196.

⁴⁴ Although Linji Yixuan did not live during the Song but during the previous Tang dynasty (618-907), the full development of his orthodoxy and extent of his teachings were seen in the period following his death, and in the works of his disciples as promulgators of his philosophy. For this reason his contribution should be included in this analysis of the Song-Ming “intellectual debate”. For more information on the work of Linji and the controversy that surrounds it see, Mario Poceski, “Mazy Yulu and the Creation of the Chan Records of Sayings,” in *The Zen Canon: Understanding Classic Text*, edited by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 53-79.

⁴⁵ *Samadhi* is a Sanskrit term “identifying an experience in which a person does not freeze because of fear or cling because of desire. In *Samadhi* an individual transcends dualism. At its deepest, *Samadhi* is the experience of interpenetration.” Rupert Gethin acknowledges the lack of a suitable technical terminology in English, when attempting to define *Samadhi*. In general, *Samadhi* could be referred to as “altered states of consciousness”, adding that, in the technical vocabulary of Indian religious texts such states come to be termed ‘meditation’ (*dhyāna/jhāna*) or ‘concentration’ (*samādhi*); the attainment of such states of consciousness was generally regarded as “bringing the practitioner to some deeper knowledge and experience of the nature of the world.” Initially *Samadhi* was considered as one of the

As has already been illustrated above, syncretization among Chinese religions in the past was studied as a fixed and final product of a particular period; most scholars discussed the fixed interpretation of what “Confucianism”, “Daoism” or “Buddhism” should look like, without giving much thought to a comparative study of the development of *syncretization*. In turn, the study of Neo-Confucian philosophy in the Ming dynasty could be well identified with progressive development not only in Confucianism, but in Daoism and Buddhism as well. The most compelling support of *syncretization* as a fluid and permanent movement could be identified in the process of signification of *gu wen* [old Confucian text] in comparison with *jin wen* [new text], which was increasingly contested by the line of new Confucian philosophers that

expressions and embodiments of Dharma, together with perfect conduct (*sīla*), wisdom (*prajñā*), freedom (*vimutti*) and knowledge and understanding (*vimutti-jñāna-dassana*). Although *Samadhi* was practiced among all Chinese schools of Buddhism, the most notable interpretations of it were found in the Tiantai and Chan Buddhist texts. As Daniel B. Stevenson states, practice of the extraordinarily rigorous four *samadhis* were “hallowed feature of Tiantai practice... which were deemed for removing karmic obstacles and inducing enlightenment.” Interestingly, some elements of the four *samadhis* were also used as a part of an incantation, seen especially in the forty-nine day invocation of Guanyin [觀音] the bodhisattva associated with compassion, and venerated for his/her healing powers (In Sanskrit Buddhist texts this bodhisattva was known in the male form under his name Avalokitesvara). In Chan Buddhism, *Samadhi* as quiet sitting in meditation, at the first glance appeared to be a somewhat controversial practice, and one of the reasons behind the divergence between the “sudden” and “gradual” enlightenment. This is supported by a well-known account of Dajian Huineng’s [大鑒惠能] (638-713) acquisition to the right on the lineage of the Patriarch, who was, according to the standard Chan history, deserving holder of the title of Sixth Patriarch of Chan. Huineng was a vocal promoter of a “complete and instantaneous enlightenment. [He] contended that pure wisdom is indivisible and undifferentiated, and to be realized completely and instantly or not at all.” (refer to additional info, footnote #302); A complete narrative of this account could be found in Kenneth Ch’en’s book *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, p. 355-356). Although Huineng was the one to ensure the triumph of the Southern School, which promoted the teachings of sudden enlightenment, in reality *Samadhi* continued to be practiced in many branches of Chan Buddhism (for example, “the Caodong branch follows the method of silent introspection or sitting in meditation under the guidance of a master.”) Mike Sayama, *Samadhi: Self-Development in Zen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986): vii; Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998):10, 32; Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr, eds. *Buddhism in Song* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999): 344; Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964): 354-355.

emerged over the centuries;⁴⁶ and also by the development of Chinese Buddhism in relationship to Buddhism that was left behind on the Indian sub-continent. This evolution was particularly recognizable in the periods of increased intellectual debate during the time of crisis that consequently was “infiltrating every stratum of Chinese society”.⁴⁷ This change was not only contained in the transformation of one particular belief, but was seen through its reciprocal influence on the other two traditions. It is important to note that the significance of Chinese Buddhism was often contested by “unseen hands of generations of Confucian historians – men who regarded Buddhism as an alien cultural excrescence, and Buddhist periods of Chinese history as shameful chapters in the life of a great people.”⁴⁸ In addition, Buddhism was also often judged by less objective and strongly persuasive streams of Japanese orthodox scholars in the 20th century,⁴⁹ however, these characterizations of Buddhism were undeniably constructive because they served as a catalyst, inciting other scholars to study Buddhism in the following decades.

Chapter Three: General Assumptions of the Pursuit of Harmony and Historical Analysis of Times of Crisis in China

⁴⁶ Michael Nylan, “The ‘Chin wen/Ku wen’ Controversy in Han Times,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series 80, Fasc. 1/3 (1994): 83-145.

⁴⁷ Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: A Kuroda Institute Book, University of Hawaii Press, 2002): 4.

⁴⁸ Arthur F. Wright, “Buddhism and Chinese Culture,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 17, No. 1 (1957): 17; Influenced by this scholarship Historian Harold M. Vinacke describes Chinese Buddhism, “it was the superstition, rather than any real religious bent, which has corrupted Buddhism from its originally subtle doctrines received from India into a system of propitiatory acts undertaken occasionally under stress of adverse circumstances.” Harold M. Vinacke, *A History of the Far East* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950): 17.

⁴⁹ Sharf, 8-10; John R. McRae, “Buddhism,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 54, No. 2 (1995): 354. Although these two biased barriers in the study of Chinese Buddhism are important, their detailed elaboration lie beyond the grounds of this study.

Throughout Chinese history their scholars have prided themselves on their willingness to record all sorts of chronological/historical data, today considered as a valuable testimony of long lasting Chinese history.⁵⁰ These records show a dynamic and rich development of tradition, packed with records of times characterized by their harmonious cultural/political establishments, frequently followed by times of clash and discordance.⁵¹ Looking into these patterns of Chinese history it was possible to recognize idiosyncratic elements in the development of Chinese philosophy. While periods of discordance were distinguished by political and material deficiency, they were at the same time characterized by their philosophical affluence, which created enriched discourse among scholars of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.⁵² In the past the analysis of this type of intellectual exchange had often been a focus of scholarly curiosity,⁵³ for the reason that it could potentially produce a valuable and clearer insight of a particular “pocket” of history, and at the same time to exhibit the character of all active participants in this dialogue. Three different time periods, the

⁵⁰ Lauren Pfister, “The Different Faces of Contemporary Religious Confucianism: An Account of the Diverse Approaches of Some Major Twentieth Century Chinese Confucian Schools,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 22, No. 1 (1995): 7.

⁵¹ For an excellent analysis of Chinese classical and contemporary history see, Endymion Porter Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual*. (Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000).

⁵² In order to support this hypothesis, three examples taken from Chinese history should be analyzed. The turbulent Late Han period which witnessed the rise of Neo-Daoism, similar cultural situations in the late Tang when the foundation of Neo-Confucianism were settled, and the complex situation during the Ming period, gave enough evidence to this claim of increased intellectual debate in times of crisis. This of course does not completely exclude, this type of scholarly involvement during the time of peace, but it was generally of a lesser volume during these peaceful times. For additional information on the historical circumstances that preceded the development of Neo-Daoism and Neo-Confucianism see, Alan K. C. Chan, “Neo-Daoism,” in *History of Chinese Philosophy*, by Bo Mou (New York: Routledge, 2008): 303-324; Alan Thomas Wood, “The Background of Neo-Confucianism,” in *Limit to Autocracy: From Song Neo-Confucianism to a Doctrine of Political Rights* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995): 25-80.

⁵³ Although the terminology used here - “scholarly debate” and “intellectual exchange” could be used to define very narrow and temporarious meanings of this term, it should rather be understood broadly to include a whole spectrum of relationships including, in addition to positive interrelationships also negative reactions among different traditions as well, such as different shades of critiques all the way to ideological persecution.

late Han [漢朝] and the period of disunion prior to the Sui dynasty [隋朝] (2nd -5th century), the late Tang [唐朝] and Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period [五代十國] and the early Ming [明朝] are especially relative to this argument, and they will be briefly addressed separately.

3.1 Late Han [漢朝] to Sui Dynasty [隋朝] (2nd -5th century)⁵⁴

The earliest written records of China's civilization date from Shang (1750-1027 B.C.E.) and Zhou (1027-221 B.C.E) periods,⁵⁵ showing closely geographically fragmented pockets of rudimentary warrior states that desired to exemplify an earthly reflection of a harmonious society, predicated on specific notions of "Heaven". This became a fundamentally significant ideology in Zhou that was defined as the "Mandate of Heaven".⁵⁶ The rulers resembled the *axis mundi*⁵⁷ or a "medium between the spirits above and the earth below."⁵⁸ Historically, "the Zhou line of kings was the

⁵⁴ For all future references to a particular period see detailed chronological table of Chinese history – Table 1.

⁵⁵ The modes of syncretization were known to influence many different spheres of human intellectual interactions. It is interesting to note that they also influence material components of this interaction as well. This is visible through illustrations of physical territory and dominance of Chinese empires throughout history. For historical/geographical illustration of the Shang and Zhou period see Appendix 1.

⁵⁶ The terminology of the "Mandate of Heaven" was instructed by the positive image of the new rulers, who justified seizure of power from previous lines of rulers. By this philosophy, the ruler or "Son of Heaven" reigned closely in accordance with the "Mandate of Heaven" that reflected the will of "Heaven" often ambiguously translated as chief deity.

⁵⁷ *Axis mundi* (Latin, 'world axis'), symbolically signifies "any of a variety of vertically oriented objects, such as a pillar, tree, ladder, or mountain, that is taken to mark the center of the world and to connect it with heaven above if not also the underworld below." Definition provided in glossary of terms by David m. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic & Contemporary* (Hoboken, N. J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997): 647. In the case of "Sons of Heaven" or rulers in Chinese traditions their symbolic role is extended to juxtapose the rationale of their connection to their ancestral perception of harmony.

⁵⁸ Sarah Allan, "Drought, Human Sacrifice, and the Mandate of Heaven in a Lost Text from the 'Shang shu'," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 47, No. 3 (1984): 523.

longest lasting and most revered of all in Chinese history.”⁵⁹ Although theoretically highly desired, the notion of harmonious reign was repeatedly interrupted by, in reality exceedingly decentralized political structures, which “rapidly shifted centers of powers, in fierce competition and warfare among numerous small and independent states.”⁶⁰ The longevity of the Zhou lineage was only a secondary reason for the great admiration given to this period of time; the primary motive lies in the grounding of the foundation of Chinese philosophy and ideology that was established through the teachings of Kǒng zǐ [孔子] (551-479 B.C.E.),⁶¹ Mèng zǐ [孟子] (371-289 B.C.E.),⁶² and Lǎo zǐ [老子] (d.u.),⁶³ who lived during this period.⁶⁴ It is important that according to a traditional account the Confucian tradition did not start with Confucius, who continuously thought of himself only as a “transmitter” of ancient wisdom, and not as the creator. The teachings of Confucius were only one of the intellectual movements present in the Warring States period in China (this period was also known as *zhūzǐ*

⁵⁹ Richard W. Bulliet and Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005): 61.

⁶⁰ Historians divide the Eastern Zhou era (referred to as a line of Zhou lineage who were relocated to a more secure Eastern capital near Luoyang sometime around 771 B.C.E.) into a “‘Spring and Autumn Period’ from 771 to 481 B.C.E. after a collection of chronicles that gave annual entries for those two seasons, and the ‘Warring States Period’ from 480 to the unification of China in 221 B.C.E.” Elinor L. Pearlstein, “A Jade Sheath of Early Imperial China,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 16, No. 2 (1990): 102-119.

⁶¹ For a brief biography of Kǒng zǐ, see “The Life of Confucius” in *Confucius and the Analects*, edited by Bryan W. Van Norden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 9-12. For an interesting retrospective on the development of Confucius’ biography[ies] and his hagiography through illustrations see, Julia K. Murray, “Illustrations of the Life of Confucius: Their Evolution, Functions, and significance in Late Ming China,” *Artibus Asiae* 57, 1/2 (1997): 73-134.

⁶² There is very little known about the private life affairs of Mencius, even the time of his birth and death are often contested. For additional information see, Chan, 49-51.

⁶³ For an interesting description of the debate on Lǎo zǐ as a teacher and deity see, Livia Kohn, “The Looks of Laozi,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 55, No. 2 (1996): 193-236.

⁶⁴ Although Confucianism and Daoism are commonly presented as the two major philosophical streams of this time, Mohism, the school of Master Mo (470-391 B.C.E.?) was one additional school of thought that attracted many followers of the time. “The Confucian school represented the position that right moral conduct was desirable and determinable as something in and of itself, while Moists took the stance that it was desirable and determinable only in terms of the benefit it might produce.” Christian Jochim, “Ethical Analysis of Ancient Debate: Moist versus Confucians,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 8, No. 1 (1980): 135-136.

bǎijiā [諸子百家] or “One Hundred Schools period”), which was later by the work of his followers successful in defining and reshaping the tradition that they inherited. At the same time, it is also important to recognize that Confucianism has never been a fixed and static philosophy. Even in its early stage by the third century B. C. E. there were eight competing Confucian “sects”. In addition, in the centuries to follow, the political agenda played its role in redefining what was by that time known as *Rú* [儒] or Confucian tradition. In sum, the Confucian tradition, as Kai-wing Chow agreeably argues, “was not neatly packaged organic whole in which the constructive parts fall naturally into their places, but that it displayed the rupture of all cultural constructions; it was forged and reforged, configured and reconfigured.”⁶⁵ The Zhou period was characterized by constant political flux, which immensely predetermined their own interpretation of social and spiritual stability. Intellectual debate centered on the terms such as duty, hierarchy, and self-cultivation for Confucians, the unity and nature of opposites, and immortality for Daoists, yet having one main objective – interpretation and harmonious application of human existence.

For the Confucians, harmony is the basic and underlying structure of reality, while conflict does not have roots in reality, but rather represents an order of unnatural imbalance or disorder of no lasting significance. The world, according to the Confucians, is a process of change and development. Notwithstanding that there may appear variations, difference, divergence, tension, opposition, and antagonism in the world;

⁶⁵ Shu-hsieh Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Song-Ming* (Westport and London, Greenwood Press, 1998): 3; Brian W. Van Norden, *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 12; Kai-wing Chou, On-cho Wg and John B. Henderson, eds. *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrine, Texts and Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999): 3.

the Confucians insist that the overall tendency of cosmic and social processes as well as individual life conduces the unity and harmony.⁶⁶

Similar to the Roman Empire in the West, Han China (221 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.)⁶⁷ sourced its strength from a line of strong supportive landlords, who gave their loyalty to the Emperor on the basis of close bound reciprocity and solid Confucian values first learned in the family – “obedience, respect for superior, piety, and strong sense of duty and honor.”⁶⁸ It is important to note that, what historians generally agree, is that both civilizations took their roots from an ethnically homogenous nucleus to eventually encompass “many diverse groups of people who practiced their own language, customs, and set of beliefs”, which would later have an immense impact of how syncretic tendencies’ power fluctuated.⁶⁹

Philosophically Han dynasty thinkers strongly participated in already inherited functioning of syncretization from the previous era. For example, Chinese scholars had a tendency to explain syncretic links according to an analogical model; they linked disparate elements of the world by establishing frequently meticulous correlations on the basis of similar factors. They developed a correlative chart which associated different fields of knowledge, notably with musical notes, colors, flavors, scents, cardinal points, moral virtues, body organs, etc. following some basic components

⁶⁶ Chung-ying Cheng, “Toward Constructing a Dialectics of Harmonization: Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, No. 1 (2006): 28 (25-59).

⁶⁷ For a historically geographical illustration of the Han Dynasty see Appendix 2.

⁶⁸ Bulliet, 174.

⁶⁹ Han China and the Roman empire share some further similarities recognized by scholars, they both depended on agriculture as a main economic activity and source of wealth; they both tended to build an infrastructure of roads, canals, and system of defense in order to connect their frontiers with the central authoritative structure; they both used large and initially effective armies; and they both collapsed under economic and divisional pressure to maintain their stability within, and outside of their borders. Bulliet, 180.

found in the text of the *Yi Jing* which is highly regarded by both Confucians and Daoists.⁷⁰ As an example, a well-known Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu [董仲舒] (179-104 B. C. E.), was, according to tradition, an author of the commentary on the *Yi Jing* titled *Chūnqiū Fánlòu* [春秋繁露] or *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*. Although scholars today in general contest his authorship of this work, Dong Zhongshu wrote on the section on cosmology (chapters 35-36 and 41-49) which summarized some of the main elements of his philosophy and display a clear example of syncretic analogy. He writes,

[The] five viscera, the liver corresponds to love, the lungs to righteousness, the heart to propriety, the kidneys to wisdom and the spleen to good faith... The liver is essence of wood... the lungs are the essence of metal... the heart is essence of fire... the kidneys are essence of water... the spleen is the essence of earth. The correlation of the various virtues and feelings in this way with the bodily organs and physical phenomena is a natural extension of the concept of ‘the oneness of man with the Heaven,’ i.e., with Nature.⁷¹

Although the *Yi Jing* was classified as a text written with “exhilarated symbolization” *xin* [信] in contrast to the other two subgroups of text categories, facts *fu* [符] and concealed parable *pi* [譬],⁷² this text would serve to closely depict the basic understanding of metaphysical standards needed alongside for the preservation of

⁷⁰ These charts were largely influenced by methodology found in the old Chinese traditional text, the *Yi Jing* or *The Book of Changes* [易經] compiled in the early Chou dynasty around 1000 B. C. E. and its *Commentaries* written sometimes during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, some are even said to be the work of Confucius. Shu-hsien Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy*, 76.

⁷¹ Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy: vol. II – The Period of Classical Learning, From the Second Century to the Twentieth Century*, in translation by Derk Bode (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983): 41-42.

⁷² Thomas H. Fang, *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking Pub. Co., 1981): 99.

highly desired harmony. These standards would identify the character of “Chinese syncretization” or in Fang’s words “Philosophy of Change” as,

A process of systematic ontology based upon the processes of creative creativity as exhibited in the incessant change of time as well as a system of general axiology wherein the origin and development of the idea of the Supreme Good is shown in the light of *comprehensive harmony*. Thus the principle of extensive connection asserts at the same time that the confluence of life, permeating *all* beings under heaven and on earth, partakes of the creative process of time, and achieves, as natural consequence, the form of Supreme Good. From this view-point, no set of fundamental principles formulated in a system of metaphysics can be cut and thrust into an air-tight compartment without interpenetration. Therefore, the principle of extensive connection serves as a prelude to the *principle of creative creativity*, which, in turn, furnishes a keynote to the principle of life in the process of value-realization (emphasis mine).⁷³

In other words, the process of syncretization becomes a recognizable prerequisite in order to achieve and sustain harmonious society as well as to achieve harmony within individual human beings themselves. The mutual discourse among Confucian and Daoist scholars produced a valuable foundation for the establishment of the school of cosmology of the Han period called *School of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements* [*Yin yang wu xing jia*].⁷⁴ Furthermore, this school served as a catalyst, the Confucians used it

⁷³ Fang, 109.

⁷⁴ Although the concept of *yin* and *yang* and the *Five Elements* was not discussed within the major classical texts of Confucianism, such as the *Analects*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Book of Mencius*, they are recommended by Xunzi (298-238 B.C.E), who said that “Confucius’ grandson Zisi (492-431 B.C. E.) advanced the *Five Agents* theory and Mencius followed it”. Chan, 245. Xunzi is considered to be one of the most respected and influential thinkers of the Chinese classical period. Xunzi’s philosophy touches on a broad range of topics and interests; however, he is probably the best known for his opposing interpretation of human nature in comparison to the philosophy of his contemporary Mencius. Both Mencius and Xunzi defend *Rú* [儒] Confucian tradition and Confucius’s model of well-governed society, yet they looked into two distinctive ways of how to achieve this harmonious order, while at the same time they evaluated each other’s values that required justification in the face of competing philosophical traditions. Xunzi’s harmonious government is created by proper

to develop political and social philosophy, individual and social ethics, while the Daoists concentrated on the direct relationship between individuals and nature. Both the public and the private areas of life were covered with these concepts. As it is the way of nature to progress through periods of flourishing and decline so it is with human affairs. The patterns of nature are reflected in both the life of the individual and of the wider society.⁷⁵ “To comprehend change is called conducting a duty,”⁷⁶ therefore, in order to strive and achieve harmony, it was necessary to accept alteration, at least in theory, *all* premises were proficient enough for the establishment of unity between Heaven and Earth. This is only but a brief example of how the processes of syncretization worked among loose boundaries between the two traditions of Confucianism and Daoism.

It is generally agreed that Buddhism ventured into a land of *Zhōngguó* [中國]⁷⁷ sometime during the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 C.E.)⁷⁸ From its early “dialogue” with Confucianism, Buddhism was estranged for its endorsement of various practices of social abandonment, such as practice of celibacy, mendicancy, or abstinence from all forms of monetary transactions.⁷⁹ For these reasons, in addition to

education, firm discipline, and especially by *li* [禮] (rites, rules of proper conduct). He defines human nature *xing* [性] as bad,⁷⁴ and in need of continuous, structured and firm reinforcement, meaning that all men are alike in nature [ultimately bad] but become different through different practice and social circumstances.

⁷⁵ Fung, 97-98.

⁷⁶ Richard F. Baynes, trans., *I Ching* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1985): 318.

⁷⁷ Translated as a "central nation" or as "middle kingdom".

⁷⁸ Wright, 17; Wing-tsit Chan trans., *a Source of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963): 336; Sharf, 4.

⁷⁹ Rupert Gethin in his book *The Foundations of Buddhism* nicely summarize what were the new social mores of those who chose to actively pursue the path to Buddhahood, “[T]he ideal of the Buddhist monk is one who steps out from ordinary society: his appearance is different (his head is shaved and he wears monastic robes); he renounces the ordinary household life of wife, children, and family and takes a vow of complete sexual abstinence; in adopting the way of life of a monk he abandons any professions or

perceptions of Buddhism as non-Chinese, it was crucial to make, and in accordance with the “laws of syncretization”, to initiate the process of adaptation to new habitual circumstances, which would change Buddhism into a more Chinese tradition. Buddhism was initially spread by trade expeditions, settlers, and political refugees via north-Western branches of the Silk Road, eventually reaching the Daoist centre of Pengcheng [彭城], in the northern part of Jiangsu [江蘇] province, sometime in the mid first century CE.⁸⁰ In only a few decades Buddhism came to be interchangeably associated with Daoist practices of immortality, while Buddha was understood as one of the reincarnation of the Daoist sage Laozi.⁸¹ In the centuries to follow Buddhism actively participated in the discourse with the Confucian and Daoist scholars similarly applying the modes of syncretization whenever felt appropriate. The way syncretic tendencies worked in these early stages was to justify their differences by simply returning to

means of livelihood; his personal possessions are minimal and for the little he can expect in the way of creature comforts he is depending on the generosity of others.” Gethin, 88.

⁸⁰ Anna Ghiglione, “Religious Diversity in Chinese Traditions: Ways of Thinking and Practical Solutions,” *Interculture* 154 (2008): 65.

⁸¹ “A memorial later addressed to the throne affirms that the designation of Buddha only refers to Laozi (6th-5th century B.C.E., according to the legend). The Old Master, a legendary figure to whom tradition attributes the creation of the Daoist doctrine, converted Barbarians in the Western regions”. Eric Zurcher argues that this urge to find a common ground as “all these utterances are of a more general scope. These are the symptoms of the quite understandable tendency to identify paragons of Confucianism and of Daoism with manifestations of Buddhism saints in the distant past.” Furthermore, in his book *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in China* he gives two examples, two interesting texts. First one is, according to him, one of the earliest extant Chinese biography of the Buddha, *Taizi ruying bengqi jing* which reads,

As to his [the Buddha’s transformation] he manifested himself in accordance with (the agencies) of the times, sometimes as a saintly emperor, sometimes as the ancestor of the Forest Literati [* somewhat loosely translated term *rulin* [儒林] generally understood as Confucian scholars] or as the Daoist National Teacher [Laozi]; everywhere where he manifested his innumerable transformations.

And second inserts of the texts from *Zhengwu lun* written by an anonymous author dating sometime from the mid fourth century which states,

Yinwenzi [or Yinxi who was a frontier guar who was according to Daoist tradition accredited for preservation of *Daode jing* after it was received from Laozi; he was the one to accompany Laozi on his journey to Western regions in his quest of conversion of the barbarians] was a disciple of Laozi, and Laozi was a disciple of the Buddha...

Eric Zurcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007): 309, 311; Ghiglione, 66; Ch’en, 24-29.

original figures, general ideas and values that could be “readable” by all traditions in question (i.e. the term self-cultivation is “readable” and acceptable by all three traditions even though when applicable it refers to a distinctive practice promoted differently by each of these traditions).

The period of political disunity seen over several centuries after the fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE produced the perception of harmony and “balance” as weak, which however, continued to be highly desired. Lack of faith in the failing official Confucian structure made the Chinese more accepting of other religious adherence found in Daoism and Buddhism.⁸² This important shift would allow rising Buddhist and Daoist elites to seriously attempt to define “harmony” beyond this material world, and to contemplate “on the mystery that is behind all mysteries, the ultimate truth that is behind the phenomenal world” and a source of equilibrium.⁸³ This shift would correspond with the rise of new intellectual power-structures, Neo-Daoism, and mass popularity of Buddhism, which subsequently produced valuable answers for some of the major present metaphysical challenges.⁸⁴ Initially, in the early post-Han period, by challenging the intellectual orthodoxy of Confucian nomenclature, Buddhism and Daoism shared some reciprocal positive outcomes; and even though positively distinctive in their approach to spirituality, they were presently strongly inclined to share mutual syncretic development of their revelations. By the fifth century Buddhist apocryphal texts and Daoist mystical philosophy,⁸⁵ had shared, borrowed and

⁸² Ch'en, 61.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 327.

⁸⁵ Daoist mystical philosophy, according to Livia Kohn, is described as a “form of discourse distinct from the ancient philosophers, revealed scriptures, and practical manuals.” Kohn attaches the term “mystical” to three religious branches including the “the quietist natural” Daoist tradition, the ecstatic shamanistic tradition of southern China, and “the analytically and insight-oriented systems of Buddhism...” Livia

reinterpreted a significant portion of their esoteric doctrine, which resulted in a redefinition of their respective practices.⁸⁶

While focusing on the notion of universal balance and harmony, the doctrine of Buddhism, as well as Daoism, offered a relatively easy escape from the narrow limitations of ordinary human existence, and the possibility to bridge a visible reality with the realm of transcendence. In contrast to the Confucian ideology that preferred social and communal harmony over the lives of individuals, Buddhist and Daoist philosophy promoted a personal and direct “harmony” with the *Dao* or “nature” identified within. The way to reach the Dao for Daoists and to get in touch with the Buddha Nature for Buddhist might have had different paths; however, they have shared some significant similarities. According to Livia Kohn the essential source of physical and spiritual harmony is found only in connection with the Dao, which is “beyond and yet always present, it is subtle and fine, impossible to grasp with common human means, the senses and the intellect. Yet there is a path to oneness with the Dao, and [while] becoming outwardly selfless, decreasing in egoistic pursuits, the Dao within begins to shine forth”.⁸⁷ In the *Daode Jing* [道德經],⁸⁸

Kohn, *Daoist Mystical Philosophy: The Scripture of Western Ascension* (New York: State of the New York Press, 1991): 5-6; Robert A. F. Thurman argues that Western understanding of hermeneutics, philosophical discipline of rational interpretation of a traditional canon of sacred scriptures authoritative in religious community, and by which most “Eastern” religions are defined as “mystical” or “non-rational”, do not fully relate to this conception, since they were “not excused from the burden of reconciling the tension between some forms of authority and philosophical reason.” Robert A. F. Thurman, “Buddhist Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, No. 1 (1978): 19.

⁸⁶ As an example of the complex mode of syncretization in which these tendencies were not only present through philosophical and religious debate, but also in the other spheres of human contact, such as in art, social customs, and leisure see, Liu Yang, “Origins of Daoist Iconography,” *Ars Orientalis* 31, (2001): 31; Julia K. Murray, “Buddhism and Early Narrative Illustrations in China,” *Archives of Asian Art* 48 (1995): 17-31;

⁸⁷ Kohn, 5.

⁸⁸ On the origin, development and influence of this classical Daoist text see, Alan Cole, “Simplicity for the Sophisticated: Rereading the *Daode Jing* for the Polemics of Ease and Innocence,” *History of Religions* 46, No. 1 (2006): 1-49.

The Dao is deep, subtle, wonderful. (1.17)
 The Dao is deep and very profound.
 It is an abyss of emptiness and non-being. (2.1)
 The Dao is without shape or end.
 Vague and obscure, it is not and yet it is. (5.1)
 The great Dao is vast and open,
 There is nothing structured or surrounded by it. (13.12)
 The Dao is empty and latent.
 It is empty, yet it will become real. It is empty and yet full. (20.1)

Human beings are within the Dao;
 The Dao is within human beings. (32.1)⁸⁹

Even though the Dao is fully indescribable by human language, and is “defined” and yet impossible to be comprehended by the human mind, descriptions similar to these served to enhance the mystery that was enclosed behind the harmonious and idealistic realm of the universal origin as well as the ultimate future. While the mysteriousness of the Dao was necessary to identify its transcendent character, “human beings are [perceived to be] within the Dao,” which at the same time, represented the real connection of humanity and the harmonious divine as interchangeably united. The Dao was seen as the origin, maintainer, and the source of all “balance” in human life. In a similar sense, the description of Buddha Nature or the foundation of the ultimate Truth and ultimate Reality was placed within, but at the same time also, beyond the literal understanding of human existence. *Fo Hsing Lun* [佛性論] or *The Buddha Nature Treatise* offers the following description of this phenomenon,⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *Daode Jing*, inserts translated by Livia Kohn, p. 84-85.

⁹⁰ Although the concept of “Buddha Nature” as an essence understood to be rooted in all sentient beings is described in various canonical texts, such as *The Lankavatara Sutra* or *The Lotus Sutra*, *The Buddha Nature Treatise* contains the key principle to understanding the Mahayana Buddhist concept of the Buddha Nature. In the words of Sallie B. King, “Buddha Nature thought is not just a matter of asserting the existence of a Buddha Nature but, especially in the syncretic form in which it appears in *The Buddha Nature Treatise*. This treatise is a full philosophical system, inclusive of ontology,

The Tathagata said that all sentient beings universally possess Buddha-nature in order to [help people] overcome errors and give rise to virtues—that is, in order to cause sentient beings to overcome inferior mind, arrogance, delusion, denial of the true Dharma, and attachment to self. Regarding causing sentient beings to overcome inferior mind, those sentient beings who have not yet heard the Buddha say that there is Buddha-nature do not know that in themselves they certainly have Buddha-nature and can attain Buddhahood.

Wishing to have them to put aside their inferior state of mind and give rise to *bodhicitta*,⁹¹ [the Buddha] says *all* sentient beings universally possess Buddha-nature.

Regarding arrogance, there are people who have heard the Buddha say that sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and this caused them to give rise to an [arrogant] mind.

Regarding overcoming delusion: If a person has this arrogant mind, then true wisdom with respect to the thusness-principle and thusness realm does not become manifest and delusion arises...⁹²

Overcoming denial of the true Dharma all comes down to sentient beings' errors regarding the dual emptiness [of person and thing]. By realizing emptiness, pure wisdom and virtue arise. Even if they have grasped the truth, they speak ill of thusness. [In them] neither wisdom nor virtue is complete.

Buddha said *all* sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature.⁹³

This longer and detailed description of the Buddha Nature contains several important aspects. First and foremost, that the Buddha Nature, similarly to the Dao, is

epistemology, and soteriology.” D. T. Suzuki, *The Lankavatara Sutra*, Chapter III, LIX. http://lirs.ru/do/lanka_eng/lanka-nondiacritical.htm.; Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 98; King, *Buddha Nature*, 159.

⁹¹ This concept is characterized as an aspiration of an individual to enlightenment, which has developed its importance in Mahayana tradition. Robert Aitken, “Formal Practice: Buddhist or Christian,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 22 (2002): 69.

⁹² Thusness is one of the central concepts in Buddhism, especially of importance in Zen. It refers to the true nature of the reality of all things. The Buddha Nature is equated with Thusness, “the reality of things as they are and knowledge of that reality.” Sallie B. King, “Buddha Nature and the Concept of Person,” *Philosophy East and West* 39, No. 2 (1989): 154.

⁹³ *Buddha Nature Treatise (Fo Hsing Lun)* [佛性論], in partial translation by Sallie B. King, in “The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature is Impeccably Buddhist,” (emphasis mine). <http://www.empty-universe.com/pdf/bnib.pdf>; “Buddha- Nature and the Concept of Person,” *Philosophy East and West* 39, No. 2 (1989): 151-170.

an essential part of all human existence; second, that all sentient beings without exception possess it; and third, even though there are numerous reasons why human beings lose their touch with this essence, there is a way that would enable them to again establish, generally speaking, their “balance” and harmony.

While there is no question that theologically the notion of Dao and Buddha-Nature are principally different, and analysis of this distinction is beyond the scope of this project, Buddhism and Daoism of the pre-Tang early medieval period engaged in the debate that looked beyond these obvious variances in their doctrine, and searched for the common elements and a familiar meeting ground. As a visible result of this tendency, the functional expression of language and their philosophical terminology became interchangeable.⁹⁴ As already established, one of the familiar and agreeably important places of contact between Buddhist and Daoist doctrine became the notion of “balance” of a physical and mental portion of human existence, as a result of essentially and positively harmonious action of Buddha Nature or respectively the Dao.

One of the concepts that were particularly visibly interchanged among Confucian and Buddhist teachings was the concept of “five phases”.⁹⁵ This concept is later used,

⁹⁴ It is also important to acknowledge that, although the syncretic tendencies were strongly pulling these traditions to a common, and understandably generic and uniform interpretation of their doctrine, at the same time, all of them have had their representatives who were interested in keeping their traditions “pure” and clean of outside influences. Considering that Buddhism of this period was still primarily fighting against stereotypes of “othering” within Chinese culture, it could be implied that many of their interpretations generally depended on the audience they were addressing. Yet those who advocated Buddhist’s “purity” of doctrine and advised against simple reduction of complex Buddhist interpretation of a nirvanic quest to a “Daoist” pursuit of harmony were the ones who protected the essential values of Buddhism within the tradition.

⁹⁵ The earliest extant literary reference to the five phases are found in the *Hóng fàn* [洪範] (*Great Plan*) chapter of the *Shàng shū* [尚書] (*Book of Documents*), dated as a post-Confucian work sometime before the second century B.C.E. From the time of the Han dynasty onward, the dynastic histories typically incorporated a chapter named “Five Phases” that reported unusual events such as earthquakes, droughts,

and in accordance to changes brought by the mode of syncretization into Buddhism under the guidance of a strong supporter of syncretization Zhiyi [智顗] (538-597).⁹⁶ Although credits were often given to Kumārajīva,⁹⁷ in reality the recognition should be given to Zhiyi as an establisher of the Tiantai Chinese school of Buddhism.⁹⁸ While Chan argues that the development of Chinese Buddhism, supported by the modes of synthesis [syncretisation], was only a “natural” path of evolution of this tradition (seen similarly in the development of Confucianism and Neo-Daoism previously);⁹⁹ it would be up to Zhuyi who further implemented “a system of correspondence dictated by correlative logic”, which was founded in the Confucian doctrine of Five elements into a creed of Tiantai.¹⁰⁰ Accepting this, Buddhist ethical prohibitions become associated with Confucian virtues by way of traditional cosmology,¹⁰¹ or in some instances, the five phases were understood as Buddhist *xíng* [行], translated as rules of conduct, which were paired with the Confucian five constant virtues *wǔ cháng* [五 常].¹⁰²

or avalanches, all in order to explain the nuance of disharmony between Heaven and Earth and its human agents. Sharf, 80, 97.

⁹⁶ An appealing hagiographic narrative was created for the life of Zhiyi. In traditional accounts his mother conceived him when in her dream she swallowed a white mouse, which was actually a manifestation of a white elephant (often used in the Buddhist texts to indicate a miraculous birth of important individuals). At the time of his birth, according to third party signification approach, two monks annunciated his future significance. He grew up to be considered as the one who established the Tiantai School of Buddhism by systematizing its doctrine.

⁹⁷ Kumārajīva was a Kuchean Buddhist scholar who was supported by the court and translated dozens of major Buddhist scriptures and commentaries. Kumārajīva’s “relatively lucid translations coupled with the training he imparted to his disciples allowed for a more sophisticated, if not ‘authentic’, Chinese encounter with Indian Buddhism.” William Theodore de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition In India, China and Japan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972): 143; Sharf, 5.

⁹⁸ It is important to note that complex philosophical concepts of the Tiantai Buddhist School lay beyond the scope of this project.

⁹⁹ Chan, 396.

¹⁰⁰ Ghiglione, 65.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Sharf, 98.

It was interesting to see how the process of syncretization becomes increasingly significant in discourses among Confucians and Buddhists in the centuries of disunion prior to the Tang re-unification of China. Confucian values such as filial piety, the sense of family as a ground block of a society, and individual duty to this society, that originally clashed with the convictions of followers of Buddhist Law (*Dharma*)¹⁰³ were now reinterpreted by many, some more successfully than others, to fit into the Chinese doctrinal ambiance. The median point of this continuous contact among these two tradition is visible in the creation of the *Treasure Store Treatise* or *Bǎo zàng lùn* [寶藏論],¹⁰⁴ which explicitly incorporate many different concepts, interestingly characterized as, “little more than a confused muddle of Ruist,¹⁰⁵ Daoist, and Buddhist ideas,”¹⁰⁶ however, its subtle critique of Confucianism imposes a constant reinforcement of Buddhism itself.

Acting in accord with the doctrine of names,¹⁰⁷ they force everything together into patterns of correspondence. In this manner sounds are organized according to the five modes, color according to the five colors, the phases according to the five phases, and virtues according to five virtues.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ *Dharma* is generally understood as a set of Buddhist teachings or creed.

¹⁰⁴ *Treasure Store Treatise* is a short text and part of the Buddhist cannon, presumably accredited to Seng-chao, an early-fifth century exegete and disciple of Kumārajīva. However, now scholars generally agree it is a work of a Tang Chan writer. It is important to remember although these ideas were materialized in the written form in the later period, they were intellectually present much earlier. Sharf, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Generally understood as Confucian scholars.

¹⁰⁶ Robert H Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002): 2.

¹⁰⁷ The “Doctrine of Names” or *míng jiào* [名教] often translated as the “school of names”, according to Zürcher, tends to value the importance of “social duties, ritual, law, and to define the capacity of individuals so as to realize an effective distribution of function to be allotted to them, while harmonizing ‘name’ and ‘reality’.” Eric Zürcher in Sharf’s *Coming to Terms*, 153.

¹⁰⁸ *The Treasure Store Treatise* or *Baozang lun* [寶藏論], 143c2. In translation by Sharf, 153.

While Sharf rightfully argues that this insertion of the text is a clear critique of what Confucian ideology was presently reinforcing – “generated contrived categories and unnecessary distinctions, in a result of their elevation of the ‘named’ over ‘nameless’”; at the same time, “five-phases played particularly important role in the meditation and ritual procedures [of both] Daoist and Buddhist practitioners alike.”¹⁰⁹ In the following centuries while all three traditions, Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism continued, perceived by some, to be on their individual and independent paths, the modes of syncretization, pulled them often into a similar gravitational realm where borrowing of concepts and ideas were common, sometimes even necessary.

3.2 Late Tang [唐朝] (9th-10th century)

Early medieval Chinese history, 9th to 10th century, is often characterized by strong dynamic and ideological transformation, creating fluid political alliances that produced larger social instability. Peasant rebellions, economic stagnation, and an increased local power structure led to the decentralization of imperial power that once represented the ideal harmonious notion of unified China. In this socio-political instability, the antagonism between Daoist, Confucian and Buddhist thinking and their quests for religious and political dominance created a situation of confrontation that was at times mediated through officially mandated religious debate. In this period, an

¹⁰⁹ Sharf, 154.

influential Buddhist literati-monk,¹¹⁰ Guīfēng Zōngmì [圭峰 宗密] (780-841)¹¹¹ made an effort to situate the position of Buddhism in the broader Chinese context. By the late Tang dynasty, Buddhism had grown far from its old perception as a strange and foreign tradition, to be perceived by many as rightfully Chinese. It is important to note that the official Confucian support of Buddhism did not come from their egalitarian approach to its doctrine, but rather as a way of dealing with an undenyng presence of Buddhism in Chinese society. The literati and ultimately the imperial position toward Buddhism was characterized by their tendency to consolidate their own power after the period of disunion, and their desire to produce a centralized authority in opposition to previously fallen dynasties, while establishing their power not by the rule of force, but as an exemplary benevolent rule (not as a “ruler” or “hegemon” but as a “true king”). The place of Buddhism as a popular religion further dictated the position of Confucian literati toward Buddhism in general. The official policies were also balanced on the merit of internal and external elements, while later they were influenced by the

¹¹⁰ During the Tang dynasty, we see the increase in the rise of a special Buddhist highly educated class who often bridged “solitary ascetics and bureaucratic elite. They interplayed between political and religious authority, implicitly influencing religious functionaries and explicitly exercising power of secular administration.” They adequately illustrated the position and prestige of Buddhist literati in that particular period, and their ability to effectively respond, first, to the demand of this political establishment, while attaining the spiritual needs of their subjects was unprecedented. These proponents of Buddhism were well aware that their religion did not, and could not, live in a vacuum; their evaluation of scriptures, therefore, sometimes mirrored the real and anticipated needs of the contemporary secular regime – ultimately serving the Buddhists’ own polemical purposes. All Buddhist schools of the time had, one way or another, their representatives among this literati class, however, Chan elite took a special role in this period. For more on the role, influence and official recognition of Buddhist literati see, Albert Welter, *Monks, Rulers and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹¹ Zōngmì was a well known Buddhist scholar and spokesperson of Buddhism who lived in the capital among official circles. His writings were aimed to influence the literati and members of the court not only

establishment of foreign policies with neighboring, mainly Buddhist sympathizing countries.

From the writing of Zōngmì it was obvious that the strength of Buddhism within the Chinese cultural sphere was being challenged once again, yet from a slightly different stand-point. Zōngmì's arguments reinforced and emphasized the centuries' long results of syncretization. For this reason, Zōngmì's analysis of this turbulent period could not have emerged without the particularly tense historical and ideological circumstances present in the late Tang Dynasty, and they illustrate the overall nature of Chinese syncretization which is more prominent in times of crisis.

Zōngmì, writing in the late Tang period prior to the suppression of Buddhism by Emperor Wuzong [唐武宗] ca. 840-845,¹¹² articulated a presumed sense of Buddhist dominance during the period some have characterized as the “golden era of Buddhism in China”.¹¹³ Zōngmì's time was characterized as a period of strong Buddhist influence, when large monasteries bloomed having thousands of ordained and lay monks and nuns dedicated to their “secluded” way of life. Buddhist presence in the imperial court and in local official governance was an indication of Buddhists' assertion in the acts of policy making, treasury management, and land distribution. Buddhist masters played the roles of advisors and religious counselors that ensured the affluence of their communities.

in their spiritual endeavours, but also to ensure Buddhist material security in the society, and to resolve some disputes among different schools of Buddhism. Welter, 34-37.

¹¹² However localized, the persecution of Buddhism in 845 left long lasting consequences. Some scholars argue that at that time monasteries located in the vicinity of the capital city controlled large portions of land, which by some estimation was contributing somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent of the total empire's wealth. Taking back the control of the land, followed by the persecution, shifted the power structure, setting back the financial support of the Buddhist Sangha in the next few centuries. Kenneth K. S. Ch'en, “The Role of Buddhist Monasteries in T'ang Society,” *History of Religions* 15, No. 3 (1976): 219.

¹¹³ Sharf unfortunately shares this opinion stating that after Tang period “intellectually Buddhism went into a long and inexorable decline from which it never recovered”, an argument mainly contested among contemporary scholarship. Sharf, 6-7.

Thus a visible digression away from the “original”¹¹⁴ Buddhist Dharma in which Buddhists lived a secluded life and refrained from worldly activities. However, Zōngmì was a noteworthy part of this imperial structure.

Zōngmì clearly states the Buddhist role in the Chinese discourse in his work *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* or *Yuanren lun* [原人論].¹¹⁵ By addressing a specific audience, the suggested parameters of his position are explicit. With the understanding that he is speaking to the Chinese intellectual elite— Confucian scholars and high-ranking Daoist leaders attached to the imperial court— Zōngmì uses clear modes of syncretisation to attempt a familiar Confucian methodological argument, though one supported by Buddhist doctrinal endorsement. His methods take the inherited Chinese tendency of classification and hierarchical placement promoted by Confucian ideology, modified by sporadic insertions of Buddhist “egalitarianism”. This was done in the effort to incorporate all three philosophies together for theoretical examination. Although Buddhist, Zōngmì definitely wrote this treatise in the style of Confucian scholars. His broad knowledge and understanding of Confucian and Daoist classical tradition gave him the skeletal and foundational structure for his analysis. For this reason, he often directly cites the traditional classic texts in their relationship to Confucianism and Daoism, and often uses them with a new Buddhist connotation.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ This term “original” can only be understood as a generalization, and mainly in reference to the Buddhism once left on the Indian sub-continent.

¹¹⁵ The complete translation of this text with rich modern commentary was supplied by Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity: An Annotated Translation of Tsong-mi’s Yuan jen lun with a Modern Commentary* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

¹¹⁶ This was evident in his interpretation of the Chinese term *qi* [氣]. Peter Gregory describes *qi* as a “common and elusive word in ordinary Chinese speech as well as in philosophy, and it covers a number of concepts. Unlike the abstract *li* [理], *qi* is quite concrete; it is transcribed as breath of life, air, source of life that disperses into the air at the time of death; something we breathe in and out and feel it rising and ebbing in our bodies as physical energy, swelling when we are angry, failing in a limb which grows numb, we smell its odours, sense it as the air or atmosphere of a person or a place, or the vitality of a

He recognizes traditional Chinese values found in Confucianism and Daoism as united, at first glance, with the teachings originating in Buddhism, however one should not be fooled by Zongmi's "generous" inclusion of Confucian and Daoism. Zōngmì's response purposefully subordinated these teachings, and as a result his ultimate understanding of Chinese religiosity was not to equate these as present products of syncretic tendencies, but rather to put them in hierarchical order. For example, in his analysis of the well-known cosmological concept of *Dao*, he acknowledges the Daoist interpretation, but formats it around ethical insufficiency within the tradition, thereby denigrating Daoism. Zongmi closely related comparable Buddhist concepts of "nothingness" and "abolition of human desires" with those promoted by the Daoists. He writes:

[I will] now elaborate on [the above]. [The period of time] during the kalpa of empty space is what the Daoists designate as the Way of nothingness. However, since the essence of the Way is tranquility illuminating and marvelously pervasive, it is not nothingness. Lao-tzu was either deluded about this or he postulated it provisionally to encourage [people] to cut off their human desires. Therefore he designated empty space as the Way... It is only because there were no written records at the time that the legendary accounts of people of later times were not clear; they become increasingly confused, and different traditions wrote up diverse theories of sundry kinds.¹¹⁷

Zōngmì also points out that Confucianism and Daoism fail to answer the essential question regarding the origin of nature. His argument was based on the specific

poem. When *qi* is used as a cosmogenic force it is defined sufficiently vague, characterizing the elusive metaphysical characteristics." Although Zōngmì initially defines *qi* as a source of life, similar to the understanding of Confucians and Daoists, he proceeds to follow the Buddhist conception of karmic perpetual power of *qi* by which once learned motions would resurface again in the life of a new born individual. See 708a2, 708a28, 708b13 *Inquiry*, translated by Gregory, 69, 86, 96.

¹¹⁷ 709a23, 709a27, *Inquiry*, 137-139.

methodology, which took into account the character of his audience and their broad knowledge of the three traditions that allowed him to syncretically reinterpret the particular pieces of these doctrines.¹¹⁸

Zōngmǐ's arguments are well selected, logically constructed and easy to follow. Particularity and unnecessarily detailed description was avoided, nevertheless keeping the focus on the larger subjects, such as cosmology and ethics, which portrayed Confucianism and Daoism as inferior to Buddhism.¹¹⁹ This debate was historically and theologically important for Chinese Buddhism, because it represented the basis to which future critics would respond. As support for Buddhism became a political issue in the late Tang, Zōngmǐ's arguments became the target for a new, emerging class of aggressive, anti-Buddhist Confucians. The superiority of Buddhist teachings was challenged, and over time overwhelmingly disputed. Zōngmǐ's syncretically instructed critique, particularly of Confucian philosophy, would encourage a reaction among official scholars who looked for more substantial groundings for their own identity, and a philosophical authority that superseded what was assumed by previous generations. The most prominent Confucian scholar to challenge the superiority of Buddhism was Zōngmǐ's contemporary Hán Yù [韩愈] (768-824). The echoes of these debates would reverberate through later centuries and serve as a guide for a convincing criticism to a

¹¹⁸ "The rise of the Chan School systematized by Zongmi, as a Chinese amalgamation of Buddhist and Daoist notions of gnostic intuition with a scorn for booklearning and scriptural tradition, contrasted pointedly with the scholasticism of the exegetical schools. All of these suggested the emergence or development of strongly sinicized forms of Buddhism in an ongoing process of adaptation that reached back to the first sutra translations and had involved a major transfusion of Daoist [and Confucian] thoughts and practices." Franciscus Varelle, "Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism: The Inversion of a Buddhist Apologetic Tradition in Late Tang," *T'oung Pao, Second Series* 78, Fasc. 4/5 (1992): 220.

¹¹⁹ For a close analysis of Zongmi's interpretation of ethics see, Jerold D. Gort, Henry Jansen and Hedrick M. Vroom. eds., *Probing the Depth of Evil and Good: Multireligious Views and Case Studies* (New York: Rodopi, 2007): 119-133; Linyu Gu, "Dipolarity in Chan Buddhism and Whiteheadian God," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32, No. 2 (2005): 211-222.

newly empowered class of Confucian scholars to construct a fresh view of Chinese identity, what they thought to be, independent of Buddhism.

Hán Yù was highly respected during his own life. He reached the highest level of education, which entitled him to serve under several governments and hold several different ministerial positions. Hán Yù is notorious for his politically inspired attack on Chinese Buddhism and his redefinition of China's ideological values through a return to Confucian-based principles. This action primarily centered on the alternation of presently applied philosophies and a "return" to Chinese indigenous values that were somehow lost over the centuries. In his zeal to "cleanse" Chinese ideological dispositions of the time, he equally attacked both Daoist mystical practices as deluded and strange, and Buddhist teachings. He wrote a memorial to Tang Emperor Xingzong [唐宪宗] outlining his concerns.

It was not until the reign of Ming-ti of Han¹²⁰ that Buddhism first appeared. Ming-ti's reign lasted no longer than eighteen years, and after him disturbance followed upon disturbance, and reigns were all short. From the time of the five dynasties, Sung, Ch'i, Ch'en, and Yüan Wei onward, as the worship of Buddha slowly increased, dynasties became more short-lived. Wu-ti of Liang alone reigned as long as forty-eight years. During his reign he three times consecrated his life to Buddha, made no animal sacrifice in his ancestral temple, and ate but one meal a day of vegetables and fruit. Yet in

¹²⁰ Various stories were developed on the theme of how Buddhism was introduced to China. Some of them place this introduction in much earlier periods, some with the "evangelical activities" involving King Aśoka during the third century B. C. E., while some even stretch to the Zhou (1122-256 B. C. E.) dynastic period. Some of these stories were created as a response to criticism, especially Confucian criticism, which stated that short lived dynasties had a positive correlation with the introduction of Buddhism as a deluded belief. However, Hán Yù makes a reference here to a well known story of the Buddhist introduction to China connected with a dream of Emperor Ming of Han [Hàn Míngdì 漢明帝], who after seeing a golden flying deity, presumably the Buddha, sent envoys to India in order to know more about his teachings. Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1972): 320. In the following statement Hán Yù lists short lived Northern and southern dynasties from the period of disunity prior to the unification of China under the Sui dynasty in 581.

the end he was driven out by the rebel Hou Ching and died of starvation in T'ai-ch'eng, and his state was immediately destroyed.¹²¹

In Hán Yù's well-supported argument, he evaluates Chinese society's health and harmony according to the Mandate of Heaven,¹²² whereby the reigns of the rulers are scrutinized by equating their longevity with success. He uses the same argument that scholars of the late Han dynasty used in order to diminish the influence of Confucianism as they looked into other religio/ideological values to sustain a more harmonious society. The late Tang dynasty, the time when Hán Yù lived, similarly required serious redefinition of their traditional values with the purpose of saving the dynastic stability.¹²³ What was obvious for Hán Yù was that Tang's preference for Daoism and strong presence of Buddhist literati at the court was to blame for the loss of harmony. In his complaint, he reminds the emperor that the Buddha was no more than a barbarian, unacquainted with Chinese culture, with a laughable clothing style, and without knowledge of the importance of Confucian social relationships. To counter Buddhist "weakness", he emphasizes the importance of harmonious living through proper

¹²¹ Hán Yù, *Memorial on the Bone of Buddha*, in the translation by Sommers, 172.

¹²² *Tian ming* or *Mandate of Heaven* [天命] is an important Confucian concept that initially defined the transcendent absolute and the foundation of all phenomena, often reinterpreted with Daoist cosmological concepts of duality. "Life and Death are the *Mandate of Heaven*, wealth and honor depends on *Heaven*". *Analects* 12:5. This term itself, under the influence of syncretic tendencies later includes soteriologically exemplary modes that required particular application of ethical standards. "The role of *ming* (variously translated as 'fate', 'destiny', 'mandate') in early Confucian thought has been subject to a range of interpretations." From its literal meaning of "command" or "order," which was used in pre-Confucius time to be understood as use as the revocable "mandate" bestowed by Heaven (*tian*) upon the rulers of a particular dynasty, it had evolved by the time of the Confucian *Analects* into a force that plays a role at the level of the individual. Its significance for the process of self-cultivation is reflected in Confucius' observation in the *Analects* 2.4 that "by the age of fifty I had understood the heavenly *ming*," as well as such passages as *Analects* 20.3, in which Confucius notes that "One who does not understand *ming* has not the means by which to become a gentleman." Translations taken from, Edward Slingerland, "The Conception of *Ming* in Early Confucian Thought," *Philosophy East and West* 46, No. 4 (1996): 567.

¹²³ Although in the Han dynasty the intellectual debate and search for harmony tended to be more receptive to values that lied beyond their own Chinese tradition, and the Tang period searched for a return to them, in general, both periods were signified by the internal political and intellectual crisis that forced their intellectual elite to redefine and vocalize their core values.

hierarchically ordained relationships among people, the significance of knowledge gained in the past by virtuous Chinese sages, and the security that lies in the supremacy of Confucian ideology. However rigid Hán Yù's reactions to Buddhism (and Daoism),¹²⁴ he was not able to resist the power of syncretization. He ultimately participated in the adaptation of “old” classical Confucian teachings into teachings more suitable for the audience of his time.¹²⁵ Deborah Sommers rightfully perceives that, no matter how much at first glance Hán Yù despises Buddhism, according to his writing on *the Bone of Buddha*, he does not explicitly critique essential creeds of Buddhism (i.e., the *Four Noble Truths*). Instead, he is infuriated with the superstitious character of what Buddhism has become, which allowed “an absurd pantomime” and “nonsense rituals” to develop.¹²⁶

There is then all the less reason now for allowing this decayed and rotten bone, this filthy and disgusting relic to enter the Forbidden Palace... I beg that this bone be handed over to the authorities to throw into the water or fire...¹²⁷

¹²⁴ On his critique of Daoism Hán Yù writes the following, “This we have the Way of the superior man [as in Confucianism] and the Way of the inferior man [as in Daoism] and there are inauspicious virtue [as in Daoism] and auspicious virtue [as in Confucianism]; Lao Tzu belittled humanity and righteousness not because he destroyed them but because his views were small... What Lao Tzu called the Way and virtue was devoid of humanity and righteousness...” Hán Yù, *An Inquiry of the Way*, in translation by Chan, 454.

¹²⁵ It is important to note that while Confucian literati whose systematic critiquing of Buddhism had forced them to adapt and consciously reinterpret their responses in order to anticipate the intellectual debate of the time and with it unconsciously syncretised part of their teachings; at the same time the members of emerging Confucian intellectual authority, who were part of a new Confucian revival, were susceptible to many of the same influences that affected Chan Buddhism, e.g., a new relation with the scriptural authority, a more direct style of writing, the elevation of dialogue records (direct speech) over scriptural commentary, etc. Albert Welter, “Zanning and Chan: The Changing Nature of Buddhism in Early Song China,” *Journal of Chinese Religion* 23 (1995): 105-140; Daniel K. Gardner, “Modes of Thinking and Modes of Discourse in the Song: Some Thoughts on the *Yulu* [*Records of Conversation*] *Texts*,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 50, No. 3 (1991): 574-603.

¹²⁶ Sommers, 169.

¹²⁷ Sommers, 173.

Given the subtle influence of Buddhist and Daoist tenets over Han Yu, it is quite easy to acknowledge his modifications of the Confucian fundamental notion of *rén* [仁], benevolence.¹²⁸ He argues for a more liberal perception of *rén*, no longer dependent on the individual's position within the hierarchy of human relationships, but as an entirely syncretized concept of *bó'ài* [博愛] or *universal love*.¹²⁹ The classical understanding of *rén* as benevolence is undeniably clouded by its character of ambiguity and generalization. Although Confucius as well as Mencius talk about *rén* as an ideal virtue of a *jūnzǐ* [君子] (virtuous man),¹³⁰ this term implicitly and effectively barred people who lacked opportunities for upward mobility within the hierarchy. In other words, the

¹²⁸ The Chinese character for *ren* is represented by the unity of two other Chinese characters for “person” [人] and “two” [二], which visually represented this ideal virtue. *Ren* is translated in many different ways to include: “sympathy”, “humanness”, “kindness”, “consideration”, “human-heartedness”, or “benevolence”. It simply means that one must be considerate of the other person through one's actions and words. Li Chenggui describes this virtue as “originated in Heaven, and best exemplified by the ancient kings of antiquity.” Li Chenggui, Liuqin Xi, and Hua Peng, “Three Sources of Wisdom of Chinese Traditional Virtue and a Contemporary Examination,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 1, No. 3 (2006): 341-365. In addition, the virtue of *ren* must include the notion of *shù* [恕] (reciprocity) – “Do not impose on others what you do not wish imposed on yourself” [己所不欲，勿施於人] and *xiào* [孝] (filial piety) – “Filial piety and fraternal submission are major roots of all benevolent actions.” [孝弟也者，其為仁之本與]. *Analects* (Selection) 15:24; 2:12. In translation by Richard Hooker. Please note that all future references to the *Analects* will take Hooker's translation or will be cited otherwise. <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GLOSSARY/SHUCHUNG.HTM>.

¹²⁹ The term “universal love” was not coined by Hǎn Yù; it first appeared in *Classic of Filial Piety* done by Wei Chao in the third century. However, Hǎn Yù gave the term “universal love” a new meaning applying it to the orthodox tradition of hierarchically defined *rén*. Wing-tsit Chan, “The Evolution of the Confucian Concept *Jen*,” *Philosophy East and West* 4, No. 4 (1955): 304. The terminology of “universal love” is also used by Mozi who, in contrast to Confucians who understood “love” as unconditional that transcends material utility, argues for more conditional “love”, which is based upon material utility in real life. Mozi's “universal love is not rooted in the inner and psychological *ren* (benevolence) but has its origin in the external *yi* (righteousness) which is based on a doctrine of mutual-benefits.” Chengchi Hao, “Is Mozi a Utilitarian Philosopher?,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 1, No. 3 (2006): 383.

¹³⁰ *Jūnzǐ* is an individual whose character is defined beyond simple meaning of “noble person” or “gentleman”. *Jūnzǐ* represents an ideal whose words and actions constitute *ren*, *yi* [義], *li* and *zhi* [知] (knowledge, education). Erica Brindley provides an excellent description of *jūnzǐ* as distinguished by his faithfulness, diligence and modesty. “He neither overpowers with his knowledge, nor is he afraid to admit error. He looks at all sides of any issue, is cautious and not concerned for personal recognition. Carrying himself with dignity, he appears imperturbable, resolute, and simple. He is exemplary in filial piety and generous with his kin. In relations with others he looks for good points, though he is not uncritical. As a leader, he knows how to delegate responsibility and when to pardon or promote. He is sensitive to the feelings and expressions of others.” Erica Brindley, “‘Why Use an Ox-Cleaver to Carve a Chicken?’ The Sociology of the *Junzi* Ideal in the *Lunyu*,” *Philosophy East and West* 59, No. 1 (2009): 47-49.

notion of *rén* was closely related with class and gender limitations within Chinese classical perceptions of human networking. Confucius writes, “He [*jūnzǐ*] alone knows how to love others... and when he [*jūnzǐ*] fully realizes *rén*, he becomes a sage.”¹³¹ When Confucius says, “Love all men comprehensively”,¹³² and Mencius, “The benevolent [men of *rén*] embrace all in their love,”¹³³ they advocate that only people capable of effective reasoning reinforced by education are eligible to pursue the *jūnzǐ* ideal, or, for that matter, for upward mobility into the highest levels of moral attainment. In reality, these individuals are largely stipulated by social and gender background, rather than merely by an individual’s innate talent, personality, and willingness to learn. What Hán Yù brings for the first time to the Confucian discourse was the syncretized notion of *rén*, now redefined as *bó’ài*, which was ultimately influenced by the universality found in Daoism,¹³⁴ and universal compassion found in Buddhism.¹³⁵ Although Hán Yù continued to disclose the superiority of Confucianism even in the interpretation of the concept of “universal love” itself, arguing that the Buddhist and Daoist example is “nothing but an empty state of mind and inactivity”,¹³⁶ the development of the concept of *rén* reveals the long and continuous power of syncretisation even in the minds of orthodox ideologues such as Hán Yù.

¹³¹ *Analects* 4:3; 6:28; 7:33.

¹³² *Analects* 1:5c.

¹³³ *Mencius* 7I: 46b. Translation provided by the authors of the Chinese Text Project. <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=1791&if=en>.

¹³⁴ The Daoist universal principle of “origin” was translated into a collective emotional bond and it stretched further than its Buddhist example. This principle was based on the perception of the single *qì* [氣] embracing all beings even including plants and minerals: “One should tenderly love all entities as much as one’s own self ... all that contain the fluid, even trees and herbs, earth, and ashes are like myself, and I think of them as if they are my own children.” TT 1322 5a, in reference to K. M. Schipper’s *Concordance du Tao-tsang*, Paris edition of 1924-25, and in incorporated and translated by Erick Zürcher, “Buddhist Influence on Early Daoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series 66, Livr. 1/3 (1980): 135.

¹³⁵ For an interesting text on compassion in Theravada Buddhism and its re-evolution in Mahayana see, Wendell C. Beane, “Buddhism Causality and Compassion,” *Religious Studies* 10, No. 4 (1974): 441-456.

¹³⁶ Chan, *The Evolution*, 303.

The late Tang dynasty persisted as a shadowy reminiscence of a once powerful and wealthy society. Fights against external enemies from Tibet and Yunnan were equally persistent, as well as their battles against their internal demons, constant peasant rebellions and military coups. Amidst these disturbances, a positive force was the continuous intellectual dialogue among scholars of all three traditions who searched for venues of harmony in some obvious and some less obvious paths. It was evident once more that clear boundaries between these three traditions of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism were less defined as the time of crisis progressed. This desire for a return to harmonious society often depended on the collaboration of disparate ideas among them. The metamorphosis of Confucius' concept of *rén* as an ideal virtue, its practice of love as an application, and finally universal love, clearly demonstrate the permanency of this syncretisation initiative. This concept of universal love will be once more redefined in the writings of Wang Yangming, and interestingly continue to be challenged in contemporary discourse.

Chapter Four: Setting the Stage in the Song and Crisis in the Ming (1368-1644)
[大明國]¹³⁷ – Intellectual Exchange and the Need to Accommodate

4.1 The Debate in the Song Dynasty: Important Points

From the late Tang onward, through the period of disunion, and until the establishment of a new dynastic house in the Song, China had experienced almost two

¹³⁷ For historical/geographical mapping of the Ming period see Appendix 4.

centuries of continuous struggle for a realization of its ideal, its harmonious and unified nation state. During these periods of struggle, the literati of China's three-traditions continued to syncretize their own philosophical principles, by freely borrowing each other's contextual perceptions. This process once more proves the primary character of *syncretization* as a never ending progression of metamorphosis and responsiveness to outside influences. A secondary characteristic of *syncretization*, its selectiveness, guided the intellectual debate present in Ming China. Similarly, while the focus of late Han philosophical discourse was on the mutual interrelationship between Daoism and Buddhism on one side and Confucianism on the other,¹³⁸ the heart of Song/Ming scholarly debate in China stood on the mutual influence and relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism, especially Chan.¹³⁹

Chan Buddhism¹⁴⁰ during the Song encountered several important impetuses that brought it in more significant contact with the Confucian literati. First, Chan of this period became the dominant form of "elite monastic Buddhism".¹⁴¹ Second, public monasteries [*gong*],¹⁴² which were predominantly associated in this period with Chan or

¹³⁸ See footnote 1.

¹³⁹ Tu Wei-Ming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976): 54.

¹⁴⁰ "Literally, the name of the school should be 'Meditation', for the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, pronounced in Chinese 'ch'an' and in Japanese 'zen'." The tradition's origins are with Bodhidharma (460-534) as its First patriarch in China. The focus of their primary scriptural text ultimately defined Chan, which was at first the text passed on from Bodhidharma - *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* [楞伽經] then *Jīngāng jīng* [金剛經] or *Diamond Scripture* – "the central emphasis of the former is Ultimate Reality or the true nature of dharmas (elements of existence), whereas the emphasis of the later is on the mind. Chan, 425-426.

¹⁴¹ According to the report done by Jiang Xiufu (1005-1060) the number of Buddhist monasteries during his time was about 39 000, which illustrated a dramatic increase from 25 000 only fifty years earlier. The official report ten years later stated an even higher number of 41 200. These numbers did not include unregistered monasteries, and accordingly Schlütter argues, "the real number must have been considerably higher." Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute Over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008): 36.

¹⁴² The common distinction between public [*gong*] and hereditary monasteries [*si*] lied in their status of ownership. Hereditary monasteries were recognized by the state as "de facto legal property of the monks and nuns that lived there", while public monasteries, often very large, "received imperial grants as well as financial and political support from members of the educated elite." Schlütter, 36-39.

Tiantai, were by their nature closely connected and depended on the government support while subjected to official Confucian protocol. This connection included continuous interaction of literati elite [*Ru*], which equally included Confucian and Buddhist scholars of the time.¹⁴³ Third, in addition to their close connection with the intellectual elite, Chan masters actively participated in popular religious rituals that ensured their status within the mass populace.¹⁴⁴ Lastly, Chan in the Song, intellectually and practically, offered a picture of a desirable religious identity certified through their distinct institutions, ideology and literature.¹⁴⁵ With the help of innovative printing, Chan texts, broad in literary genre, from the “Records of Sayings of Famous Zen Masters” [*Yulu*], “Transmission of the Lamp Histories” [*Denglu*], to *kōan* [公案] collections such as *Blue Cliff Records* [碧巖錄]¹⁴⁶ obtained mass appeal. These texts were continuously and systematically produced in the span of several centuries, collected, and first partially published in the late Tang, for the first time fully reprinted in Song (also known as *Kaibao Cannon* [開寶], to eventually find their place under the larger modern Buddhist canonical collection *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* [大正新脩大藏經].¹⁴⁷ In early Song China, all these intellectual activities demanded stricter political control, and they did not pass without further Confucian critique.

¹⁴³ Li-hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006): 33.

¹⁴⁴ Among the most encountered practices of the time were such rituals as “call for rain” or “subjugation of ghosts.” Carl Olson, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation from the Representational Mode of Thinking* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000): 101.

¹⁴⁵ Hsueh-li Cheng, *Asian Thought and Culture: New Essays in Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997): 161.

¹⁴⁶ For more detailed information on the Chan texts see an excellent source edited by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, *The Zen Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ The *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* or *Taishozo* is the corpus of Buddhist texts existing in Japan, the large majority in Chinese, compiled between 1924 and 1934. It is based mainly on the xylographic edition preserved at the Haeinsa temple of the Kaya mountain in Korea.

Even though Confucian philosophy was always perceived as an official Chinese orthodoxy, their superior position was never left ultimately fixed; instead it was continuously reshaped to respond to the dialogue with the other two traditions, Buddhism and Daoism. Political unrest and change of dynastic reign was always potentially more damaging to the Confucian positions of power, for the simple reason that Confucian philosophy strived to propagate their ideal within the visible earthly realm.¹⁴⁸ According to Confucius, harmonious society stood on the premises of the five appropriate relations,

Confucius was sitting in attendance of Duke Ai. The Duke asked him; ‘May I ask, what is greatest in the Way of man?’ ... ‘I dare to answer without declining: in the Way of man, government is greatest. Now government means: to be correct. If the ruler does [what is] correct, then the people will follow and be correct. Whatever the ruler does, the people follow’... The Duke said: ‘may I ask you how the government should be conducted?’ Confucius answered: ‘distinction between husband and wife, affection between father and son, honesty between ruler and subject; if these three are correct, then all things will follow and be correct.’¹⁴⁹

According to Tao Jiang, Confucianism initially rejected “limited notions” such as rules of ethics, procedural justice, and a “normatively predetermined way.”¹⁵⁰ This meant that there were no “hard or fast rules that one must respond” and also that the particular circumstances, open mind, and willingness to be flexible would determine what is, for that moment, the best possible harmonious solution. Such a liberal view of ethics will

¹⁴⁸ This ideal is especially underlined in the *Analects* 4.13, which reads: “If rulers are able to effect order in the state through the combination of observing propriety (*li*) and deferring to others, what more is needed?”

¹⁴⁹ *Kongzi Jia yu* (孔子家語) *The School of Sayings of Confucius: Introduction and Translation of Sections 1-10*. 12a.

¹⁵⁰ Tao Jiang, “Intimate Authority: The Rule of Rituals in Classical Confucian Discourse,” in Peter D. Hershock and Roger T. Ames, eds. *Confucian Cultures of Authority* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006): 26.

be subsequently critiqued and redefined on the basis of their debate with Buddhism in the Song/Ming period.

Song China (10-13th century) was marked by the rise of Neo-Confucian - Buddhist debate that would continue with unstoppable vigor during the several following centuries. Neo-Confucian¹⁵¹ philosophers re-evaluated their own canon inherited in standard Confucian Classics by giving the “Four Books” the status of orthodoxy *Great Learning* or *Daxue* [大學], *Doctrine of the Mean* or *Zhongyong* [中庸], *Analects of Confucius* or *Lunyu* [論語], and *Writings of Mencius* or *Mengzi* [孟子].¹⁵² This fresh interpretation of their doctrinal writings was undoubtedly largely created to their debate with Buddhism, which became over the time profoundly influential.

It is important to note that originally Neo-Confucianism was not seen as orthodoxy, and itself had gone through an internal process of syncretization in its initial stage that continued to be shaped in a direction that blended old classical Confucian doctrine with a mixture of influences from contemporary debates.¹⁵³ The internal debate among different branches of Neo-Confucianism was primarily centered on the reinterpretation of the authority of classical texts; while the Five Classics still retained their canonical status and importance, gradually they became secondary to a large

¹⁵¹ Neo-Confucianism, sometimes called “the Second-Epoch of Confucian Humanism”, was a Western term coined by the Jesuits in the 17th-18th century. Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe, *A Companion for World Philosophies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999): 21.

¹⁵² Neo-Confucians successfully transformed and substantially reconstructed the classical tradition in terms of basic scripture, core curriculum, styles of writing, educational institutions, political participation, and social meaning. The *Great Learning*, the *Mean*, the *Analects*, and the *Writings of Mencius* were texts selected as canon by Zhu Xi, and were used as a core of the civil examination system in China. It is often recognized that “Educational Confucianism” tended to be differently used than “Political Confucianism”, “Social Confucianism”, or “Economic Confucianism”, which might have preferred other classical Confucian texts. Tu Weiming, *Confucian Spirituality*, 18-19.

¹⁵³ W. Theodore de Bary, *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975): 6.

corpus of “commentarial writing”.¹⁵⁴ In addition to textual authority, Neo-Confucian scholars tried to redefine the principle that was essential to character of human nature, making it distinct from conventional Confucianism.¹⁵⁵

The Confucian critique of Buddhism covered three basic areas of concern. First, the early messages of Neo-Confucianism¹⁵⁶ were strongly promoted and received by the intelligentsia, particularly by zealous patriots who called for the return to the traditional Chinese heritage.¹⁵⁷ Second, following the critique of the Tang literati and Neo-

¹⁵⁴ In the Song period, intellectual circles witnessed a burst of commentarial interest written on the classical texts, where literati argued for their significance and focused on the tradition that ultimately requested greater importance than what was given to the Five Classics. “This literati shift to the Four Books reflected in the sudden rash of written commentaries on Classics led by dynasty’s end to the displacement of the Five Classics as the central texts in the canon. But, in time, a reaction against the displacement of the Five Classics would set in; literati of the Ming and onward, those associated in particular with the *kǎozhèng* [考證] school [philological school], would argue that Song literati, had misrepresented the tradition, abandoned the Five Classics, and elevated the importance of the Four Books to construct a philosophical program that had little to do with the teachings of Confucius.” These critics demanded abandonment of the Four Books and a “return” to the traditional values found in the classical canon, in contrast to those who refocused their attention on the Five Classics, many supporters of the “Four Books” orthodoxy created a great amount of “evidential style” commentarial writings that would serve as a challenge to the orthodoxy. “For to write commentary was to lay claim to these texts for themselves, to make these texts their own; it was to give these collections of ancient records a peculiarly Confucian spin or interpretation. It was also to make a case for their special significance, to persuade others that they did indeed hold a unique place in the Chinese cultural tradition. Finally, writing commentary on the newly canonized texts was opportunity to reconcile and integrate the five diverse works, and to demonstrate their fundamental harmony and unity, the coherence of their message” Daniel K. Gardner, “Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, No. 2 (1998): 409-410; Benjamin A. Elman, “Philosophy (*I-li*) versus Philology (*K’ao-cheng*): The *Jen-hsin Tao-hsin* Debate,” *T’oung Pao* 69, No. 4/5 (1983): 175-222.

¹⁵⁵ What would later become particularly problematic part of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, was that it understood the continuous change of the real world with the fixed idea of principle. “These features of Neo-Confucianism made it useful in leading the world in an intended direction but at the same time it posed a great danger of making it a tool to regulate reality. Another problem was that it tried to explain what was going in the world in terms of the relations between principle and material force, which was purely speculative concept that were removed from reality. Therefore without intentionally injecting the notion of statecraft, Neo-Confucianism was in danger of slipping into an empty system of thought separated from reality.” Noh Daehwan, “The Eclectic Development of Neo-Confucianism and Statecraft from the 18th to the 19th Century,” *Korea Journal* 43, No. 4 (2003): 88-89.

¹⁵⁶ See footnote #12

¹⁵⁷ Siu-chi Huang, *Essentials of Neo-Confucianism: Eight Major Philosophers of the Song and Ming Periods* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999): 4.

Confucians' predecessor Hán Yù,¹⁵⁸ they attacked Buddhists for their lack of morality, their privileged land-ownership status, and their disrespect toward earthly/imperial government.¹⁵⁹ Lastly, Neo-Confucians confronted Buddhists from the stand point of their nihilistic metaphysical inclination and their negative attitude toward life and society in general.¹⁶⁰ Although the Neo-Confucian “debate” was generally understood as a critique of Buddhist spirituality and practices, it also generated the syncretization effects amongst their own philosophy.

The process of syncretization of Buddhist and Confucian ideas into forming a new Neo-Confucian philosophical discourse came as a gradual but strong movement. In the same way as Hán Yù was regarded as one who “initiated” negative reactions toward Buddhism and occupied the extreme end of anti-Buddhist polemics in the spectrum in the Buddho-Confucian debate, Zhou Dunyi [周敦頤] (1017-1073)¹⁶¹ strove to incorporate many Buddhist (and Daoist) elements into Confucian teachings.¹⁶² With the rise of Neo-Confucianism, the need to redefine a foundation of metaphysical premises

¹⁵⁸ For an additional interesting view on the work of Han Yu and Li Ao see James R. Hightower's, “Han Yu as Humorist,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44, No. 1 (1984): 5-27; and T. H. Barrett's, *Li Ao: Buddhist, Daoist or Neo-Confucian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁵⁹ Many scholars consider Han Yu as predecessor of Neo-Confucianism. W. Theodore de Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and Learning of the Mind-and Heart* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981): 108.

¹⁶⁰ Brook, *Praying for Power*, 60.

¹⁶¹ Renowned as one of the five great masters of Neo-Confucianism in the Song, Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) attempts to answer the question of ethical antagonism within human beings using the notion of polarity between yin and yang as already preserved in the classical Confucian work of the *Yijing* (*The Book of Changes*), and borrowing and combining at the same time the appropriate metaphysical elements found in the teachings of Daoism and Buddhism. Robin R. Wang, “Zhou Dunyi's Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained (*Taijiyu Shuo*): A Construction of the Confucian Metaphysics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, No. 3 (2005): 315.

¹⁶² Julia Ching, “Zhu Xi and Daoism,” in *Meeting of the Minds: Intellectual and Religious Interaction in East Asian Traditions of Thought*, edited by Irene Bloom and Joshua A. Fogel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 108-115.

and to construct universal Confucian ethics was stronger than ever before.¹⁶³ Cheng Yi [程頤] (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi [朱熹] (1130-1200)¹⁶⁴ continued to build on the foundation that Zhou Dunyi laid, carefully selecting the elements of non-Confucian cosmologies and metaphysics creating a “coherent view that concentrated as much on the spiritual cultivation of the self as the perfection of moral duty.”¹⁶⁵ Building on these foundational premises Chinese scholars in the Ming, once again when harmonious existence became questionable, openly challenged and adapted their own ideas according to the modes of syncretization in order to pursue what they thought was lost or perceived as in need of harmonization .

4.2 Circumstances that Contributed to the Crisis in the Ming

4.2.1 Political and Economic Circumstances

In spite of the short life of the Yuan dynasty [元朝] (1271-1368), this government had an immense impact on the lives of the Han people, not only because it brought up unseen brutality and devastation, but most importantly, it intensified the aspiration for political unity and harmony for all Chinese. After almost two decades of

¹⁶³ Rodney L. Taylor, “Neo-Confucian Sagehood and the Religious Dimension,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 2, No. 4 (1975): 395-396.

¹⁶⁴ Large volumes of writing were done on the philosophy of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi who are considered to be creators of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. It is interesting that although highly criticizing Buddhism, the Cheng brothers believed in the possibility of “re-creation of the transformative powers of the classical sages” developed by the influences of Buddhist teachings of the knowledge/understanding transmission – “I [one of his disciples] had been in the school of Mingdao [Cheng Hao] from early on and I am able to free myself, for he transforms all whom he passes by”. Tu Weiming, *Confucian Spirituality*, 59; Syncretic tendencies in the work of Zhu Xi were, similarly to the case of Hân Yü, at the first glance less visible. He critiques Chan’s notion of “transmission from mind to mind – outside the scriptures”, by promoting the imperatives of the textual traditions, practicality, and reformation of old classical texts as a guide in the spiritual conquest, similar to what other Buddhist schools have used as their critique of Chan. Tu Weiming, 77.

¹⁶⁵ Brook, 57.

constant peasant rebellions and famine, which escalated into a full scale civil war, a once poor and uneducated farmer Zhū Yuánzhāng [朱元璋], after obtaining necessary military power, and became the ruler of a new all-Chinese dynasty as emperor Hóngwǔ dì [洪武帝]. The name of this new dynasty - *Míng* [明] characterized a new beginning, which came as an important result of a long desired successful protection of China's Northern borders. At the same time the name of the new dynasty - *Míng* was a product of syncretization itself; it refers to its Confucian strong prominence as “bright, clear, and knowledgeable”; however, it was also influenced by a non-Confucian, and for some deeply heretical connection to sectarian *Móní Jiào*'s [摩尼教] belief in “conquest of light over darkness”.¹⁶⁶ With the rise of a new dynasty, fourteenth century China had entered one of its greatest periods of social and political stability, a time of prosperity and cultural splendor.¹⁶⁷ This period was also remembered as a period of grand innovations,¹⁶⁸ flourishing maritime exploration,¹⁶⁹ fast commercial development and

¹⁶⁶ *Móní Jiào* [摩尼教] or Manichaeism was a somewhat influential variance of a Gnostic belief that originated in Persia in the third century. The influence of its teachings spread all along the Roman Empire, eventually reaching China sometime in the sixth century. In the later period their belief was closely connected with the Buddhist White Lotus Society which instigated the first in a series of riots against the Yüan Dynasty, the predecessor of the Ming. John W. Dardess, “The Transformation of Messianic Revolt and the Foundation of the Ming Dynasty,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, No. 3 (1970): 539-540.

¹⁶⁷ The level of prosperity in the society often correlates with the investment in their cultural status for the majority of their populace. The early Ming was described just like that, a society where the ordinary people enjoyed many of the once perceived privileges of the aristocracy. In an interesting article Grant Shen describes the cultural richness of this period, for some scholars compared with much later Elizabethan times in England, as a time of renaissance and the development of new ideas in arts and sciences. Grant Shen, “Acting in the Private Theatre of the Ming Dynasty,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 15, No. 1 (1998): 64-86; In his article Lee describes the growth of *wénrén* or “literary men” (literati class) in this period and the overall heightened interest and patronage of art. Sherman E. Lee, “Literati and Professionals: Four Ming Painters,” *The Bulletin of Cleveland Museum* 53, No. 1 (1966): 2-7.

¹⁶⁸ Some of the best-known products of Ming technological advances were porcelain, technology for making high quality bronze and steel (especially used in the production of weaponry), advances in printing, timekeeping, shipbuilding, and agricultural technology. Raymond Chang, “The Renaissance of Book Arts in the Ming Period,” *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)* 16, No. 3 (1981): 501;

¹⁶⁹ China's maritime economy flourished and reached an unprecedented level of prosperity in this period. Edward L. Dreyer in his book *Zheng He* describes in detail the maritime economy of the early Ming

rise of power of the merchant class,¹⁷⁰ increased longevity in the general populace and a rapid growth of population and urbanization,¹⁷¹ massively expensive government projects,¹⁷² and unparalleled openness to cosmopolitanism and egalitarianism generally endorsed by the imperial administration.¹⁷³ It seemed, at least for almost half of the century, that China had reached and successfully sustained “the will of Heaven”, by which it was granted a gift of harmony. The first indication of potential new political and social troubles were seen when the initial “openness” of the Ming imperial government toward foreign ideas, which were welcomed during the reign of the first two emperors Hongwu and Yongle [永樂皇帝] (1360-1424), came to an abrupt political closure. The imperial house released of their duties all foreign emissaries, as well as the majority of non-Han ministries, suspended all overseas travel, and gave a

period. He compares the best European vessels with those made by the Chinese shipbuilders, to conclude that the latter ones were at least five times larger, and “probably the largest wooden ships ever built”. Dreyer focuses on the seven Chinese voyages to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean led by the Muslim admiral eunuch Zheng He, who led a fleet of hundreds of ships and over ten thousand men. He also argues that the primary motive for these explorations was to bring the distant states into the Ming tributary system. Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007); Graeme Lang, “Geography as Destiny?,” *Science New Series* 288, No. 5468 (2000): 982-983.

¹⁷⁰ Richard von Glahn, “Municipal Reform and Urban Social Conflict in Late Ming Jiangnan,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50, No. 2 (1990): 280.

¹⁷¹ The budding influence of the merchant class in the Ming, according to Joanne Smith, although poorly documented primarily for the reason of inherited boundaries of social hierarchy, was evident through their contribution to the overall economy, sciences and art. The social restrictions prevented these educated men who were otherwise fully capable of managing economic affairs, to be considered superior to those of peasants. According to the lines of social hierarchy in the Ming, the scholars stood at the top, while merchants, argued by Joanna Handlin Smith, who were their direct competitors, were ranked at the bottom, only surpassing the butchers and prostitutes. Joanna F. Handlin Smith, “Social Hierarchy and Merchant Philanthropy as Perceived in Several Late Ming and Early Qing Texts,” *Journal of the Economics and Social History of the Orient*, 41, No. 3 (1998): 421; Frederic Wakeman Jr., “Boundaries of the Public Sphere in Ming and Qing China,” *Daedalus* 127, No. 3 (1998): 167-189.

¹⁷² Peter C. Perdue, “Official Goal and Local Interests: Water Control in the Dongting Lake Region During the Ming and Qing Periods,” *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41, No. 4 (1982): 747-765; K. T. Wu and Wu Kuang Ch’ing, “Ming Printing and Printers,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 7, No. 3 (1943): 203-260; Yu Zhuoyun, trans. by Ng Mao-Sang, *Palaces of the Forbidden City* (New York: Viking Press, 1984).

¹⁷³ It is argued that government openness and egalitarianism that was manifested by the employment of talented people irrespective of their linguistic, ethnic, or religious views, which defined government policy in the early Ming, was inherited from the previous Mongol rule. Bulliet, 363.

full and undisclosed power to high class Confucian intelligentsia. This accelerated shift toward absolutism and the emergence of stronger arbitrary exercise of the state power continued, with varying intensity, until the fall of the dynasty.

What was perceived only five decades ago as an indication of stability and prosperity, the grandeur project such as reconstruction and modernization of the Grand Canal, the building of the Forbidden City and the development of urban centers, now was seen as a source of non-substantiated government spending and with it came a general discontent among the people. While the extravagant expenditures continued to rise, two additional factors that affect any country's stability became evident – the expansion of already large and expensive government administration and a drawback in the number of military troops. Although the decrease of the military would in other cases seem to relieve the imperial treasury, in this period it only caused further social instability because once highly trained and well paid Ming soldiers were forced into banditry and piracy along China's coast lines and in the region of the Grand Canal, which was a major traveling connection and the link from the rich revenue-producing provinces of south China and the capital.¹⁷⁴

The administration throughout the Ming period was dominated by civil service officials or *wénguān* [文官], which were classified in nine grades, each grade subdivided into two additional classes; extending from top first class - *zhèng yī pǐn* [正一品] to one all the way on the bottom or *cóng jiǔ pǐn* [從九品].¹⁷⁵ All members of the Ming government apparatus received salaries in correlation to their ranks, and were

¹⁷⁴ David M. Robinson, "Banditry and the Subversion of State Authority in China: The Capital Region during the Middle Ming Period (1420-1525)," *Journal of Social History* 33, No. 3 (2000): 527-563.

¹⁷⁵ Charles O. Hucker, "Government Organization in the Ming," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958): 13-15.

paid partly in rice and partly in silver. What was once a brilliant idea of how to fill the imperial coffers with highly needed silver, accredited to Hongwu's decision to replace paper money with silver for all tax payments and commerce, now further drained the imperial treasury by creating an increasingly expensive bureaucratic system.¹⁷⁶ The usual recruitment of civil service agents through the well known examination system was modified sometime in the mid fifteenth century to allow the recruitment of officials through purchase, allowing those who were in charge on the local and provincial level to be bribed, and generally to choose those whose intellectual and administrative ability was questionable.¹⁷⁷

The rapid pace of commercial growth and urbanization brought forward yet another element that would contribute to the crisis of the Ming period. The economic tensions were building up between the top, alleged as "unproductive" strata, and the bottom-class of merchants. This evolved in the later years of the dynasty into an unprecedented series of urban protests in the commercial centers of China.¹⁷⁸ These protests would escalate into full scale campaigns once this now strong class of

¹⁷⁶ The number of functioning civil officials multiplied repeatedly throughout the Ming period. The exact statistics are often debated, in his argument Hucker states that "it appears reasonable that in the latter half of the Ming period the number of official bureaucracy lay between 10,000 and 15,000. Recruitment through examinations was initiated at the beginning of the dynasty, suspended in 1373, and restored in 1384. It flourished thereafter, coming to be the supreme system of recruitment. Through adherence to the famous eight-legged essay style, the form of the examination became perhaps more rigid than in any preceding dynasty. The grand competition or *dàbǐ* [大比] was conducted every third year in three stages. First there were provincial examinations in the provincial capitals and, in the cases of the metropolitan areas, in Beijing and Nanking. Some were students in the National University and in the local schools who had completed their studies there, but entirely private scholars appear to have comprised a steadily increasing proportion. Those who successfully passed the provincial examinations were qualified to participate in a metropolitan examination. Those who passed this reassembled shortly thereafter for a palace examination nominally conducted by the Emperor. All were generally assured civil service careers." Hucker, 14

¹⁷⁷ "As a rule, whenever the government encountered a financial or military crisis, it was proclaimed that persons who contributed rice or horses to the state might be admitted as special students to the National University and thence, ultimately into the civil service." While some scholars argue that this practice had very little effect on the functioning bureaucracy, and served merely to confer honorific status on contributors, it further produced a societal unbalance. Hucker, 15.

¹⁷⁸ Von Glahn, 280.

bourgeoisie in China entered into a period of pre-capitalism in the Qing dynasty.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, the rapid growth of wealth that the merchant class experienced starting from the early Ming period and their constant conflict with the intelligentsia also produced an unusual symbiosis of the two classes. Prosperous families, especially in the region of Jiangnan [江南], (an area enclosing the present-day Shanghai) used their immense profit to become unprecedented benefactors of art and sponsors of academies which were centers of new philosophical debates of the time, and this brought them into contact with the intelligentsia class who traditionally patronized these activities.¹⁸⁰

In the beginning the Ming dynasty was considered as one of the most prosperous, politically and militarily advanced, and openly cosmopolitan Chinese society. However, only a half century later, the signs of insularism and corruption had contributed to the political and economic crisis in the Ming that would eventually lead to the downfall of the dynasty.

¹⁷⁹ Although the brewing of discontent among the class of bourgeoisie would be more significant in the Qing period, and this is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note that the root of this resentment began sometime earlier, and ultimately contributed to the overall crisis in Ming. Additional interesting material on this subject could be found in the work of the following authors, R. Bin Wong, "Food Riots in the Qing Dynasty," *Journal of the Asian Studies* 41, No. 4 (1982): 767-788; Joseph Fewsmith, "From Guild to Interest Group: The Transformation of Public and Private in Late Qing China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, No. 4 (1983): 617-640; Hsu Wen-Chin, "Social and Economic Factors in the Chinese Porcelain Industry in Jingdezhen During the Late Ming and Early Qing Period ca.1620-1683," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1988): 135-159.

¹⁸⁰ During this period prosperous regions such as Jiangnan (a region of about three hundred kilometers around present-day Shanghai) bore a class of merchants whose wealth enabled them to bridge the gap between the material and intellectual worlds. The merchants began to be involved with the publishing industry and the sponsorship of academies where the groundwork of political and philosophical discourse was formatted. In this period the rise of private academies, founded and built to honor individual Neo-Confucian philosophers, similar to those which rose in the late Song period (960-1278), thrived again. Larger groups of eminent literati were located in the area along the lower Yangtze River, also in Jiangnan, and they devoted themselves to philosophical contemplation. These academies would be later known for their stance against literati politics of the Ming court that prevailed in Beijing. Von Glahn, 299-303.

4.2.2 Religious Circumstances (Focus on Christianity and Islam)

While the imperial court was closing their dialogue with all subjects who they perceived as “foreign”, this act forced the members of the intellectual elite to search for the source of stability and positive values within other previously present traditions in China. This was especially important for those who professed Christianity¹⁸¹ and Islam,¹⁸² the traditions that had already established their roots in China in the past

¹⁸¹ The history of Christianity in China began when the first Nestorian missionaries came from Syria, across central Asia, sometime in the seventh century. The first date that connects Nestorians to present-day China was found on a large pillar in Sian dated 671 marking the existence of the first known Christian community in China. It is highly doubtful that this community had any Chinese members at this time, because as Morton Fried argues, Nestorian missionary activities were primarily directed to communities of foreign merchants, predominantly Persians and Arabs. Morton H. Fried, “Reflection on Christianity in China,” *American Ethnologist* 14, No. 1 (1987): 96.

¹⁸² According to Dai Kangsheng the introduction of Islam to China is shrouded under a veil of mystery. There are several different historical and inscriptional records in existence today that document this event. The earliest date depicted on the tablets, according to Kangsheng, shows that Islam first arrived in China between the period 600-610 during the Sui dynasty, a time when the Prophet Muhammad was still alive. This date is strongly contested in Western academia, mainly because of a presumption that the message of Islam was not formed yet. The next few dates are set in the Tang Dynasty in the span of thirty five years, from 618 to 651. The date that the majority of scholars agree to be the most reliable was in the fall of the year 651, when the envoy sent by the Third caliph ‘Uthmān was received by the Tang emperor Gaozong. Soon after, in the year 757 on the special request of the emperor Suzong, a larger regiment of Arab soldiers were sent to China in order to help with the suppression of the An Lushan rebellion. In the period of stability that followed the period of civil war, several thousands of Abbasid veterans were allowed to settle in China. In addition, a significant number of Arab and Persian merchants, who came via the land route or by the sea, started to organize Muslim communities dispersed in the far Western region, and in Eastern coastal areas of China. They would become the forefathers of “Hui,” or the first “Chinese Muslim” ethnic minority. While Islam was initially named as *Dashi fa*, “law of the Arabs”, it was later accepted as *Huihui Jiao* or the “Religion of the Huihui.” The term “Hui” originated from the Mandarin word “Huihui,” a term first used in the [Yuan dynasty](#) to describe Central Asian, Persian, and Arab settlers in China. Donald Daniel Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China* (Canberra: College of Advanced Education, 1986): 40; Sachiko Murata, *Wang Tai-yü’s ‘Great Learning of the Pure and Real’ and Liu Chih’s ‘Displaying Concealment of the Real Realm’* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000):13; Mark Hudson, “Religion and Ethnicity in Chinese Islam,” *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 8, No. 1 (1987): 156.

several centuries. Both of these traditions, although present in China for some time, had very little impact on the religio/philosophical discourse of the Han Chinese. With Christianity in general, the missionary objective was focused on the work among uneducated and impoverished, communities of minorities, where commonly people were more willing to accept non-traditional beliefs.¹⁸³ For this reason, the most prominent group of missionaries in China by this time were Franciscan friars, whose vows of poverty only enhanced their practice of so called “limited evangelization” mainly in the infringed Chinese communities.¹⁸⁴ The first steps to change such a practice were made during the earlier Yuan period, and were instigated by friar John of Pian de Carpine (1180-1262) and friar John of Monte Corvino (1294-1328)¹⁸⁵ who closely interacted with the members of provincial governments, courts and emperors of the time. In the later Ming, simultaneously as the crisis was developing in the overall Chinese society, Christian missionary activity now lead by the Jesuit Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606),¹⁸⁶ would bring forward an interesting example of syncretic tendencies. As appointee Superior of Jesuit missions in the Far East he was well aware that in order to reach similar results to those seen with the conversion of ancient Rome, he needed a close relationship with Chinese power structure, in this case Confucian literati, so he strived to, first, ensure that missionaries were perceived as culturally

¹⁸³ The practice by which Christian missionaries tended to devote their attention to minority peoples was closely followed in many overseas countries including China. The term “rice-bowl Christians”, describing those who converted in order to receive some material benefits was a known phenomenon in many parts of Asia. Nicholas Tapp, “The Impact of Missionary Christianity upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, No. 1 (1989): 70.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph S. Sebes, “China’s Jesuit Century,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 2, No. 1 (1978):174.

¹⁸⁵ Livarius Oliger, “Franciscan Pioneers among the Tartars,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 16, No. 3 (1930): 261, 265.

¹⁸⁶ By the time of the later Ming dynasty the most influential Christian group in China were Portuguese Jesuits who were known to be more perceptive to adaptations and interpretations of their doctrine than were Franciscans and Dominicans who were predominant in China in prior centuries. “As scholars, the Jesuits had a natural affinity with the literati and educated officials, whose influence would afford the missionaries a measure of protection.” Sebes 174.

equal,¹⁸⁷ and second, to “de-emphasize” the mystical aspects of Catholic doctrine to avoid being labeled in the same group as Daoists. The Jesuits masterfully and cautiously gave importance to learning and self-enrichment over complex religious dogma, simply to avoid conflicts. They clearly attempted to correlate the Chinese perception of ethical action and social life with those similarly found in Christianity. It is interesting that while the Christianity of Medieval ages was full of mystical elements, yet the Jesuits were more willing to connect with the classical Confucian teachings. By “condemning the adulterated later version, which, unfortunately, had been official doctrine for 600 years”, they were ultimately bound to bring themselves into a conflict with Neo-Confucian intellectuals, which only intensified the philosophical debate of this period.¹⁸⁸

Similar to the emphasis of Christians to come closer to the source of Chinese authority, the visibility of the Muslim presence in China, from the time of the 13th century onward, was also seen by their active presence in the local and provincial administration, and involvement in the philosophical and intellectual debates of the time.¹⁸⁹ After the death of the second emperor of the Ming and the drastic turn in the

¹⁸⁷ Sebes writes, “The Chinese generally regarded the Europeans as little better than the Japanese pirates who periodically ravaged the kingdom’s coastline ... Valignano believed that the Chinese would respond better to a show of respect than to self-righteousness. Intensely proud of their ancient culture and holding intellectual accomplishment in high esteem, the Chinese, he felt, would be impressed by Jesuit scholars who accommodated themselves to the Chinese way of life. Accordingly, he insisted that his missionaries ‘Sinicize’ themselves by obtaining sound knowledge of the Chinese language and the Confucian classics - something no European missionaries had done before.” By the time when Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was getting ready to sail for China, the Catholic clergy were encouraged to undergo intensive training in Chinese language, manners, and customs. Ricci even took a Chinese name (Li Ma-tou) and wore the robes of a Buddhist monk to indicate that he was a man of God. It is interesting to note that later, after he learned who was on the top level of the Chinese social hierarchy, he switched his robe to a Mandarin, the robe of Confucian literati. Sebes, 176.

¹⁸⁸ Sebes, 176.

¹⁸⁹ It is worth mentioning that thousands of Muslims were relocated during the Yuan dynasty in order to aid in the administrative duties of the empire. Murata, 17; In the centuries that followed, the essential commerce relationship between the East and West along the 6 500 kilometer Silk Route became exclusively governed by Arabs; some of these Muslim entrepreneurs by the time of the Song dynasty established their place and held some of the highest ranks among government officials in the court. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, 10th to 14th century, China witnessed the great Islamic “organic

character of Chinese internal and external diplomacy, this shift in the political ideology had significant consequences in the life of the Muslim community. The Muslims in China who were descended from earlier immigration began to feel the consequences of syncretization by themselves increasingly adopting various characters of Chinese culture. Mosque architecture began to follow traditional Chinese architecture, and dress and customs appeared to be more sinicized. The last portion of the Ming dynasty reign generally was perceived as a distinctive point in Chinese history that marked the time when Chinese-Muslim relations would gradually decline.¹⁹⁰

Similar to the political and economic circumstances which contributed to the material crisis of the dynastic house of Ming, the increased religio/philosophical debate of this period, showed unsettledness in the intellectual sphere. The whole intellectual debate was focused on the two main aspects, enforcing the stronger boundaries between the tradition and foreign ideas, and reinterpretation of the state Confucian orthodoxy. Considering that Wang Yangming grew up under these circumstances, the powerful syncretic tendencies undoubtedly played an important role in the development of his thought.

Chapter Five: Wang Yangming's Approach to Harmony – Redefining the Old Tradition by Modes of Syncretization and Inclusive Reinterpretation of Previously Contested Buddhist and Daoist Ideas

proselytization” when thousands of Chinese converted to Islam. Hudson argues that the organic nature of their evangelism was not understood in the nominal sense of “come and conquer” by mass of soldiers or missionaries, but was rather achieved as a secondary aim, as the primary goal was still profit and commerce.

¹⁹⁰ Chang-Kuan Lin, “Three Eminent Chinese ‘Ulama’ of Yunnan,” *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 11, No. 1 (1990): 101.

The uniqueness of Wang Yangming's philosophy was often closely connected with the following historic and philosophical developments. First, the initial "openness" of the Ming government apparatus toward foreign influences (this was true during the reign of the first two emperors Hongwu and Yongle) came to an abrupt political closure forcing the members of the intellectual elite to search for the source of stability and positive ideologies within the by then indigenous traditions. Second, two previously fallen dynastic houses, Tang and Yuan, were in close connection with Daoists, in the case of the former, and Muslim and Buddhist ideologies, in the case of the latter, giving Confucian philosophy an increasingly strong credibility. Third, after a close encounter with foreign teachings of Islam and Christianity, the Confucian literati were more willing to critically adapt the elements of the now not-so-foreign traditions of Daoism and Buddhism. Fourth, Neo-Confucian ideology was slowly developed from the 11th century onward through the work of several influential philosophers, Zhu Xi, the Cheng brothers [程頤, 程灝], Zhang Zai [張載], Lu Xiangshan [陆象山], etc. and these scholars' ideas contributed to the development of a more mature Neo-Confucian perspective present in Wang Yangming's thought. Fifth, the uniqueness of Wang Yangming's philosophy by and large coincided with more than a millennia long process of syncretization within Chinese tradition that actively sought to incorporate elements from Daoism and Buddhism. For these reasons I wish to look into Wang Yangming's philosophy through the lenses of syncretization while I argue for the presence of stronger forces of syncretization that were producing "accretion-philosophies" closely corresponding with the time of crisis, and as a mark of the times in which Wang Yangming lived.

5.1 Life of Wang Yangming

Most of the existing biographical records on Wang Yangming are taken from two sources. One was his official career biography entitled *The Biography of Master Wang Yangming* or *Wáng Yángmíng xiānsheng xíng zhuàng* [王陽明先生行狀], and the other was written by one of his most trusted disciples Qian Dehong [錢德洪] in the text entitled *Chronological Biography* or *Niánpǔ* [年譜]. According to renewed historian Máo Jīlíng [毛奇齡] (1623-1716) several narratives found in the *Niánpǔ* should be considered hagiographical.¹⁹¹ As many scholars who study the philosophy of Wang Yangming agree, his teachings were a solid example of how the power of syncretization could influence the development of someone's belief; however, the portrait of Wang Yangming's life is a good model of how the power of syncretization worked in a smaller and distinctive period of time, making his ideas fluid and continuously responding to particular circumstances in his life. It is important to note that this project will revisit only crucial events in the life of Wang Yangming.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Tu Weiming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action*, 62.

¹⁹² For a more detailed biography of Wang Yangming see Tu Weiming's, Carsun Chang's and Wing-tsit Chan's partial translation of *Wáng Yángmíng xiānsheng xíng zhuàng* and *Niánpǔ* in their works: *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yangming's Youth (1472-1509)*, *Wang Yangming: Idealist Philosopher of Sixteenth-Century China*, and "Wang Yangming: A Biography".

Wang Shouren [王 守仁],¹⁹³ later better known as Wang Yangming, was born on October 31st, 1472 in Yuyao in Zhejiang province. He was born into a high ranking official family; his father Wang Hua [王花] served as a minister in several different positions, including the post of Minister of Personnel in Nanjing. By the age of four he was still unable to speak, however, once the “gates” of his mouth were opened, he grew up constantly questioning the world around him. At age ten he joined his father in Beijing, and although still not enrolled in formal education, he was able to astonish the members of the court during a formal banquet, as he composed the following poem,

When the mountain is near and the moon at a great distance
You find that the moon is small.
You express this by saying: ‘The Mountain is greater than the moon.’
But if a man’s eyes were as vast as heaven
He would feel that the mountain is small and the moon is great.¹⁹⁴

He began his schooling by the age of eleven, and he was known to express very unorthodox ideas to his tutors. The following narrative summarizes one of them. Once when Wang inquired about the ‘first accomplishment of every man’, and it was answered that this must be ‘the passing of the State examinations’, he doubted and promptly rejected this answer. After thinking for a second, Wang answered that the first stage in the accomplishment of every man should be ‘to become a sage’. Even though he was laughed at for his answer, he never seemed to fail in questioning the prevailing views of the time and to lose this goal of becoming a great man.

¹⁹³ Wang Yangming was given several names during his life, a courtesy name Bo'an [伯安], a title Xinjianbo [新建伯], and a posthumous one, Wang Wenchengong [王文成公].

¹⁹⁴ Carsun Chang, *Wang Yangming: Idealist Philosopher of Sixteenth-Century China* (New York: St. John’s University Press, 1970): 2.

In the few following years, Wang Yangming was occupied by thorough studies of the classical Confucian texts, and, as Wing-tsit Chan claims, he “stronger exhibited a developing spirit of adventure and questioning of orthodox beliefs, characteristics that help to explain his future turbulent political career and dynamic thinking.”¹⁹⁵ In 1489, at age sixteen, Wang was encouraged to marry a young girl from Nanchang in Jiangxi province. While everybody expected that he would, at least for his wedding night, loose his intellectual curiosity, he spent it engaged in deep conversation about the sustenance of life with a Daoist master.¹⁹⁶

One of the most significant individuals in his early life was Lou Liang [楼亮] (1422-1491), an elderly Neo-Confucian scholar, who would be merited with interesting young Wang Yangming in a close study of the Song Confucian teachings, especially Zhu Xi’s concept of *gewu* [格物] or *Investigation of Things*.¹⁹⁷ Both texts, the *Xíng zhuàng* and the *Niánpǔ* agree that Wang Yangming’s relationship with Lou Liang, although short (he would die only two years shortly after their first encounter), would be one of the turning points in the developments of his philosophy. Chan speculates that it was probably during Wang’s visit to his father in Beijing in 1492 that he, for the first time, seriously experimented with Zhu Xi’s theory of *gewu*. Using what he thought the codes of the investigation of things were, he sat in front of a bamboo plant for days in an attempt to discern its principle, only to become seriously ill.¹⁹⁸ His disappointment

¹⁹⁵ Wing-tsit Chan, “Wang Yangming: A Biography,” *Philosophy East and West* 22, No. 1 (1972): 63.

¹⁹⁶ Wing-tsit Chan, “Chan Jo-shui’s Influence on Wang Yangming,” *Philosophy East and West* 23, 1/2, Proceedings of East-West Philosophers’ Conference on Wang Yang-ming (Jan. - Apr., 1973):

¹⁹⁷ A more close analysis of this concept will be given in the section on “Essence of Wang Yangming’s Neo-Confucian Thought.”

¹⁹⁸ According to Zhu Xi the Principle or *li* of any thing is the all-perfect form or supreme archetype of that thing. Furthermore, all the myriad things of the universe are manifestations of a single Principle, and this Principle is the essence of morality. By realization of a principle of one particular thing, this would lead to

after the failure to “discover” the Principle led him to experiment with Daoist techniques for longevity and various Buddhist meditative practices, while extensively reading and studying their sacred texts.¹⁹⁹ His interest in Buddhist and Daoist practices extensively continued for almost a decade, during which time he visited their communities, spoke with masters and participated in their rituals. However, after passing his highest examinations and being appointed to the Ministry of Works in 1499, his intellectual curiosity was steered back in the direction of Confucianism. This change was instigated by his encounter with a Chan monk who had been sitting in silence with his eyes closed for three years. Although he reacted, as he admits, as a result of his disappointment and doubt for the monk’s effectiveness in the “investigation of things”, he used the same didactic tools of shouting and ridicule to address the monk as are often exercised by Chan Buddhist masters. He screamed, “What does this monk say so noisily all day, and what does he see with his eyes wide open all day?”²⁰⁰ This example shows how the modes of syncretization were working in a very subtle way in the life of Wang Yangming on an everyday basis.

In the next decade Wang worked in the court administration in the capacity of several different positions, from Ministry of Justice, where, due to his diligence and honest work he was able to correct numerous wrongly accused cases; Ministry of Education, where he was appointed to stop the corruption in the provincial examination in Shandong province; and later in the Ministry of War, where his intelligence and extraordinary military strategy was particularly noticed.

the understanding of the Principle, and ultimately to an understanding of moral principles that would result in harmony within family, society, and peace under Heaven.

¹⁹⁹ Wing-tsit Chan, “How Buddhist is Wang Yangming,” *Philosophy East and West* 12, No. 3 (1962): 206.

²⁰⁰ Chan, “How Buddhist is Wang Yangming?”, 206.

Sometime in 1505 Wang Yangming began to receive his first followers, whom he gave lectures on the need to “make up their minds to become Confucian sages”.²⁰¹ The next critical event in his life occurred in 1506. A new emperor Zhengde [正德] who was only fifteen at the time, and who was closely controlled by the influential eunuch Liu Jin [劉瑾] was a target of a coup led by one of the high officials. Knowing the affairs of the court and corruption that was overflowing the majority of the ministries, Wang sided with those who were accusing Liu Jin. As a result he was beaten with forty strokes, imprisoned for three months, and then he was banished to the Northwestern part of Guizhou province very narrowly escaping death. It was said that the Daoist recommended diet and Buddhist-influenced meditative practices were what helped him survive his ordeal.²⁰²

Wang Yangming’s exile lasted only for three years but it left deep physical, mental, and spiritual consequences on him. He was stationed in extremely poor and primitive conditions, surrounded by indigenous people whose language he could not speak. “His subordinates frequently fell sick, and although himself in weak health, he was the one who drew water, gathered fuel, and did the cooking often cheering them up by his singing.”²⁰³ It was under these harsh conditions and hardship that his enlightenment occurred. One night, surrounded by silence under millions of stars, in a moment, the same as Buddhists who promoted the notion of sudden enlightenment, he came upon a realization. To investigate things, he argued, should not be done externally, looking into the actual perception of reality, but instead to “perceive” them within one’s

²⁰¹ Chan, *A Biography*, 64.

²⁰² Michael M. Pophoff, “The Ethics of Knowledge and Action in Postmodern Organizations,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 14 (2007): 5.

²⁰³ Chan, *A Biography*, 65.

own mind, because the principles of reality *are* part of the mind. “His doctrine was as new as it was revolutionary.”²⁰⁴ From that day onward he was an active promoter of the idealist branch of Chinese philosophy.

After the death of Liu Jin, Wang Yangming returned to Beijing in 1511, received an imperial audience, and then was transferred to the Ministry of Justice in Nanjing. The years 1513-1519 are considered to be the years most heavily occupied with numerous material affairs of the state. However, he had not overlooked the needs of his students. The number of his followers was increasing daily, and he was often surrounded by hundreds of students participating in philosophical debates on “man’s original nature as well as the practice of sitting in quiet meditation;” all with one goal in mind - to improve their moral character.²⁰⁵ In his debates he continuously discussed the positions of Daoism and Buddhism saying,

From youth I also was generously inclined toward two religions. I said to myself, ‘I have acquired their learning’ implying thereby that the doctrines of Confucius are not fully adequate. Later, while I lived in a distant part of the Empire among barbarous tribes for three years, I realized that though the learning of the sage is simple it is nevertheless profound. I then regretted that I had wasted my energy for thirty years. In general, it may be said that the excellences of the learning of the two religions constitute but a small portion of those of the sage.²⁰⁶

Although Wang Yangming understandably vocalizes the status of Confucianism as above then the teachings of Daoism and Buddhism, he is equally aware that some practices of these two traditions are valuable “constitutions of excellence”. What is even more important, and this hypothesis will be further analyzed in the section on

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Chan, A Biography, 65.

²⁰⁶ Taken from the *Instructions for Practical Life* in translation by Frederick Goodrich Henke, 131.

the influence of syncretization on his teachings, was that those who were subjected to these tendencies, as was the case of Wang Yangming, often involuntarily adapted to them, making the changes more subtle and elusive.

In 1519 Wang Yangming was instrumental in the defeat of the rebellion against Prince Zhu Zhenhao [朱宸濠] after only forty days. Any other conclusion of this event, as Hung-Lam Chu argues, “might have caused the end of the Ming dynasty,” therefore; Wang Yangming’s fame and influence on the court grew swiftly.²⁰⁷ While he could finally reap the fruits of his exceptional military talent, he focused the majority of his time and energy on social and political reforms as well as philosophy.²⁰⁸ After the death of his father in 1522, which had left him deeply shaken, and Wang became politically quiet. The years till his death in 1529 would be marked by his “supreme philosophical achievements”. These were also the years when criticism of him was in its zenith by those who supported Zhu Xi’s orthodoxy. However, the group of his close loyal followers, which included Wang Gen [王艮] (1483-1540), Qian Dehong, and sixty-eight year old prefect of Hunan [湖南] Dong Yun [董雲] who formally became his disciples in this period, helped him stay intellectually sharp in spite of his deteriorating

²⁰⁷ Hung-Lam Chu, “The Debate over Recognition of Wang Yangming,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, No. 1 (1988): 64.

²⁰⁸ Once he was appointed as governor of Jiangxi [江西] province he was able, in only a year and a half, to relieve the burden from extra taxation, repair the damage from the flood, and secure financial assistance for gifted students. Although he received for this remarkable achievement the title of Earl of Xinzheng [新郑], which included hereditary salary and certificate of exemption for his descendants from criminal punishment, he graciously declined all of them. Wang Yangming was also passionately interested in aiding the territories which were majorly populated with indigenous people, suggesting that peace would be only possible by having a local government with representatives of both parties, one a Chinese and the other a tribal chief. “The duty of these officials would be to show them how to live, and how to irrigate their fields. The local government should supply [them] with seeds, livestock, and agricultural implements, which should be returned, together with one-third of the harvest. Get more farmers to work uncultivated land; induce more merchants to come to trade; but take as low taxes as possible so that the people can maintain their accustomed worship, travel as usual, and meet all their living expenses.” Chan, 70, 72.

health.²⁰⁹ During these years he was able to enunciate his doctrine of *liang zhi* (innate knowledge), which he described as “the original substance of the mind”, “intelligent and clear”, and, if someone is sincere, it could result in both “understanding and action.”²¹⁰ Wang furthermore elaborated, in so called Four-Sentence Doctrine,

In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction between good and evil.

When the will becomes active, however, such distinction exists.

The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil.

The investigation of things is to do and remove evil.²¹¹

To explain his sentiments of how he felt after finally being able to vocalize his teachings, Wang used clear Buddhist jargon saying that “it was achieved after a hundred deaths and a thousand sufferings”²¹² Wang Yangming's most cited work *Inquiry into the Great Learning*, and a guide composed for his disciples, was written only a year before his death, and is considered to be a systematic formulation of his major doctrines.

In the last decade of his life he appealed to the court several times in order to be relieved of his administrative duties, for which he was refused each time. In late 1528 he was again called to take part in the military campaign in Jiangxi province, which would further weaken his already poor health. At this time, he once more requested his discharge, and without waiting for official response he started to travel

²⁰⁹ These are only but few examples how his understanding of universal attributions of humanity, and yet so beyond present Confucian hierarchical orthodoxy, could be applied in real society. Anne D. Birdwhistell, *Li Yong (1627-1707) and Epistemological Dimensions of Confucian Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 174.

²¹⁰ Chan, 71.

²¹¹ Chan summarizes his philosophical achievement saying, “the new concept [which] gave Chinese thought a different outlook and dynamic purpose. It shocked the Chinese intellectual community, but it also brought in fresh air.” Chan, 71.

²¹² *Ibid.*

back home. He never reached home and he died on January 9, 1529 in Jiangxi. Once his body returned to Yuyao, he was buried without honor, and his “false teachings” were severely prohibited.²¹³ Half a century later, through an imperial decree in 1584, Wang Yangming was honored and his tablet was placed in the Confucian temple, officially recognizing him as a patron enabled to receive sacrifices, which was an exceptional honor given only to most distinguished teachers such as Confucius and Mencius.

5.2 Essence of Wang Yangming’s Neo-Confucian Thought

Although Wang Yangming’s background is characterized by a solid Confucian predetermination, which directed his study from an early age, his mature writings could be defined as a religious and philosophical “collaboration” of different ideas. His teachings were initiated by his own newly formed perception towards syncretic tendencies that attempted to, directly or indirectly, link two or more polarized teachings.²¹⁴ Besides his interest in discourses with Daoist and Buddhist scholars, Wang Yangming responded to, in his opinion, particularly problematic parts of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, which understood the continuous change of the real world with the fixed idea of principle. The essential part of Wang’s philosophy could be summarized around two important concepts: *gewu* [格物] (*investigation of things*), and *liang zhi* [良知]

²¹³ Kandice Hauf, “‘Goodness Unbound’: Wang Yangming and Redrawing of the Boundary of Confucianism,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrine, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, edited by Kai-wing Chou, On-cho Wg and John B. Henderson (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999): 122.

²¹⁴ Baird, 147.

(*innate understanding*), which are indispensable for understanding of the “unity of knowledge and action”.²¹⁵

Wang Yangming’s teachings exemplified the School of Mind (*Xinxue*) by locating the Principle within the self, and by calling for an intuitive reliance upon one’s innate consciousness.²¹⁶ Wang calls this realization of the Principle *zhēnzhī* [真知] or *genuine or real knowledge* or simply *zhi* [知] *knowledge*, which is for him the ultimate goal of human rational existence.²¹⁷ David T. Tien goes on to say that this *knowledge* is for Wang “the highest kind of knowledge attainable, and in religious and moral spheres, the only kind worth living.”²¹⁸ According to Wang Yangming the acceptance and acquisition of *zhi* begins, not with a simple desire or will for having it, but rather with a pure state of selflessness. He states,

The ordinary man, however, is not free from the obstruction of self-centered ideas. He therefore requires the effort of the extension of knowledge or *zhìzhī* [致知] and the reflection of thought or investigation of things, *géwù* [格物] in order to overcome his self-centered ideas and recover *li* [理] (principle).

I wondered why it was that before making the will sincere there had to be the two further steps of extending knowledge and investigating things. Later I again personally realized that one must first be aware whether his will is sincere or not. I used as proof the fact that whenever Yen Hui [Confucius’s most virtuous pupil] did anything wrong, he never failed to realize it and,

²¹⁵ Wang Yangming’s philosophy offers a large number of interpretations, opinions, and detailed elaborations on many discourses present in the intellectual arena of the time, and for this reason it lies beyond the scope of this project, while only a portion of his philosophy will be analyzed.

²¹⁶ Chung-ying Cheng, “Unity and Creativity in Wang Yangming’s Philosophy of Mind,” *Philosophy East and West* 23, No. 1/2 (1973): 49-72; Lai Whalen W., “Wang Yangming’s Enlightenment and Hung Hsiu-Ch’uan’s Dream,” *Ching Feng* 35, No. 3/4 (2009): 200-212

²¹⁷ There are several concepts in Wang Yangming’s philosophy that include the notion of *knowledge*. These concepts are often contrasted with each other, *real knowledge* and *common knowledge*, *higher knowledge* and *sensory knowledge*, *applied knowledge* and *unapplied knowledge*, *knowledge acquired through personal realization* and *knowledge acquired through listening to discussions*. For further elaboration on this concepts, see A. S. Cua, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: A Study in Wang Yangming’s Moral Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1982) 7-16.

²¹⁸ David W. Tien, “Warranted Neo-Confucian Belief: Religious Pluralism and the Affections in the Epistemologies of Wang Yangming (1472-1529) and Alvin Plantinga,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 55, No. 1 (2004): 40.

having realized it, never did it again. I felt completely clear as though without a doubt. However, I still felt the task of investigating things (*gewu*) to be superfluous. Then upon further thinking, I realized that the human mind is intelligent and cannot fail to know whether one's will is good or evil. However, because it is obstructed by material (*wu*) desires [selfish desires for external things, it sometimes does not function freely], therefore it is necessary to purge (*ge*) the mind of material (*wu*) desire before one can resemble Yen Hui in never failing to realize the wrong things one does.²¹⁹

The concept of *gewu* is not Wang Yangming's creation, but is rather a highly employed notion used from the *Daxue* or *Great Learning* which says,

The perfecting of knowledge depends on the investigation of things, is this: If we wish to carry our knowledge to the utmost, we must investigate the principles of all things we come into contact with, for the intelligent mind of man is certainly formed to know, and there is not a single thing in which its principles do not adhere. But so long as all principles are not investigated, man's knowledge is incomplete.²²⁰

What is important to remember is that through the process of *investigation of things* all individuals acquire self-cultivation, which helps in the elimination of selfish desires. According to Philip J. Ivanhoe, the most widely used translation of *Daxue* done by Legge (also evident here), is based on Zhu Xi's commentary on the *Great Learning* where *ge* is transcribed to mean *reach*, while *wu* is understood as "something like *affair* (*shi*事)" producing a collective meaning of "to reach into the principles of things and affairs."²²¹ Wang completely rejects the meanings of *ge* and *wu* proposed by Zhu Xi. He argues that *wu* should be understood simply as *thing[s]* (objects and events of the

²¹⁹ Translation adopted from Chan, *Instructions*, p. 188 with minor modifications.

²²⁰ *Daxue*, 5.6.3 in translation by James Legge. <http://wengu.tartarie.com/wg/wengu.php?l=Daxue&s=6>.

²²¹ "Zhu Xi follows Chen Yi's interpretation of this expression. In one passage Chen Yi says, '*Ge* means 'to reach' (*zhi*). *Wu* means 'affairs' (*shi*). Affairs all have their principles. To reach into their principles is *gewu*. In another section of the text he says, '*ge* means 'to fully comprehend' (*qiong*窮), and *wu* means 'principle' (*Li*理). *Gewu* is like saying 'to fully comprehend [their] principles'." Inserts are taken from *Daxue* 2:4a and 25:1a. Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002): 97.

visible world), but not as things that could be perceived by external retrospection, but rather as thing[s] manifested by internal introspection of the mind. At the same time, Wang proposes that the concept of *ge* should be understood as the *rectification* of introspection or the thoughts of things. In a sense, for Wang, *ge wu* constitutes the unity of two equally important steps, the rectification of one's thoughts as a result of the mind responding to the objects and events someone encounters, as well as its own internal reflections empowered by the elimination of selfish desires. He writes,

[One] eliminates whatever is incorrect in the mind and maintains the correctness of its original state. Wherever there is a thought, eliminate whatever is incorrect and maintain the correctness of the mind's original state. Then nowhere, in no time, will Heavenly principle be perceived. Thus is to realize principle completely. Heavenly principle is bright virtue. And completely realizing principle is shining with bright virtue.²²²

In the end, the attainment of perfect moral constitution, which is a foundation of all harmony within one individual, family, society and under Heaven, is still an ultimate goal of Wang's *investigation of things*. The faculty that was originally inscribed within someone's mind or *liang zhi* (inner understanding) is there to aid in this progression. For Wang Yangming, the involvement in this development is not a one-time thing, but it requires a constant effort. "For each time one is successful in elimination of incorrect thought, one's *liang zhi* will be able to operate more freely. The more one's *liang zhi* operates freely, the more easily one's *ling zhi* can identify the incorrect thoughts and eliminate them."²²³ Tien argues that this part of Wang Yangming's thought is similar to Buddhist use of the analogy of a mirror polishing.²²⁴ This is, at the first glance, a perpetual cyclical process, in which the rectification of thoughts closely depends on the

²²² Ivanhoe, 98.

²²³ Tien, 41.

²²⁴ See footnote #302

“status” or radius of freedom found within *liang zhi*, and at the same time the radius of freedom of *liang zhi* is closely connected with the ability to rectify one’s own thought. The goal of the rectification of thought stays always the same – to be able to extend knowledge, and if one is able to do so, like what Wang Yangming suggests in the case of Yen Hui, he is also able to consciously choose to live harmoniously under Heaven. This comparison would work in the reverse order as well; if someone is not able to extend his knowledge, then his moral character is contingent to his polluting nature. If his philosophy would stop here, it would seem that there is no optimism for those who are innately connected to their common nature. But fortunately, Wang does not stop here, the uniqueness of his philosophy lies in the promise of the *unity of knowledge and action* or *zhixing heyi* [知行合一],²²⁵ where these two components, the *rectification of thoughts* and the freeing of *liang zhi* are happening simultaneously, and by this, they are not dependent on each other. *All* (universalistic emphasis) of those who recognize and acknowledge these principles are equally guaranteed to achieve harmony.²²⁶

Whenever the superior man is engaged in practical affairs or discussions, he insists on the task of knowledge and action combined. The aim is precisely to extend the *liang zhi* of his original mind. He is unlike those who devote themselves to merely talking and hearing as though that were knowledgeable, and divide knowledge and action into two separate things as though they really could itemize and take place one after the other.²²⁷

²²⁵ Literal translation – “Knowing and doing”.

²²⁶ It is important to note that following this principle Wang Yangming separates all people into three different categories, those who have the knowledge and act on it, those who possess the knowledge but do not act, and those who for any reason are still connected to the perpetual wheel of separation of knowledge and action and are not able to achieve harmony, as was the case of mentally ill individuals.

²²⁷ Tien, 43.

Wang's concept of *real* or *ultimate knowledge* applies only when knowledge is unified with action. His argument of unity between "knowing and doing are one" and equal emphasis on words and deeds are probably the best known premises of this concept of his philosophy.²²⁸

One of the disciples made inquiry saying, 'In what way do knowledge and practice become unity? The Doctrine of the Mean says, 'extensive study', and in addition speaks of 'earnest practice'. This would clearly distinguish knowledge and practice as two distinct things.' The Teacher [Wang Yangming] said, 'Extensive learning implies that in all things one should learn how to cherish natural law, while earnest practice carries with it the idea of learning without ceasing. The two characters, *zhi* [知] (meaning 'knowledge') and *xing* [行] (meaning 'practice') of 'being born with knowledge and practice' has reference to intuitive knowledge and practice of good, then though it be an individual who acquires the knowledge after painful feeling of ignorance and practice by strenuous effort, he may still be said to have been born with knowledge and practice.'²²⁹

When Wang speaks of the application of the unity of knowledge and action or the visible manifestation of harmonious morality, he often uses the example of filial piety. When he asks rhetorically, if it was possible for someone to know what it means to *know* what filial piety entails, (similar to the question Mencius asks in the case of a child who fell in the well),²³⁰ without actually applying what they *know*. Wang was aware that it is possible to *know* and yet not to *act*, and he argues that unless one apply or extend this "lesser knowledge" (physical act of knowledge is always considered less significant in comparison to a cognitive application of the

²²⁸ Chan, 24.

²²⁹ From Wang Yangming's *Letters* in translation by Frederick Goodrich Henke in *The Philosophy of Wang Yangming*, 253.

²³⁰ Mencius used the analogy of a child who fell in the well to prove his basic hypothesis of the universal positive nature that is inherited in all human beings. He argues that all people are able feel compassion in the case of such a tragedy. Joseph Chan, "A Confucian Perspective on Human Rights for Contemporary China," in *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* edited by Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 218.

same), and actually manifest the act of filial piety, they would actually never acquire *real knowledge* of the notion of piety.

An essential part of Wang Yangming's philosophy focuses on the possibility of the restoration of harmonious existence through accessible modes of moral self-cultivation. His universalistic perception of self-cultivation includes tools such as *gewu* (*investigation of things*)²³¹ and *liang zhi* (*innate understanding*). *Gewu* and *liang zhi* are ultimately perceived as union of knowledge and action, which implied the accessibility of sagehood for all, and even to those who are "deprived of the luxury of intellectual striving."²³² Wang Yangming's understanding of *gewu* and *liang zhi* as essential elements of his philosophy, are utilized in understanding of the *Dao*,²³³ and will have a profound effect on the development of Chinese thought in centuries to come. Wang Yangming's universalistic view of human nature that was based on ideas such as *gewu* and *liang zhi*, and which were syncretically formulated beyond classical Confucian idea of human Nature, these are eventually recognized as "Asian" contribution to the contemporary understanding of universal human rights.²³⁴

²³¹ It is important to note, while the majority of Confucian thinkers essentially promote *gewu* as "investigation of things", Wang Yangming's understanding of *gewu* stretches beyond simple understanding of the Principles that regulates and manifests the will of Heaven. Wang Yangming's *gewu* includes a complete balance between "the knowledge" of this principle and "the understanding" of actions (including moral actions) that rise from this awareness. For this reason, his *gewu* could be defined as "rectification of thought" or harmonious balance between knowledge and action, which is guided by *liang zhi* or innate moral compass.

²³² Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 161. Thome H. Fang, "The Essence of Wang Yangming's Philosophy in a Historical Perspective," *Philosophy East and West* 23, No. 1/2 (1973): 83; David S. Nivison, "Moral Decision in Wang Yangming: The Problem of Chinese 'Existentialism'," *Philosophy East and West* 23, No. 1/2 (1973): 121-137; Tu Weiming, "Subjectivity and Ontological Reality: An Interpretation of Wang Yangming's Mode of Thinking," *Philosophy East and West* 23, No. 1/2 (1973): 187-205.

²³³ *The Way, Nature or Great Ultimate*, taken with different terminology or translations respectively.

²³⁴ For more information on this subject see various essays in *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* edited by Joanna R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell.

One of the most important concepts in Chinese tradition in general is the concept of *xing* [性] or *Nature*. This notion was often addressed in various discourses among Chinese thinkers across time. Irene Bloom argues, that it is possible “to learn something about one’s view [on Nature] from attending how one thinker was argumentatively engaged with others”.²³⁵ The concept of Nature including terminologies such as, “original nature” (*yuan xing* [原性]), “one’s own nature” 本性 or 自性 [*ben xing* or *zi xing*], and also “Buddha Nature” (*Fo xing* [佛性]) are an indispensable part of the understanding of Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist doctrine respectively, especially their cosmological and soteriological segments. As already discussed earlier in this project, the power of syncretization experienced through long periods of interaction between these three Chinese traditions has contributed to numerous blending of concepts, and this is also visible in Wang Yangming’s interpretation of the notion of *xing*.

Wang Yangming’s understanding of Nature, his perception of self-cultivation as a reaction to already redefined inner-positive foundations in all human beings, and meditation as one of the practical applications in this process of personal development, are some of the examples of the presence of syncretic tendencies in his thought. Influenced by Buddhism (Buddhahood) and Daoism (*wuwei* [無爲])²³⁶ Confucius was now seen as an epitome of *liang zhi*, or awakened inner sagehood, by which he escaped

²³⁵ Irene Bloom, “Human Nature and Biological Nature in Mencius,” *Philosophy East and West* 47, No. 1, Human “Nature” in Chinese Philosophy: A Panel of the 1995 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (1997): 21-22.

²³⁶ *Wuwei* is considered to be one of the most important concepts in Daoism simply described as an inner “compass” which is inherited by all beings, by which all agents should recognize their rightful place within universe. In the case of human beings *wuwei* is understood to be a moral “compass” ultimately guiding people in their quest for harmony.

the narrow and temporary human/teacher boundaries. Similar to the universal soteriological component found in Mahayana Buddhism by which the inner Buddha is accessible to all human beings, for Wang Yangming the positive power within human nature is essential to all individuals regardless of their rank and position in society. He interprets the deflection of Nature, often using Buddhist terminology, as a result of the interchangeability of visible reality, which is diluted by its dependences on the five senses (i.e. “hearing”, “seeing”) and Ultimate reality. Similarly to Buddhism and Daoism, Wang Yangming proposes a variety of meditative practices as an effective remedy against “confusion”, “delusion”, and “doubtfulness” that ultimately lead to the understanding of *liang zhi* as an aid in “restoration” and reconfiguration of Original Nature. For example he modifies the existing “Buddhist” idea of “pure and inherited Buddha Nature” to be now understood as *liang zhi* or an innate intuitive insight and universal moral compass. These are some of the examples in which Yangming’s teachings were understood to be a creation of new identities based on the conditions of already present universal dispositions found in the pluralistic setting of Ming China. The following sample of Wang Yangming’s poetry echoes the most interesting elements of syncretization found in his philosophy,

Each and every human mind has Confucius within,
 But afflicted by hearing and seeing,
 They become confused and deluded;
 Now I point out your true original face,
 It is none other than *liang zhi* – have no more doubts.²³⁷

²³⁷ From Wang Yangming’s poem, “Four Hymns to *Liang Chih* Shown to my Students” in *Wang Wen-ch’eng-kung ch-üan-shu* 20:629a, and in translation done by Heup Young Kim. In this short example, this five line poem points out the key elements that were unique to Wang Yangming’s syncretic redefinition of Nature, and self-cultivation of this Nature if once corrupted.

In order to contextualize the specific interpretation of Wang Yangming's comprehension of the two terms, *Nature*, which sustains complete and undenyng standards of highest morality, and *human nature*, it is important to revisit the Confucian teachings that contributed to the concept of Nature which was developed prior to Wang Yangming's time.

5.2.1 Classical Confucian View of *xìng* [性] Nature²³⁸

The majority of classical Chinese texts state that innate human nature is originally virtuous, but Confucius' opinion on this matter is not quite clear. The term *xìng* [性] or Nature is mentioned in *The Analects* only twice; in passage 5:13 it says, "Zi Gong said, 'The Master's personal displays of his principles and ordinary descriptions of them may be heard. His discourses about man's nature, and the way of Heaven, cannot be heard';"²³⁹ and in 17:3 "The Master said, 'By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart';"²⁴⁰ J. Legge uses a somewhat less formal translation of *xián* [賢], which, although generally translated as "virtuosity", he translates as "human nature." For example, when he quotes, "He [Confucius] said, "What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the *Dao*. Cultivating the *Dao* is

²³⁸ It is important to note that classical doctrine on the *Dao* or *Nature* (or *Original Nature*) and *human nature* as briefly analyzed here needs to be understood exactly as that – as a brief summary of their main ideas. A more complete analysis of this theme which was found in the work of Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming lies beyond the scope of this project.

²³⁹ [子貢曰：“夫子之文章，可得而聞也；夫子之言性與天道，不可得而聞也。”] Translation contributed by authors of the *Chinese Text Project*, <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=1086&if=en>.

²⁴⁰ [子曰：“性相近也，習相遠也”]. *Chinese Text Project*, <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=1098&if=en>.

called education”,²⁴¹ he interprets *xian* as “human nature”. Even though Confucius was quite certain that the harmonious connection with the *Dao* was relatively easily accessible, a man needs to “hear” it, he does not further describe this connection - “If a man in the morning hears the *Dao*; he may die in the evening without regret!”²⁴² Nevertheless, he goes on to say that, “Man is born with uprightness”, and he continues to say that “If one loses it he will be lucky if he escapes with his life.”²⁴³ It seems that while he advocates some kind of initial semi-harmonious inheritance as *xing* within the majority of people, he also is quite “disappointed” by man’s nature’s undemanding loss of virtuosity. In addition to “stability of perfection” of human nature, Confucius also advocates a hierarchical perception of human nature itself. In *The Analects* 16:9 it says,

Confucius said, "Those who are born with the possession of knowledge are the highest class of men. Those who learn, and so, readily, get possession of knowledge, are the next. Those who are dull and stupid, and yet compass the learning, are another class next to these. As to those who are dull and stupid and yet do not learn - they are the lowest of the people."²⁴⁴

Unlike Mencius after him, Confucius is not so naive in defining human nature. He does not believe that human nature is innately programmed to comply with *li* (sense of propriety), and he has his deep suspicion that it is naturally attracted to *ren* (benevolence): “I have never met a man who finds *ren* attractive or a man who finds not-*ren* repulsive. A man who finds *ren* attractive cannot be surpassed.”²⁴⁵ When he argues that *ren* is “to return to *li*,” he actually says - “to overcome *xin xing* [心性] or

²⁴¹ J. Legge, trans., “Confucius Analects” in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991): 39.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ From *The Analects* 6:17 in translation by Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*, 29.

²⁴⁴ *Chinese Text Project*, <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=1097&if=en>.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

one's own nature of mind and to return to *li*." And subsequently, after returning to *li*, one must first of all discipline one's own nature.²⁴⁶ Although it is known that Confucius had claimed that the *Dao*, as a harmonious existence, is not far from a man and could be reached by extensive education, yet the *Dao*, as mystery, would still remain beyond reach for common man. In this sense the *Dao* and *Nature* would be interpreted as equivalent. While scholars generally agree on what is Confucius' main consideration of *human nature*, the same is not so obvious, considering the debate that surrounds him, in the case of Mencius.

While a minority of scholars, led by Roger Ames, interpret *human nature* or *renxing* [人性] as being present in Mencius' thought, at the same time, they argue, human nature is not a notion that could be vocalized by a normative description. They carefully elaborate on what it is that makes discrepancy among human beings; according to Ames, for Mencius, *human nature* is determined through its achievement value.²⁴⁷ In this sense, for Mencius, there is a clear distinction on what capacity *all* man could be considered equal, because they are *all* predetermined by the part of the *nature* that he defines as "great" (cognition) and "small" (senses), or in other words under their general distinction between concepts of *Nature* and *human nature*. He states,

Those who follow that part of themselves which is great are great men; those who follow that part which is little are little men...

The senses of hearing and seeing do not think, and are obscured by external things. When one thing comes into contact with another, as a matter of course it leads it away. To the mind belongs the office of thinking. By thinking, it gets the right view of things; by neglecting to think, it fails to do this. These - the

²⁴⁶ Jiyuan Yu, "Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle," *Philosophy East and West* 48, No. 2 (1998): 332.

²⁴⁷ Roger Ames, "The Mencius Conception of *Ren-Xing*: Does it Mean Human Nature?," in Henry J. Rosemont, ed., *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essay Dedicated to Angus C. Graham (Critics and Their Critics)* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991): 158.

senses and the mind - are what Heaven has given to us. Let a man first stand fast in the supremacy of the nobler part of his constitution, and the inferior part will not be able to take it from him. It is simply this which makes the great man.²⁴⁸

In summary, Roger Ames argues that Mencius did not claim the universal status of *human nature* and that *all man cannot be the same*, and that it should not be expected from *all* of them to have the same quality - "Human beings are [only] unimportantly similar, and [only] importantly distinct while cultivated through achievements (emphasis mine)."²⁴⁹ On the other side of the spectrum, scholars such as Irene Bloom and Kwong-loi Shun interpret Mencius as one who "characteristically understands" in what capacity human beings might vary according to the *Nature* that all share.²⁵⁰ Bloom states, "[Mencius] understands moral success on the part of certain individuals, or dereliction of duty on the part of others, in terms of their shared potential and common dispositions and the achievements as a fulfillment of that shared potential and the dereliction as a destruction of it and distancing of the wayward individual from common human norms and experience."²⁵¹ For Mencius, this fine connection between *Nature* and *human nature*, as a "common humanity" would set aside the legacy of Mencius, profoundly affecting a long line of philosophers who would come afterwards, including

²⁴⁸ *Mencius*, 6.I:15. Translation contributed by authors of the *Chinese Text Project*, <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=1754&if=en>.

²⁴⁹ Ames, 158.

²⁵⁰ It is interesting what Shun finds in his etymological study of the term *xing*, stating that, "*xing* was derived from *sheng* [生], meaning 'life', 'growth' [and those two terms were] already distinguished in pre-Han texts. There is also agreement that the early use of *xing* bore a close relation to *sheng* and that *xing* probably referred initially to the direction of *sheng* of a thing-that is, the direction that a thing develops in its process of growth. It is likely that the use of *xing* has also evolved in early texts to refer to other things related to the life of a thing, such as the tendencies or desires that a thing has in being alive." Kwong-loi Shun, "Mencius and *Jen-hsing*," *Philosophy East and West* 47, No. 1, Human 'Nature' in Chinese Philosophy: A Panel of the 1995 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (1997): 1; Bloom, 21-22.

²⁵¹ Bloom, 22.

Wang Yangming. While, as already stated, the majority of Chinese thinkers find *human nature* somewhat in the spectrum of “good”, Xunzi argues exactly the opposite.

Xunzi defines human nature *xing* [性] as bad,²⁵² and in need of continuous, structured and firm reinforcement, “all men are alike in nature [ultimately bad] but become different through practice”.²⁵³ He saw the classical virtues rooted in the “accumulated endeavors of the sage kings of antiquity” who were the ones to rightfully transmit their achievements in the form of ritual, music, and text.²⁵⁴ It would be that promotion of *li* invested with *ren* and *yi* [義] (righteousness and justice) that would define the normative character of sagehood, and the practical applicable living of the *jūnzǐ* [君子] (virtuous man). Common people, once when are able to act in accordance with *jūnzǐ*’s ideal, are capable of becoming sages if they make efforts to understand the rationales and practices of these virtues. He states,

Someone once asked: ‘If human nature is evil, then how were ritual and righteousness generated?’ I responded by saying that ritual and righteousness were produced by the conscious effort of sages, not by human nature.²⁵⁵

While both, Confucius and Mencius see the connection between *Nature* and *human nature* as ultimately compatible, Xunzi, on the other hand, finds these two concepts undeniably distinct, as “ultimate good” could not be fully associated with “evil”. It would be through the effort of Zhu Xi that the two concepts of the *Dao* (*Nature*) and

²⁵² Michael Molloy summarizes human nature interpreted by Xunzi as such that does not stretch beyond its self-interest unless taught differently. “Human nature and human beings function in a similar mechanical way; primarily selfish and individualistic.” Michael Molloy, *Experiencing World’s Religions* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2005): 240; Kim-Chong Chong, “Xunzi’ Systematic Critique of Mencius,” *Philosophy East and West* 53, No. 2 (2003): 215-216.

²⁵³ Chan, 115.

²⁵⁴ Mark Edward Lewis, “Custom and Human Nature in Early China,” *Philosophy East and West* 53, No. 3 (2003): 308.

²⁵⁵ Sommers, 70.

human nature would be brought a step closer to their same heritages, while at the same time identifying possible prerogatives of this unity.

5.2.2 Zhu Xi's Interpretation of *Nature*

There are several important elements that should be taken into account with regards to Zhu Xi's understanding of the *Dao* and its correlation with human nature. First, Zhu Xi interprets the *Dao* or the *Great Ultimate* as a source and at the same time as a root of *human nature*. Previous thinkers, although agreeing that human nature is initially instated by the *Dao*, see *human nature* as an ultimately separate entity. Zhu Xi argues for, not only the connection between the two, but rather as "one" only disengaged by physical reality.

The Dao is identical with the nature of man and things and their nature is identical with the Dao, and Cheng I put it best when he said that 'the nature is the same as principle'.²⁵⁶

A second important element in Zhu Xi's interpretation of *Nature* is that by the method of investigation of things, it is possible to achieve recognition of nature; the non-physical perception of *Nature* is part of the cognitive, and outside of physical reality. According to Zhu Xi, the concept of *Nature* or how he often transcribed it as *Great Ultimate*, has two essential characteristics; first, it incorporates the principles of all things under Heaven (included in this hypothesis is that all things under Heaven possess

²⁵⁶ In translation by De Bary with slight modifications. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, comp., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed. Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 704-705.

their own distinctive principle); and second, that cognitive recognition of even one principle could lead to intuitive distinction of the Principle which disseminates the character of *Great Ultimate*. For Zhu Xi, all things include the *Great Ultimate*, and the *Great Ultimate* encompasses all things.²⁵⁷ Xianglong Zhang and Taisu Zhan further explain this concept, “If no true principle is isolated and, quite the opposite, everything is incorporated as *Great Ultimate* (or all principles) then there no longer exists obstacle; one is therefore justified in saying ‘all things naturally reveal themselves to me when I quietly observe them.’”²⁵⁸ In addition, according to Zhu Xi, *human nature* should be treated as obsolete and in necessity to be reunited with *Nature*,

Original nature is an all-pervading perfection not contrasted with evil. This is true of what Heaven has endowed in the self. We fall into evil only when our actions are not in accord with the original nature.²⁵⁹

Heaven is my father and earth is my mother, and even such an insignificant being as myself finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. *All people* are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Although Zhu Xi is known for his extremely harsh critique of Buddhism, his interpretation of *Great Ultimate* as a progenitor of all principles, and that all principles are the root of the *Great Ultimate* is closely associated with Huayan Buddhist doctrine of “Indra’s net”. “Indra is a King of Heaven in Hinduism adopted in Buddhism as its defender, but is considered to be inferior to the Buddha. His net is one of the favourite Buddhist metaphors. The net is decorated with a bright jewel on each knot of the mesh. Each of these jewels reflects not only the image of every other jewel but all the other jewels, and so on to infinity.” In the *Treatise of the Golden Lion*, section seven *Mastering the Ten Mysteries* [Gates], part seven it says the following, “In each of the lion’s eyes, ears, limbs, joints, and in each and every hair, there is a golden lion. All the lions embraced by all the single hairs simultaneously and instantaneously enter a single hair. Thus in each and every hair there are an infinite number of lions, and in addition, all the single hairs, together with their infinite number of lions, in turn enter into a single hair. In this way the geometric progression is infinite, like the jewels of Celestial Lord Indra’s net.” In translation by Wing-tsit Chan in *A Source Book*, 412.

²⁵⁸ Wang Yangming followed this teaching once when he was quietly sitting looking at a bamboo plant and hoping to acquire the Principle. Xianglong Zhang and Taisu Zhang, “Flowing with Text: A Discussion on He Lin’s Explanation of Zhu Xi’s Method of Intuition,” *Frontiers in Philosophy in China* 1, No. 1 (2006): 61.

²⁵⁹ In translation by De Bary with slight modifications. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 704-705.

²⁶⁰ Translation adapted by Mario Poceski, *Introducing Chinese Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2009): 191.

Zhu Xi's interpretation of *Nature* and *human nature* and ultimately the whole reality is constituted by the intricate combination of principle and the Principle, which were complementarily united and never disjointed in every single thing. There is no principle without the Principle and vice versa, and there is no *human nature* without *the Original Nature*. The deficiency of this theory, which would be highly critiqued by Wang Yangming, arises in the following postulates. First, it was interpreted through the fixed idea of principle which is argued to be a component of a fluid and ever-changing reality (something that was already for a long time part of the Chinese understanding of reality, in other words as syncretization itself); and second, the notion of realization of the Principle was thought to be a result of introspection in comparison to retrospection as Zhu Xi suggested.²⁶¹

5.2.3 Wang Yangming's View of *Nature*

It is important to remember that Wang Yangming's teachings on *Original Nature* and *human nature* are largely inherited through evolution of Confucian thought preceding his time, and as well they are indebted to the power of syncretization that was manifesting outside of Confucian discourse. While it was important to distinguish what the character of *human nature* was prior to Wang's reinterpretation, it could be argued that it was even more important once the whole notion of *nature* was included to define the basic soteriological notion of Confucianism. This understanding covers the teaching

²⁶¹ For more information on Zhu Xi's philosophy see, Hoyt Cleveland Tillman's, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992).

of the *Original Nature* as ultimately good and absolutely morally imperative. In addition, *human nature* is originated *with Original Nature* and by this they are in prospective accordance with the highest moral standards. At the same time, *human nature* is, for the reason that it partially exhibits the sensory fragment of the ultimate reality, also in accordance with divergences of *Original Nature*. Once this departure happens, *human nature* is required (in order to sustain its harmonious character within an individual, a family, the society and under Heaven), to somehow return to its original state. This anticipative prerequisite of *human nature* is what makes up the soteriological component of Wang Yangming's teachings.

The Teacher [Wang Yangming] said: 'Nature is the highest good. Nature is in its original condition devoid of all evil, and for this reason is called the highest good. To rest in the highest good implies returning to one's natural condition.'²⁶²

For Wang Yangming, a return of *human nature* to its original high moral standards is the basic and only value of every human existence. The diluted condition of *human nature* which results from the selfish life, is not actually human's primary condition, but rather a secondary one. In one part Wang Yangming somewhat agrees with Zhu Xi, but while Zhu Xi rightfully promotes the unity between *Original Nature* and *human nature*; considering the general interpretation of these concepts, Wang extends this theory to include the unity of the two, through only one faculty that consists of the rational perception of this unity – the mind.

²⁶² *Instructions for Practical Living*, 106.

The intuitive knowledge of good is to be identified with the path of truth, and this knowledge is in the minds of men. Not only sages and virtuous men, but ordinary men are thus gifted.²⁶³

After patient and persistent anticipation and an attempt to replicate the unity of the principle and *Original Nature* following Zhu Xi's method that had left him discouraged and physically and spiritually ill, Wang Yangming succeeded in discovering the source of intuitive knowledge. As he says, the mind does not only possess the truth, but it also could "identify the path" or aid human beings to this knowledge. As many other Confucian thinkers before him since the time of Mencius, Wang Yangming argues that *all* men are in possession of this intuitive knowledge of higher moral good. While this is generously interpreted to include universally given attributes to all men without difference, at the same time it also demands higher expectations from all as well, by which there is no excuse for not doing what is morally right. Wang Yangming says,

The Nature of *all* men is good. The state of equilibrium and harmony is *originally* possessed by all men. However, the mind of the usual man has things that becloud, and therefore, though nature is manifested at times, the conditions is such that it is sometimes manifested and sometimes extinguished. When the conditions have been reached in which there is a continuous state of equilibrium... and when a condition of continuous harmony has been acquired, it is designated as the universal way.²⁶⁴

Wang argues that the *Original Nature* of all men is the same. This nature was inherited by everyone equally, because in itself it does not possess the quality of subjectivity. Although he speaks of the difference between a nature that is fully harmonious, and one which is subjugated to a "clouded judgment", he does not lose his original universalistic inclination. He argues that *Original Nature* is present within everyone; however it

²⁶³ *Instructions for Practical Living*, 252.

²⁶⁴ *Instructions for Practical Living*, 101.

depends on the temporary conditions of a man's rationale. For Wang it is important, that this "clouded judgment", as he calls it, is only a provisional condition of a man, with the imperative of a return into its original state. Furthermore, not only human beings are in possession of the *Original Nature*, but all things as well. "All things are *ab initio*²⁶⁵ one with man;"²⁶⁶ "Heaven and earth are structure with me; spirits and gods are in one all-pervading unity with me."²⁶⁷ According to this statement, interconnectedness among all things and the *Original Nature* is something that Wang Yangming shared with Zhu Xi. However, while Zhu Xi argues for the interrelatedness among all things within the physical existence of things, Wang Yangming argues for their connection within the mind, as the only faculty with the capacity to do so.²⁶⁸

The question remains – if the man's mind is only a faculty which is able to reflect on things as they really are, and that this mind could be sometimes temporarily "clouded" how, in reality, should the equilibrium be reinstated? Wang suggests that the first step to the recovery of a harmonious character of anyone's nature begins with the process of *gewu* or *rectification of thoughts*. At the same time, *liang zhi*, which is equipped to recognize and sustain the reflection of the *Original Nature* should be eliminating selfish desires which are the main reason for the "cloudiness of the mind". The result of this "cleansing" should be adequate to carry one's nature till the next possible disruption of harmony when the whole process should be recreated. Wang writes,

²⁶⁵ *Ab initio* is a Latin term meaning "from the beginning".

²⁶⁶ *Instructions for Practical Living*, 169.

²⁶⁷ From *Wang Yangming's Record of Discourses* in translation by Frederick Goodrich Henke in *The Philosophy of Wang Yangming*, 184.

²⁶⁸ For a more detailed elaboration of Zhu Xi's and Wang Yangming's view on Nature see, Shu-hsieh Lin, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Song-Ming* (Westport: & London: Greenwood Press, 1998): 199; Cheng, "Toward Constructing a Dialectic of Harmonization", 36-39.

Accordingly, a necessary condition for having real knowledge is being in a state of selflessness. How, though, does one eliminate one's self-centered desires and become selfless? Wang explains that the process begins with the *rectification of thoughts* (*gewu*): 'Knowledge is the original substance of the mind. The mind is naturally able to know . . .' This is *liangzhi* and need not be sought outside [oneself]. If what emanates from *liangzhi* is not hindered by self-centered ideas, the result will be like the saying, 'If a man fully develops his feeling of compassion, his benevolence will be more than he needs.' The ordinary man, however, is not free from the obstruction of self-centered ideas. He therefore requires the effort of the extension of knowledge (*zhizhi*) and the rectification of thoughts (*gewu*) in order to overcome [his] self-centered ideas and recover *li* (principle). Then the mind's faculty of *liangzhi* will no longer be obstructed but will be able to penetrate and operate everywhere.²⁶⁹

As one of the implements in this process of self-cultivation or reinstatement of *Original Nature*, Wang recommends various meditative practices. Wang Yangming's understanding of *human nature* as an undivided part of *Nature*, reflected his perception of self-cultivation. At the same time, the process of self-cultivation was developed as a necessary tool to access already predefined inherently-positive foundations rooted in all human beings. In addition to self-cultivation, meditation, as one of the practical applications of personal development, exemplifies the presence of the syncretization in his thought. The following analysis represents only a portion of these "outside" influences that influenced his views on the subject.

5.3 Influence of Syncretization and Wang Yangming's Perception of Meditation

²⁶⁹ Translation taken from Simon M. Wong, "A Critique of Huang Tsong-hsi's Interpretations of the 'Four Maxims'," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 28, No. 4 (1998): 499.

The syncretic blending that came out as a result of the Confucian and Buddhist debate in the Song/Ming period instigated the development of several new concepts that became a part of Wang Yangming's intellectual investigation. Among many others, the notions of spiritual self-cultivation aided by various meditative practices took significant portions of his interest. Wang Yangming's syncretized understanding of meditation brought him to examine the work of some Buddhist and Daoist teachers such as, Hongzhi Zhengjue [宏智正覺] (1091-1157) and Dahui Zonggao [大慧宗杲] (1089-1163).²⁷⁰ In order to interpret what the outcomes were in Wang Yangming's understanding of meditation, a comparative study of earlier Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist texts is to follow.

5.3.1 Classical Confucian Teachings on Meditation

The classical texts accredited to Confucius do not explicitly promote meditation. When Confucius says, "man withdraws his mind" or "the more man meditates upon good thoughts",²⁷¹ the act of "meditation" should not be understood outside general conscious thinking. Although he advocates some kind of contemplative practice, often

²⁷⁰ This section of the project will only superficially deal with their general contribution to philosophy. Detailed descriptions of the terms and concepts such as *Silent Illumination*, "sudden" vs. "gradual", "Northern" and "Southern School", Buddhist and Daoist meditative syncretization, Chan's didactic methodology of teaching, etc. are large concepts and they lie beyond the scope of this project. For more information on differences in their teachings see, Bernard Faure's, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); and Mario Poceski's, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Christopher P. Atwood, "Validation of Holiness or Sovereignty: Religious Tolerance as Political Theology in the Mongol World Empire of the Thirteenth Century," *The International History Review* 26, No. 2 (2004): 245-249.

²⁷¹ *The Analects*, 1:7a, in translation by *Chinese Text Project*.

connected with *qi* [氣],²⁷² Confucius warns against excessive reflection. His position appears to be a middle course between studying and reflecting on what one has learned. “He who learns but does not think is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.”²⁷³ In Daoist texts, such as the following insert from *Zhuangzi*, Confucius was often used to mouthpiece Daoist ideas;

[Confucius said] Make your will (*zhi* [志]) one! Don’t listen with your ears, listen with your mind (*xin* [心]). No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your *qi* [氣]. Ears stop with [ordinary] listening, the mind stops with tallying (*fu* [符]), but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. It is *the Way* (*dao* [道]) that accumulates in emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.²⁷⁴

However, there is very little evidence that Confucius implied anything beyond sincere engagement of *xin* [心].²⁷⁵ The terminology of *qi* itself was not further defined until the time of Mencius. In addition to the “withdrawal of someone’s mind” as some form of contemplative practice that was utilized in order to induce harmonious unity with the *Dao*, a more formal practice of meditation or *si* [思] was desirably used in the process of active learning and moral development. Alice W. Cheng argues that,

The teaching in *the Analects* sought to model moral behaviour that is becoming to a truly responsive and responsible human being by means of exploring such questions as the meaning of humanity (*ren*), the content of ritual (*li*), and conduct appropriate to the gentleman (*junzi*). No one can be made into a better person simply by being told that this would be a good idea, still less by reading up on the subject; but if, using these methods, we can be induced to make an active effort to engage with our mental, emotional, and psychic energies-through study (*xue*) and meditation (*si*) some of the vital activities involved in becoming and doing good

²⁷² *Qi* is later described as an ambiguous, mysterious and in a superordinary sense, something that seems to get activated by different tempos of breathing (panting) – *Mengzi* 2A2. 10 (Harvard-Yenching [HY] – this is a reference to the Chinese text in the appropriate volume of the *Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series*).

²⁷³ *The Analects* 2:15, in translation by J. Riegel.

²⁷⁴ *Zhuangzi*, HY 9/4/26-28. Translation modified by Graham, 1985.

²⁷⁵ 心 [*xin*], ambiguously understood and translated as heart or mind, can also be understood as a center of human rationale and vital energy that flows within us.

(*weiren* [為仁]) and in being and acting more fully human (also *weiren* [偉人]), we will have taken a step towards actualizing that goal. Or, as Confucius would say, more succinctly, "Who says that *ren* is far away? No sooner do I wish for it than it is here."²⁷⁶

According to Cheng, Confucius implicitly endorses the use of *si* in order to achieve balance between man's mental, physical, emotional, and intellectual capacities, with the intention that if their faculties were balanced, they would become fully knowledgeable/enlightened human beings. Although Cheng reinserts the notion of meditation as a desired part of the process of development, there is no indication that *si* was practiced in this context in the classical times. Similar to Confucius, Mencius did not explicitly promote meditation. When he says, "I turned my thoughts inward"²⁷⁷ Mencius does not imply criticize those who have faith in natural understanding or intuition and argues that the only real understanding of a subject comes from long and careful study. Study, for Confucius, means finding a good teacher and imitating his words and deeds. A good teacher is someone older who is familiar with the ways of the past and the practices of the ancients.

For Confucius and Mencius the acquisition of knowledge, and ultimately enlightenment, was connected with the conscious accretion of knowledge – "true knowledge as 'knowing what you do know and knowing what you do not know', thus allowing for the possibility of ignorance and expertise, while asserting the need for self-

²⁷⁶ With slight modifications this text was taken from, Alice W. Cheng, "Review: The Master's Voice: On Reading, Translating, and Interpreting the *Analects* of Confucius," *The Review of Politics* 62, No. 3 (2000): 567.

²⁷⁷ *Mengzi* 7:13, translation found in *Chinese Text Project*.

knowledge as a basis of self-mastery,”²⁷⁸ does not leave the space for extensive practical use of meditation.

5.3.2 Daoists and Meditation

Daoist philosophy was traditionally closely connected with practices such as physical exercises, dietary commendations, breathing techniques, alchemy and magic, along with various forms of meditation. Throughout history Daoists were using meditation as a tool for “spiritual communication” with the worlds beyond this realm, as an aid for physical and mental healing, and as a means of “adept ritual of psychological alchemy in order to reach a state of blissful primordial paradise and attain *xian* or immortality.”²⁷⁹ In Daoist classical texts such as the *Dao De Jing* [道德經]²⁸⁰ meditation is described as a secure path to realization and return to harmony,

Attain complete vacuity,
Maintain steadfast quietude.
All things come into being,
And I see thereby their return.
All things flourish...²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ W. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom eds., *Principle and Practicality: Essays in Neo-Confucianism and Practical Learning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979): 178-179.

²⁷⁹ David The-yu Wang, “‘Nei Jing Tu’, a Daoist Diagram of the Internal Circulation of Man,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 49/50 (1991-1992): 146, 149.

²⁸⁰ *Dao De Jing* [道德經] in translation by Wing-tsit Chan (in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 139-176), “no other Chinese classic of such small size has exercised so much influence. More commentaries have been written on it than on any other Chinese classics.”

²⁸¹ 16.1-4, Chan, 147.

While in other texts, such as the *Zhuangzi*,²⁸² the description of meditation mimics the Confucian predisposition of meditation. The following passage from the *Zhuangzi* reports the following discussion between Confucius and Yen Hui,

Another day Yen Hui saw Confucius again and said: 'I have made some progress;' 'What do you mean?' asked Confucius. Yen Hui said: 'I forget everything while sitting down.' Confucius' face turned pale. He said: 'What do you mean by sitting down and forgetting everything?' 'I cast aside my limbs,' replied Yen Hui, 'discard my intelligence, detach from both body and mind, and become one with *Great Universal [Dao]*. This is called sitting down and forgetting everything.'²⁸³

The *Zhuangzi* uses Daoist language and terminology, however, in this particular passage it describes an obvious Confucian misunderstanding of how the meditative practices should be perceived and applied. It is interesting to find that, although the *Zhuangzi* often uses Confucius to "mouthpiece Daoist ideas,"²⁸⁴ in this case Confucius is stunned by the idea of enlightenment aided by meditation. This particular text was largely used as a Daoist critique of Confucian [mis]understandings of inner self-cultivation that supposedly lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the *Dao*.²⁸⁵

Another Daoist text, *Inward Training*, which was written as a series of poetic verses devoted to the practice of guided breathing, is one of the oldest texts describing the meditative technique. In this text, meditation was defined as "diligently cleaning out

²⁸² The *Zhuangzi* [莊子] is a classical Daoist text written by the philosopher Zhuangzi (369- d.u. B.C.E.). Tsai Chih Chung, "Zhuangzi Speaks," *The Antioch Review* 50, No. 3 (1992): 529-537.

²⁸³ The *Zhuangzi*, *Inner Chapters*, 6. No. 9. Modified translation by Dumoilin, 32. For a complete translation of *Zhuangzi* see, <http://chinese.dsturgeon.net/text.pl?node=2753&if=en>.

²⁸⁴ Bryan W. van Norden, "Competing Interpretations of Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*," *Philosophy East and West* 46, No. 2 (1996): 251.

²⁸⁵ For a more detailed interpretation of *Inner Chapters* see Van Norden, 247-268.

the lodging place of the numinous.”²⁸⁶ The process of cleansing served as a metaphor of increased tranquility which was supposed to ensure a vivid connection between the conscious mind and the manifestation of the *Dao* within human beings.

The notion of Confucian inner self-cultivation in connection to a new perception of mind, as a source of “all knowledge” would not be further adequately questioned until the time of Mencius;²⁸⁷ and much more effectively in the work of Wang Yangming,²⁸⁸ when the centuries long process of syncretization, and response to Buddhist and Daoist elements, had already left their mark.

5.3.3. Chan Buddhism and Meditation

Hongzhi Zhengjue came from a long line of followers of Chan who studied under Kumu Facheng [枯木法稱], and Yuanwu Keqin [圓悟克勤] (1063-1135), who was a well-known writer of an extended annotation to Xuedou Zhongxian's [雪竇重顯] (980 – 1052) *Blue Cliff Koan Collection* or *Bìyán lù* [碧巖錄].²⁸⁹ Hongzhi Zhengjue is probably best known for his work of *Silent Illumination* or *Mòzhào chán* [默照禪]²⁹⁰ which had instigated a passionate debate within Chan. He was overwhelmingly

²⁸⁶ XIII.6 *Inward Training* in translation by Harold D. Roth, *Original Tao: Nei-yeh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 106

²⁸⁷ Chan, 78.

²⁸⁸ Chung-ying Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York, 1991): 435.

²⁸⁹ Schlütter, 97.

²⁹⁰ Hongzhi's *Silent Illumination* could be found in the solid translation done by Taigen Dan Leighton, *Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000).

critiqued by Dahui Zhonggao, eventually developing into a full scale schism within Chinese and subsequently Japanese Chan/Zen Buddhism.²⁹¹

Chan Buddhism had from its early stages of development given strong support to meditation as a vehicle and a tool to break-through the layers of the conscious, rational mind that would eventually lead to the experience of genuine reality - enlightenment. If only for this reason, meditation was supposed to be an essential part in the lives of every Buddhist. The following sequence is taken from an important Chan text, *The Platform Scripture* or *Liùzǔ tánjīng* [六祖壇經],²⁹²

...What is meant by sitting in meditation? In this method, to sit means to be free from all obstacles, and externally not to allow thoughts to rise from the mind over any sphere of objects. To meditate means to realize the imperturbability of one's one nature. What is meant by meditation and calmness? Meditation means to be free from all characters externally; calmness means to be unperturbed internally. If there are characters outside and the inner mind is not disturbed, one's original nature is naturally pure and calm. It is only because of the sphere of objects that there is contact and contact leads to perturbation. There is meditation when one is externally free from characters, and there is calmness when one is internally undisturbed. Meditation and calmness means that external meditation is attained and internal calmness is achieved. *Wei-mo-chieh (so-shuo) ching* [The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra] says, 'Immediately we become completely clear and recover our original mind'. The *P'u-sa chieh ching* [Brahma-net Scripture] says, 'We are originally pure in our self-nature.' Good and learned friends, realize that your self-nature is naturally pure. Cultivate and achieve for yourselves the Law-body of your self-nature. Follow the Way of the Buddha yourselves. Act and achieve Buddhahood for yourselves.

One of the major factors that had led to the schism within Chan was their understanding of the significance of meditation. It is important to note that while

²⁹¹ Chan, 426-427; Steven Heine, *Dogen and Kōan Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994): 73-75.

²⁹² Parts of this text are found in the translation by Wing-tsit Chan in his *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, and are selections made from the oldest version of the *Liùzǔ tánjīng* discovered in a Dunhuang cave in 1900. For a complete translation and commentary of this text see Wing-tsit Chan, trans., *The Platform Scripture, The Basis Classic of Zen Buddhism* (St. John's University Press, 1963).

meditative practices as a “path to enlightenment” were often renounced in many Chan (Linji sect) sources, the vast evidence shows that formal meditation stood as an essential part of Song Chan monastery life.²⁹³ The *Platform Sutra* describes the act of Huineng’s disciples who diligently sat in meditation after his death – “Be the same as you would if I were here, and sit altogether in meditation”;²⁹⁴ even though the message of the sutra explicitly states that *Samadhi* [concentration] and *Prajna* [wisdom] are useless, because they do not support each other, and are only delusion.²⁹⁵ “Thus, meditation was an important part of Chan practice, even if Chan masters found it difficult to make any kataphatic statement about enlightenment.”²⁹⁶

Hongzhi’s poem *Mozhao ming*²⁹⁷ was commonly associated with the endorsement of meditative practices, defined as a part of *Silent Illumination*. “*Mozhao ming* has been understood as a kind of manifesto”,²⁹⁸ that contains only one instance from the whole corpus of Caodong’s texts where the term “*silent illumination*” is used. The first several stanzas read as follows,

1. In complete silence words are forgotten,
Total clarity appears before you.
When you reflect it, it is boundlessly vast,
And your body becomes numinous.
2. Numinous it is illuminated without relying on anything,
In illumination, you return to the transcendent [*miao*].
The dewy moon on the Milky way,
The snow-clad pine on the cloudy peak.

²⁹³ Peter n. Gregory, “The Sudden/Gradual Polarity: A Recurrent Theme in Chinese Thought,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 9, No. 4 (1982): 472.

²⁹⁴ Philip B. Yampolsky trans., *The Platform Sutra Preached by the Sixth Patriarch Hhui-neng at the Ta-fan Temple in Shao-chou.*, pg. 181. http://www2.fodian.net/old/English/Platform_Sutra_Yampolsky.pdf.

²⁹⁵ Yampolsky, 136.

²⁹⁶ Schlütter, 54.

²⁹⁷ *Mozhao ming* is partially translated by Schlütter and it was published in his work on Zen, seventh chapter entitled “*Silent Illumination* and the Caodong Tradition.” Schlütter, 144-147.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

4. The endless eons are completely empty,
All things are exactly the same.
Transcendent wisdom [*miao*] exists in a place of silence,
Striving for achievement in illumination.

5. Where does transcendent wisdom exist?
Alertly we destroy murkiness.
The path of silent Illumination
Is the basis for leaving the world of delusion.²⁹⁹

The poem describes several important characteristics of Chan's meditative practices that deserve our attention. First, the poem effectively sums up the inner experiences of those who practice meditation, while at the same time giving them a clear instruction of how it should be practiced in order to produce the maximum outcome. Second, the first stanza is the guide and the basic description of meditation, silence leads to clarity, and self-reflection leads to numinosity. Third, in stanzas 14 and 15³⁰⁰ Hongzhi explicitly ties the practice of meditation with "our tradition" (The Caodong Chan sect), where the practice itself is used as a tool for a creation of identity and self-distinction for all its practitioners. Schlütter argues, "as the meditator, mirror-like reflects this clarity, his whole being becomes one with the entire universe and merges into the realm of enlightenment."³⁰¹ Although Schlütter uses the clear language of Chan Buddhism to perform exegesis on *Mozhao ming*, the result of syncretization with the Daoist philosophy and language on meditation is apparent. It is fair to say that the description of meditation had come a long way from the austere

²⁹⁹ For additional stanzas see Appendix 1.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Schlütter, 147.

meditation practiced under the Bodhi-tree by the Buddha some centuries ago.³⁰² Hongzhi's understanding of *Samadhi* was closely drawn from the Chinese Buddhist notion of *tathāgatagarbha*,³⁰³ as innate Buddha-nature that was considered to be the “underpinned teaching of all of Song Chan.”³⁰⁴ In the Chan texts, *Samadhi* defines both the highest state of awareness and the means to this state. Master Shibayama Zenkei defines *Samadhi* as follows:

Originally a Sanskrit word meaning to concentrate one's mind on one point so that the mind remains still and quiet. In Zen, *Samadhi* is used in a somewhat different sense, that is, it is the pure working of no-mind that has transcended both action and quietude.³⁰⁵

Practically, meditation has always been a part of the Chan discourse, however, doctrinally, *Samadhi* was strongly criticized by Dahui for its *mozhao xie chan* – heretical interpretation.³⁰⁶ Dahui's encounter with an eighty-three-year-old monk who had lost his faith in enlightenment,³⁰⁷ and who had only practiced seated meditation, had initially generated his outrage toward *silent illumination*. His judgment was verified when this old monk experienced enlightenment only after a

³⁰² For a brief description of the Buddhist transformation from the Indian sub-continent to a new Chinese environment see Wing-tsit Chan's, “Transformation of Buddhism in China,” *Philosophy East and West* 7, 3/4 (1958): 107-116.

³⁰³ Olson, 232.

³⁰⁴ Schlütter, 149.

³⁰⁵ Shibayama Zenkei, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*, translated by S. Kudo (New York: Harper and Row, 1974): 350.

³⁰⁶ In his critique of *Silent Illumination* Dahui uses the term *mozhao xie chan* as an indication of his view on meditation as a misguided practice and a clear distinction of heterodoxy.

³⁰⁷ New development in Mahayana doctrine promoted that “anyone can become a Buddha, can ascertain what Buddhahood is, and can share that Buddhahood with all including insentient beings. This was revolutionary, for before Seng-can, traditional Buddhists gradually came to believe that attaining Buddhahood was more and more difficult and required eons, so that it came to be regarded as impossible.” Yoshida Osamu “Introduction” in *Three Chan Classics: The Recorded Sayings of Linji, Wumen's Gate, and The Faith-Mind Maxim- Taisho 47/48. No. 1985, 2005, and 2010* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1999): 117.

brief *kanhua* instruction/experience.³⁰⁸ During his life Dahui was known to use his correspondence as a teaching device in order to reach various Chan monastic communities and some known literati as well. In one of his letters he writes,

The very worst [of all heretical views] is that of a *silent illumination*, with which people become entrenched in the ghostly cave, not uttering a word, and being totally empty and still, seeking the ultimate peace and happiness.³⁰⁹

Silent Illumination was understood to combine some elements of meditative practices (*dhyāna*), the state of relaxed concentration (*samadhi*), and insightful contemplation (*vipassāna*).³¹⁰ The critique that Dahui placed on the methods of *Silent Illumination* were not radical, but were part of a long and ongoing debate within Chan on the preferred method that led to enlightenment – sudden or gradual.³¹¹

In opposition to Hongzhi, who belonged to Caodong Chan [曹洞宗],³¹² Linji Yixuan and Dahui Zhonggao were some of the most respected masters in the Linji line

³⁰⁸ See footnote #64.

³⁰⁹ *Dahui yulu*, T 47.935a29. Also translated in Levering, “Ch’an Enlightenment,” 261.

³¹⁰ Mike Sayama, *Samadhi: Self Development in Zen* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986): 66.

³¹¹ Gregory, “The Sudden/Gradual Polarity”, 476.

³¹² The Caodong sect was founded by Dongshan Lianjie who claimed to have a direct link to Dharma-heir Yuquan Shenxiu [玉泉神秀] (606-706), who was known for his verse-contest with Dajian Huineng [惠能] (638-713). The verses themselves were supposed to represent the distinction between gradual and sudden enlightenment and necessity and less desirability of meditation.

The body is a Bodhi tree,
the mind a standing mirror bright.
At all times polish it diligently,
and let no dust alight.

Bodhi is no tree,

of Chan. Linji describes his teachings and his monastery as a place where the monks “neither read sutras nor learn meditation.”³¹³ This statement was given in order to critique the previously strict sole emphasis on monastic discipline and “empty” practice of conventional meditation that itself had over time gone through a process of syncretization with similar Daoist practices.³¹⁴ Linji was credited with this critique:

Fearing that nobody would understand, they [the Buddhas] selected the name ‘*Dao*’ [*The Way*]. You must not allow this name to lead you into forming a mental concept of a road. So it is said, ‘when the fish is caught, we pay no more attention to the trap.’ When body and mind achieve spontaneity, *the Way* is reached and Mind is understood.³¹⁵

Linji was also known for his controversial teaching practices, while many masters in the Linji’s branch of Chan “aim at sudden enlightenment through the use

nor is the mind a standing mirror bright.

Since all is originally empty,

where does the dust alight?

Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (London: Pelican Books, 1962): 111.-113

³¹³ Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright eds., *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 82.

³¹⁴ The following insert from *Zhuangzi* describe mediation as,

The Way of learning to be great consists in manifesting the clear character, loving the people, and abiding in the highest good.

Only after knowing what to abide in can one be calm.

Only after having been calm can one be tranquil.

Only after having achieved tranquility can one have peaceful repose.

Only after having peaceful repose can one begin to deliberate.

Only after deliberation can the end be attained.

Things have their roots and their branches.

Affairs have their beginnings and their ends.

To know what is first and what is last will lead one to the Way.

Zhuangzi 5.553.23 in translation by Andrew Wilson ed., *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* (New York: Paragon House, 1991): 143.

³¹⁵ Dumoulin, 31.

of shouting, beating, and riddles called *koans*”.³¹⁶ Dahui Zhonggao, in addition to being outspoken about the traps of meditation, is credited with the full establishment of *Kanhua* Chan or “Chan of observing the key phrase”.³¹⁷ In order to erase all traps that are created with superficial reading and interpretation of *koans*, close to the end of his life, Dahui ordered the burning of the *Blue Cliff Collection*, an act which had resulted in an almost complete loss of this text.

It is clear that Dahui somewhat identifies *silent illumination* with a Daoist influenced quietist practice [*jing*] that was “devoid of all wisdom”. It is interesting to find that although he generally attacks all types of meditative practices, he was especially rigorous towards those which he associated with long periods of passive contemplation, which are “all-consuming, focused on ‘silence’, and not particularly concerned with enlightenment.”³¹⁸ If the goal of enlightenment was lost, for Dahui, the main teaching of Buddhism was lost too.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Ching, *Chinese Religions*, 141; Dumoulin argues that the practice of koans in Zen is “one of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of religion.” Dumoulin, 65; At the same time Japanese Rinzai master Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki state in their book, “The koan is not a conundrum to be solved by a nibble wit. It is not a verbal psychiatric device for shocking the disintegrated ego of a student into some kind stability. Nor, in my opinion, is it ever a paradoxical statement except to those who view it from outside. When the koan is resolved it is realized to be a simple and clear statement made from the state of consciousness which has helped to awaken.” Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *The Zen Koan: Its History and Use in Rinzai Zen* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & company, 1965): xi.

³¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of Dahui’s view on *kanhua* phrasing including the sound “wu” (no) see Morten Schlütter’s chapter 5 “A Dog Has No Buddha Nature,” in *How Zen Became Zen*.

³¹⁸ Schlütter, 116.

³¹⁹ It is important to remember that the goal of enlightenment was attainment of buddhahood. According to Miriam Levering, Dahui himself underwent “great” awakening eighteen times, and “small” awakening countless of times. Kenneth Kraft describes several meaning of “awakening” or “enlightenment” being “flexible enough to embrace specific insight experiences and advanced stages of awareness; therefore, awakening could refer to full range of awakening experiences, from a tip-of-the-tongue taste to profound realization as well as a full awakening or full buddhahood”. At the end, what Dahui is critiquing was focus on the “small” awakening, which was only induced by meditation, while forgetting a greater experience that was possible by sudden awakening. Miriam Levering, “Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163)” in *Zen Masters*, edited by Steven Heine and Dale Stuart Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 105; Kenneth Kraft, *Eloquent Zen: Daito and Early Japanese Zen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992): 90-91.

The path of Mindlessness is easy to seek out. So-called “mindlessness” is not being inert and unknowing like earth, wood, tile or stone; it means that the mind is settled and imperturbable when in contact with situations and meeting circumstances; that it does not cling to anything, but is clear in all places, without hindrance or obstruction...no it’s not lip-service mindlessness; if you haven’t attained true Mindlessness and just go by the verbal kind, how is this different from the *perverted* Ch’an of “silent illumination” [emphasis mine].³²⁰
 To study the Path, one must be an iron man:
 Get hold of the mind and settle the issue *immediately*!
 Directly seizing supreme enlightenment,
 Don’t concern yourself at all with right and wrong [emphasis mine].³²¹

For Dahui the actualization of enlightenment was of primary importance, because only the enlightened mind is capable of perceiving that everyone is already intrinsically enlightened. He openly argues against *syncretization* and attributes the “absorption” of any of non-orthodox Chan ideas with decadence within Buddhism.

Heretical teachers teach to regulate the mind and to do quiet-sitting, completely separating themselves from all matters, ceasing and resting. This is clearly the case of using the mind to stop the mind, and using the mind to rest the mind, and using the mind to apply the mind. Practicing in this way, how can they not fall into the realm of [dead-end] *dhyāna* [meditation] and annihilationism like the non-Buddhist and the Hīnayānist?³²²

Dahui critiques the negative impact of inner and external *syncretization* which was pulling the pure doctrine of Buddhism out of its course or within its existing Buddhist doctrine. In his judgment, the inner modes of *syncretization* were produced by the influence of the old and overrun pre-Mahayana doctrine, while the external *syncretization* was developed by accretion of Daoist and post-Mencius Confucian ideas on meditative practices. It is important to note that Dahui does not define

³²⁰ Taken from Dahui’s letter to Hung Po-ch’ong, and translated by Christopher Cleary, *Swampland Flowers: Letters and Lectures of Zen Master Ta Hui* (New York: Grove Press, inc., 1997): 2

³²¹ Taken from Dahui’s letter to Lu Shun-yuan, Cleary, 17.

³²² *Dahui yulu*, T 47.923b9-12. Partially translated by Steven Heine and Dale Wright in *Zen Masters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

syncretization as a conscious process, but rather, as a negative unconscious reaction to other beliefs and practices.

5.3.4 Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucian View on Meditation

The rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and its more fruitful development during Ming China sought to creatively reinterpret ancient Confucian texts, and to redefine already promoted modes of self-cultivation with a new metaphysical foundation that was supposedly be able to rival and replace that of Buddhism. What was left for interpretation from their long and extensive debate with Buddhism had not left them immune to *syncretization*, resulting in their presumably novice ideas, which, it could be argued, were only a byproduct of their unconscious religio/philosophical adaptation.³²³ Their perception of mediation affected Neo-Confucian views of the subject for several centuries. From the time of Confucius who saw meditation as a deviation of self-cultivating practices, to the time of Zhu Xi who promoted *daoxue* [studying of the way], which was inspired by Buddhism, and now emphasized personal cultivation through an active act of contemplation in order to retrospectively rediscover Principle.

[T]he mood of *daoxue* was one of self-confidence; the human mind was seen as a reflection of the ultimate cosmic principle, and an ordinary person, with the right kind of study and effort, could be turned into saint.³²⁴

³²³ Edward T. Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung and the Restructuring of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming* (New York: Columbia University, 1986): 25; Lionel M. Jansen, *Manufacturing Confucianism* (Duke University Press, 1997): 17.

³²⁴ Gardner, "Modes of Thinking and Modes of Discourse in the Song", 583.

It was by questioning this premise that Wang Yangming developed his own understanding of meditation, ultimately defining it as an active process of introspection. While the philosophy of Wang Yangming shows several distinctive elements of *syncretization*, it was his approach to meditation that is in my opinion the most intriguing.

Wang Yangming's definition of self-cultivation with the aid of meditation begins and ends with his reaction to Buddhist and Daoist understandings of this practice. In his *Record of Discourses* he attempts to make a comprehensible distinction in approaches to meditation as practice and its expectation, in regards to all three traditions, singling out the superiority of the Confucian interpretation. In a record of his conversation with one of his students, it reads,

The Teacher said: 'In so far as the Daoists speak of the contemplative conditions of the mind, is the sage [Wang Yangming] able to add anything of real value to what they say? When the Buddhists say that they are free from desire, is the sage able to add anything to this? The contemplation of which Daoists speak comes from their attempt to preserve life and absence of desire and that which the Buddhists speak comes from their attempt to escape bitterness and pain of life and death. But if such ideas are inflicted on the original nature the original meaning of contemplation has been obscured.'³²⁵

Wang Yangming defines the basic purpose of meditation for the Buddhist and the Daoist. At first glance it seems that the rationale behind the Buddhist practice of *Samadhi* was to escape reality and the common negative perception of life as suffering. In opposition, Daoist practitioners' perception of meditation was closely connected with their equal obstruction of reality, however, this hindrance was closely connected with

³²⁵ Wang Yangming's *Record of Discourse* is fully translated by Frederick Goodrich Henke and published in his work on *The Philosophy of Wang Yangming*, 167.

their desire to preserve life beyond its nominal boundaries. He argues that, clinging to this kind of attitude, it was not possible to reach any meaningful realization/enlightenment. He proceeds to explain what should be some of the perquisites of the character and goal of meditation,

A friend who was sitting in meditation attained some insight. He ran to make an inquiry of the Teacher. The Teacher said, ‘Formerly I taught students that were mostly occupied with intellectual explanations and debates on similarities and differences, which did them no good. I therefore taught them sitting in meditation. For a time they realized the situation a little bit [they saw the *true Way*]³²⁶ and achieved some immediate results. In time, however, they gradually developed the defect of fondness for tranquility and disgust for activity and degenerated into lifelessness like dry wood. For this reason I have recently expounded only the doctrine of the extension of innate knowledge. If one’s innate knowledge is clear, it will be all right to try to obtain truth through personal realization in a quiet place or to discover it through training and polishing in actual affairs of life. The original substance of innate knowledge is neither tranquil nor active. Recognition of this fact is the basis of learning’.³²⁷

In the *Instruction for Practical Learning*, book three and question 262, which was partially rewritten here, it is possible to notice several key elements. First, Confucian literati and students of *Xiaoxue* [小學] and *Daxue* [大學] [Elementary and Higher Education respectively] were already experimenting with some forms of meditation, not explicitly saying anything beyond its general character of “sitting meditation”. Although Wang Yangming uses here the particular Confucian terminology *zuo ziwo* (*zuo* [坐] –

³²⁶ The *True Way* or *Dao* [道] was defined by Confucians as a “single definite order” and the only alternative to chaos. In Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, *li* [理] was often translated as “principle” and has been interpreted as a single, non-empirical, ordering unity that penetrates things. Sor-hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004): 61; Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990): 8-9.

³²⁷ Wing-tsit Chan, *Instructions for Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang Yangming* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963): 217.

sitting; *ziwo* [自我]– to forget (the self)], and not *dǎ zuò* [打坐]³²⁸ or *zuò chán* [坐禪]³²⁹, this fact does not exclude the possibilities that different understandings of meditation were not applied, or were interchangeably used by Confucian practitioners who did not consider the differences among them particularly unsettling. By Confucian understanding, the goal of *zuo ziwo*³³⁰ was to actualize self-awareness, self-enhancement, self-discipline, and self-actualization in order to produce stronger personal integrity,³³¹ which would be successfully used for the good of the family and society at large.³³² The Confucian understanding of this process starts with individual meditation, goes through personal enhancement and self-discipline in order to develop personal integrity that was presumably used in family integration and state governance, eventually reaching the excellence of universal harmony.

A second important key element that could be taken from Wang Yangming's discussion describes the change in attitude toward learning – acquisition of knowledge/truth in general.³³³ The initial approach to enlightenment more closely corresponded with the classical Confucian take on learning, when didactic tools of philosophical analysis, analogy, and discussion were solely promoted. The important conclusion for Wang Yangming was that there was no success in the orthodox Confucian methodology if used by itself. Similarly to this – the practice of meditation

³²⁸ The term commonly used in reference to sitting in meditation by Daoist practitioners.

³²⁹ The term commonly used in reference to meditative practices in Buddhism (Chan).

³³⁰ Irene Eber ed., *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition* (London: and New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986): 69.

³³¹ “Upon reflection, the self acquires an identity as well as power for self-transformation. In such a context, Confucians call the self which is to be cultivated or self-cultivated in light of its own act of reflection of self or *ji* [己].” Kwong-loi Shun and David B. Wong, *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 126.

³³² Shun and Wong, 97.

³³³ J. D. Lanchois, “The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 7, No. 2 (1980): 189.

alone would leave them with very little spiritual and intellectual satisfaction, eventually ending in laziness and lifelessness - “like a dry wood”. Although he acknowledges the intriguing Buddhist and Daoist approaches to enlightenment, similar to Zhu Xi, he was convinced that meditation alone could not have everlasting results – “they realized the situation a little bit [only]”. In addition, as the following text describes, common practitioners, often looked beyond strictly fixed boundaries of one particular tradition, therefore their understanding of meditation was masked by their own modes of syncretization.

Ordinarily when literati read books, they merely want to learn something beyond historical events of the past and present, and only for the purpose of writing compositions. Consequently, they really do not pay attention at all to a thorough understanding of the learning of sages and worthies. Because they omit this task, they do not have a defined view in their mind. As soon as they hear the Buddhist and Daoist talk about the mind and nature, they are moved and convinced.³³⁴

Wang Yangming’s awareness of the lack of appropriate understanding of the role of “Nature” and “the mind” within Confucian philosophical discourse helped him to set the guidelines for the foundation of his whole philosophy. There was nothing more disagreeable in the Confucian approach to personal self-actualization than indolence. What Wang Yangming proposed was that neither the classical Confucian approach to self-realization, nor solely the use of meditative practices (including of those of Buddhism and Daoism), would result in enlightenment.³³⁵ The superiority of Wang Yangming’s approach to self-actualization, by which he had effectively integrated two

³³⁴ Ch’en Ch’un was a known pupil of Zhu Xi. This insert was taken from *Ta-ch’üan-chi*, his correspondence with his students, chapter 2:4b-5b in translation by Wing-tsit Chan, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained* (New York: Columbia University, 1986): 172.

³³⁵ It must be noted that Confucians and Buddhists have a clearly distinct understanding of what should constitute the experience of enlightenment, which is closely related to their own perception of the Absolute Truth. These philosophical descriptions lie beyond the scope of this paper.

seemingly opposed methodologies, could be transcribed as the syncretization of some of the elements from both of these two approaches.

Finally, similar to Chan's meditation promoted by Hongzhi in *Silent Illumination*, Wang Yangming's interpretation of meditative practices begins with the resting of the energy *qi* [起], peacefulness *an* [安], quiescence *jijing* [寂静], and mindfulness *li* [厯]. In this act mind and spiritual training take equal parts in "concentrating on ones – *qiyi* [起一]", which results in the "completion of heavenly virtues and overcoming of all desires."³³⁶ For Hongzhi meditative practices served as a major path to enlightenment, however, for Wang Yangming they are only part of a solution – "if one seeks only the peace and the quiet of the mind, one is not necessarily following the principle of Heaven"; "[the] beginner who practice this type of thing will fall into Zen Buddhism."³³⁷ It is interesting to see that, whereas Wang Yangming redefines and syncretizes some of the elements of Hongzhi's philosophy on meditation, he also syncretizes and takes over some of the ideas promoted by Dahui. He argues, "if one's innate knowledge is clear [and for this reason solely meditative practices are not for the beginners], it will be all right to try to obtain truth through personal realization in a quiet place," but also, "to discover it through training and polishing in actual affairs of life." Through intellectual activities, Wang Yangming promotes "breaking through a veil of beclouding selfish impulses that keep one from fully utilizing their inner potentials."³³⁸ It is quite interesting to see that in spite of his overwhelming critique of Daoist pursuit

³³⁶ De Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy*, 80.

³³⁷ Rodney L. Taylor, *The Confucian Way of Contemplation: Okada Takehiko and the Tradition of Quiet-Sitting* (University of south Carolina press, 1988): 119.

³³⁸ Nivison, 51,

of immortality, Wang Yangming also reinterpreted understanding of mediation as an aid, in what he says, “understanding of the path”. Furthermore he writes,

When one cultivates natural law by every breath, and harbors it at every glance of the eye; when the mind is intelligent and clear, and natural law is not interrupted for a moment, then one is able to understand the day. This is virtue of Heaven. This implies that one perceives and understands the path of duty by day and night. How can there, then, be death and life any more.³³⁹

Similar to Daoists who searched for immortality among other things by various meditative practices, Wang Yangming searched for “immortality” of perfect human values, and ultimately “immortality” of harmony within larger society.

Save people from their distress and difficulty. There is a transcendent and imminent higher reality that *all* people (perhaps *all* things) somehow partakes of, ordinarily without being aware of it. The necessary consequences of this ignorance are a life that is unsatisfactory in various ways for different forms of thought: shabby, or ineffective, or unhappy, or miserable. I [Wang Yangming] advocate the unity of knowledge and action, realization of ignorance and effective action of the mind.³⁴⁰

Similarly to Hongzhi, Wang Yangming understands the task of self-cultivation as the incessant and constant act of “mirror polishing”; but at the same time similarly to Dahui, he sees it as not directed through “learning rules in the ordinary sense by reading and studying” but as an active penetration of the mind. In essence, while some of the Chan schools obviously regarded quietude as essential, and Dahui and followers of the Linji sect of Chan focused on what they thought were practical activities,³⁴¹ “The original substance of innate knowledge is neither tranquil nor active, and recognition of this fact is the basis of learning”. For this reason, he says, the interconnection of the passive/active approach is the most effective approach to enlightenment. Wang

³³⁹ *Instruction for Practical Living*, 135.

³⁴⁰ Nivison, 228.

³⁴¹ Dahui argued that active effort is a hundredfold more effective than quiet effort. Taylor, 120.

Yangming, even though Confucian, was able to “quietly syncretize”³⁴² and “see eye to eye” with both seemingly opposed schools of Chan, who were the most prominent actors in much larger framework of Buddhist tradition.³⁴³

Conclusion

The aspiration for constant change, or transcribed in action as syncretization, describes the process, permanent movement and accretion of ideas. In a more explicit way, syncretization should be defined as a response to influences found in one’s habitual surroundings - religious, social, cultural, artistic, economic, etc. The notion of syncretism is often recognized in historical, anthropological and religious discourses, but I would argue that the notion of syncretism has a more widespread character, and it could be found in all spheres of human activity, closely relating to general understanding of overall development of humanity. In the Chinese context, syncretization seems more visible for a very simple reason, because throughout history three of its major religious traditions were more open to critically access, respond and accept “other’s” functional and doctrinal premises. These traditions habitually attempted to fit syncretized ideas into their own philosophical opus, continuously searching for values that could perpetuate their highly desired harmonious existence. For this reason they are an excellent example of how syncretization should be evaluated in theory and practice.

³⁴² This could be a fascinating description of his passivity/activity characterized philosophy.

³⁴³ W. Theodore de Bary, *The Message of the Mind in Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia university Press, 1989): 179.

In general, the uniqueness of Wang Yangming's philosophy was contingent to overall modes of syncretisation. What is evident from his example is that, the process of syncretization is clearly defined by three characteristics. First, syncretization must be understood as a process of adaptation. The evolutive development of one of the most important concepts in Chinese tradition - the concept of Nature or *xing*, provides evidence for this argument. For Classical Chinese thinkers, such as Confucius, *xing* was understood as "gift from Heaven" and "nearly the same for all men", yet, easily disharmonious. Although, Confucius presented his teachings as lessons taken from the antiquity, and alleged that he was "a transmitter and not a maker", much of what he taught represented a response to circumstances that surrounded him. Mencius and Xunzi, while referred to *xing*, stood in the opposite sides of the spectrum; however, they both amended in their own way the previous Confucian understanding of Nature, focusing now on its potency and development. Over the following centuries the complexity of *xing* was further developed and modified by numerous Confucian scholars. Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, who responded to present Daoist and Buddhist critique, eventually molded their own understanding of Nature. By the time of Wang Yangming, Original Nature was not only perceived as the source of all good and absolute moral imperative, but also, the human nature was understood to have originated within it, and now had an universal potency for the highest moral standards. Wang Yangming successfully uses inherited philosophical foundations promoted by Confucians to understand Nature and human nature, but at the same time he syncretizes other elements found outside of Confucian discourse to promote the idea of interrelatedness and inclusiveness among all things. For Wang, similarly to Buddhist

and Daoist teachings, Original Nature was present, reflected, and sustained by the mind, so as to anticipate the changes [syncretisation] that this world would bring. He writes,

In every man there is a (mariner's) compass,
His mind-and-heart is the seat of ten thousand changes.
Foolishly, I once saw things in reverse:
Leaves and branches thought I outside.³⁴⁴

The uniqueness of Wang Yangming teachings on *xing* furthermore proved that syncretization should be portrait as a process of continuous development largely depending on the present circumstances and influences among major traditions in question.

In order to evaluate my second hypothesis, which states that the process of syncretization is generally intensified during the time of crisis of any kind, I have closely analyzed several “pockets” of Chinese history. The period after the fall of the Han dynasty until the Ming dynasty was characterized as one of the most intellectually dynamic periods in the history of China. The traditionally highly revered notion of harmony and balance in Nature and society was interrupted by continuous periods of destruction, disunion, and disappointment. The old orthodox Confucian ideology was challenged by a new resurgence of Daoist and Buddhist influences, which now began to battle for stronger and more effective influence in the tradition. The early medieval period was not only perceived as a time of conflict, it was also regarded as an era of persistent and categorical philosophical borrowing of ideas among literati and religious exegetes, who searched to redefine their own notion of Chineseness. Their focus, as always, lied in the restoration of harmonious nature within an individual, family, society and under Heaven. They all, in their own way taught that there was no disharmony that

³⁴⁴ Pophoff, 6-7

could not be potentially restored. This teaching resonated with a yet broader desire that there is no disunity within the borders that could not make China harmonious and whole again. What was evident from a closer analysis was that increased scholarly debate and development of different intellectual movements closely correspond with the period of “crisis” in China. These times of predicament characterized with disunity, reign of hegemony, increased rebellions, and natural disasters, proved to be a fertile ground for intensified intellectual involvement ultimately producing a stronger stream of syncretic tendencies.

Wang Yangming’s approach toward meditation shows an interesting example of syncretisation, where incorporation of the opposed elements was quite acceptable. Although his philosophy initially inherited an already redefined position, considering the changes instrumentalized by Mencius and through the influences of Daoism, Wang Yangming successfully reconciled Hongzhi’s and Dahui’s position on meditation. He advocates the continuous practices of *jing zuo* [靜坐] or sitting quietly as a passive approach to enlightenment, in addition to the pursuit of active penetration of the mind beyond the ordinary means of study. Using meditation as an example of the syncretization process in the philosophically pluralistic setting of China it is possible to conclude that the austere meditative practice of India changed, while in constant contact with positive reinforcement from Daoism and initial negative underpinnings from Confucianism, into a completely new form of spiritual means in Chan, which was further interpreted and reinterpreted throughout constant discourse with Neo-Confucians. At the end there was no Hinayāna *Samadhi*, Daoist *dǎ zuò*, Confucian *zuo ziwo*, Hongzhi’s or Dahui’s views on *zuo chan*, but there was Wang Yangming’s

understanding of meditation which successfully syncretized all of them into compatible “one”.

Medieval China, from the emergence of Han Yu’s pre Neo-Confucian philosophy in the eighth century, to its exemplary model seen in the work of Wang Yangming, was characterized as a time of increased syncretic fluidity, which would serve as an ideological base for several following centuries.³⁴⁵ The process of syncretization should never be understood as exclusively propagated in the Song/Ming period, but rather should be seen as a visible Chinese philosophical junction found throughout history, however, Wang Yangming’s teachings portray this tendency in more noticeable ways. Wang Yangming’s teachings continue to shape the philosophical trends in East Asia,³⁴⁶ especially in the contemporary discourse on human rights. His universalistic interpretation of humanity is considered to be a starting point in the redefinition of rights in Asia, including gender egalitarianism and humanitarian ecology. The development of his philosophy is an excellent example how syncretisation should be perceived and evaluated in the sense that it brings important nuances of how religion and philosophy change over the course of time.

³⁴⁵ For additional information on the influence of Wang Yangming’s philosophy in Korea, Japan, and in contemporary discourse see, Tu Weiming, “Intellectuals in the World Made of Knowledge,” *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 30, No. 2 (2005):224-226; Noh Daehwan, “The Eclectic Development of Neo-Confucianism and Statecraft from 18th to the19th Century,” *Korea Journal* 43, No. 4 (2003): 87-112; Paolo Santangelo, “A Neo-Confucian Debate in 26th Century Korea,” *T’oung Pao* 76, No. 4 (1990): 234-270; Koh Young-jin, “Neo-Confucianism as the Dominant Ideology in Joseon,” *Korea Journal* 43, No. 4 (2003): 59-86; Song-Rae Park, “Portents and Neo-Confucian Politics in Korea, 1392-1519,” *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 49 (1979): 53-117; Koh Byong-ik, “Confucianism in Asia’s Modern Transformation,” *Korea Journal* 32, No. 4 (1992): 46-64; Ronal Moore, “Report on the Panel Discussion: Wang Yangming and Japanese Culture,” *Philosophy East and West* 23, No. 1/2 (1973): 217-224; Cha-sik Chung, “Between Principle and Situation Contrasting Styles in the Japanese and Korean Traditions of Moral Culture,” *Philosophy East and West* 56, No. 2 (2006): 253-280.

³⁴⁶ Peng Guoxiang, “Contemporary Chinese Studies of Wang Yangming (王阳明) and His Followers,” *Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 2, No. 2 (2003): 311-329.

Table 1. Chronological Review of Chinese History

Xia Dynasty		2100-1600 B.C.E.
Shang Dynasty		1600-1046 B.C.E.
	Western Zhou	1046-771 B.C.E.
	Eastern Zhou	770-256 B.C.E.

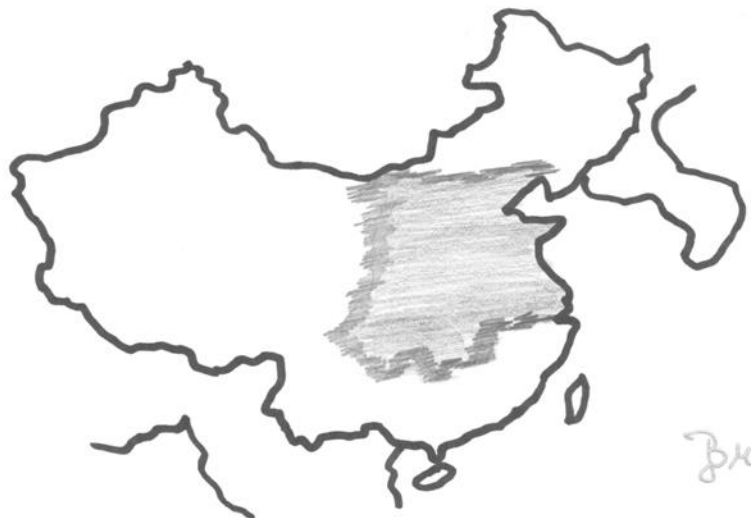
Zhou Dynasty	Spring and Autumn Period		770-403 B.C.E
	Warring States Period		403-221 B.C.E.
Qin Dynasty			221-207 B.C.E.
Han Dynasty	Western Han		206 B.C.E.-207 C.E
	Eastern Han		25-220 C.E.
Three Kingdoms	Wei		220-265
	Shu		221-263
	Wu		222-280
Jin Dynasty	Western Jin		265-316
	Eastern Jin		317-420
Southern and Northern Dynasties	Southern Song		420-479
	Southern Qi		479-502
	Southern Liang		502-557
	Southern Chen		557-589
	Wei	Northern	386-534
		Eastern	534-550
		Western	386-534
	Northern Qi		550-557
	Northern Zhou		557-581
Sui Dynasty			581-618
Tang Dynasty			618-907
5 Dynasties (North)	Later Liang Dynasty		907-923
	Later Tang Dynasty		923-936
	Later Jin Dynasty		936-946
	Later Hun Dynasty		947-950
	Later Zhou Dynasty		951-960

and 10 Kingdoms (South)	Wu Kingdom	907-937
	Wuyue Kingdom	907-978
	Min Kingdom	909-945
	Chu Kingdom	907-951
	Southern Han	907-971
	Former Shu	907-925
	Later Shu	934-965
	Jingnan Kingdom	924-963
	Southern Tang	937-975
	Northern Han	951-979
Song Dynasty	Northern Song	960-1127
	Southern Song	1127-1279
Liao Dynasty		907-1125
Jin Dynasty		1115-1234
Yuan Dynasty		1271-1368
Ming Dynasty		1368-1644
Qing Dynasty		1644-1911
Republic of China		1912-
People's Republic of China		1949-

APPENDIX 1



Map #1: Shang Period (1750-1027 B. C. E.)



Map #2: Zhou Period (1027- 221 B. C.) E.)

Source: Boris Majhen

Legend	
	Present borders of People's Republic of China
	Territory occupied

APPENDIX 2

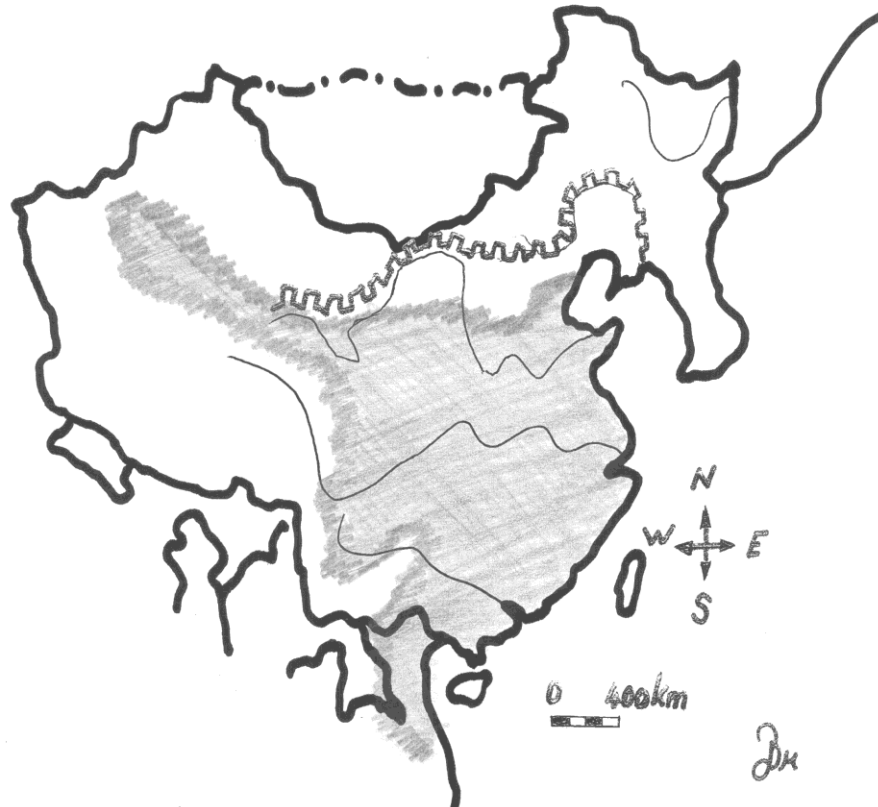


Map #3: Han Dynasty (206 B. C. E. – 265 C. E.)

Source: Boris Majhen

Legend (Map #3, 4)	
	Present borders of People's Republic of China
	Territory occupied
	Great Wall of China (main route)
	3 Major rivers (Huang He, Yangzi, Zhu Jiang)

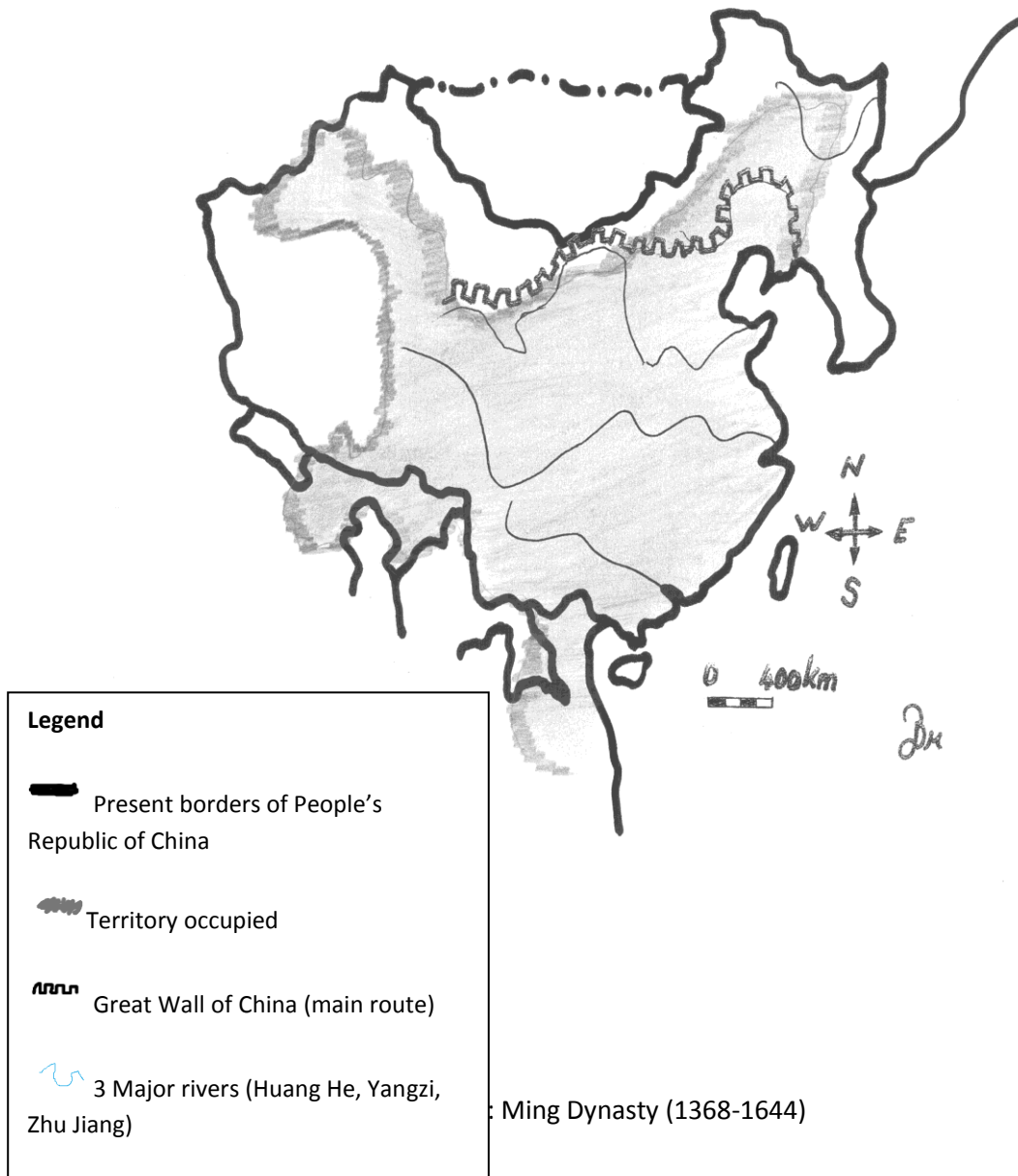
APPENDIX 3



Map #4: Tang Dynasty (618-907)

Source: Boris Majhen

APPENDIX 4



Source: Boris Majhen

APPENDIX 5

3. In darkness it is even brighter,
When hidden it is all the more visible.
The crane dreams of misty frost,
The waters contain the distant autumn.

Stanzas #6-#9 are missing from the Schlütter's translation of *Mozhao ming*.

10. All the myriad things in the universe,
Emit radiance and speak the dharma.
They all attest to each other,
And individually correspond in dialogue.

11. Corresponding in dialogue and attesting,
They respond to each other perfectly.
But if in illumination silence is lost,
Then aggressiveness will appear.

12. Attesting and corresponding in dialogue,
Perfectly they respond to each other.
But if in silence illumination is lost,
Then you will become turbid and leave behind the dharma.

13. When "silence" and "illuminating" both are operating and complete,
The lotus flower opens and the dreamer awakens.
The hundred rivers flow into the sea,
And the thousand peaks dace the great mountain.

14. Like geese preferring milk,
Like bees seeking out flowers,
When silent illumination is perfect and obtained,
The teaching of our tradition [*zong*] is set in motion.

15. Our tradition's teachings of silent illumination
Penetrates to the highest peak and the deepest deep.
Our bodies are emptiness [*sunyata*],
Our arms form the *mudra* [sacred hand gesture].

16. Beginning and end are parts of the one principle,
Through transformation they become the ten thousand differences.
Continue...

Mr. He offered jade,
Xiangry pointed out its flaws.

17. The different Buddhist teachings are all on the same level,
The marvelous function [of skillful means] has no need to strive.
An emperor dwells within the place walls,
While a general stays outside the fortifications.

18. the teachings of our tradition
Are on mark and hit right in the center.
Transmit it out in all directions,
Make no delay in expounding it.

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