



Li Zhi 李贄

Confucianism and

THE VIRTUE
OF DESIRE

Pauline C. Lee

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A volume in the
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Roger T. Ames, *editor*

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In memory of my grandfather 公公
(1914–2010)
who preserved his beautiful heart
through all his days.

And for sweet Nadya 達樂,
this book on the child-like heart.

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An earlier version of Chapter Three is forthcoming as “‘There is nothing more than . . . dressing and eating’: Li Zhi 李贽 and the child-like heart-mind (*tong xin* 童心),” in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, v. 11, n. 1, spring 2012. An earlier version of sections found in Chapter Two and Chapter Five is forthcoming as “‘Spewing Jade and Spitting Pearls’: Li Zhi’s Ethics of Genuineness,” in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, supplement to v. 38, December 2011. I thank both journals for giving me permission to republish the respective articles.

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Conventions

In light of their accuracy and availability I use the following editions of Li Zhi's works:

Fenshu 焚書 (*A Book to Burn*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961. (Hereafter FS.)

Xu fenshu 續焚書 (*An Addendum to A Book to Burn*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961. (Hereafter XFS.)

Cangshu 藏書 (*A Book to Hide*), 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961. (Hereafter CS.)

Xu cangshu 續藏書 (*An Addendum to A Book to Hide*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961. (Hereafter XCS.)

Chutan ji 初潭集 (*Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974. (Hereafter CTJ.)

Li Zhi wenji 李贄文集 (*The Collected Works of Li Zhi*), edited by Zhang Jianye 张建业, 7 vols. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000. (Hereafter LZWJ.)

During the completion of my book manuscript a new complete and annotated set of Li Zhi's works has been published. See Li Zhi 2009a.

In Romanizing the Chinese, I use the *pinyin* system. Two exceptions to my use of *pinyin* are with proper names and published works that have become commonly known under another Romanization system. When quoting translations by other scholars, I have Romanized the Chinese terms in *pinyin* for the sake of consistency. When I have modified a translation, I indicate that the translation has been “adapted.”

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I. LI ZHI'S LIFE IN THE EIGHTEENTH YEAR OF THE WANLI REIGN (1590)

Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), widely known as one of the foremost iconoclastic thinkers in Chinese history, was born in the commercial southern district of Jinjiang 晉江 in the port city of Quanzhou 泉州, the southern province of Fujian, in the sixth year of the Jiajing reign of the Ming period (1527).¹ In the course of his lifetime, he came to participate actively in a wide and passionate discourse of his time that centered around a cluster of notions, including “desire” (*yu* 欲), “feeling” (*qing* 情), and “genuineness” (*zhen* 真). Critical voices from this period—Li Zhi himself, Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1624),² Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620),³ Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616),⁴ to name just four—differed, often times quite radically, in their focus, conception, and philosophical positions regarding these related ideas. The terrain of this discourse was complex and varied, and disputes were sustained, wide-ranging, and passionate.

Much recent scholarship has drawn attention to this widespread discourse among literati in the late-Ming and referred to voices within it as forming a “cult of feeling” or “*qing*.”⁵ The late-Ming,⁶ of course, is not the only period in Chinese history when we find such intense and feverish debate regarding the spontaneous expression of the self.⁷ But the period spanning the 16th and 17th centuries is certainly one of the highpoints in Chinese history on this subject and offers a distinctive variation on this broader theme.⁸ In Li Zhi we find one of the most compelling and subtle expressions of this general point of view and a developed philosophical vision that is relevant and significant to contemporary ethics. Li argues for a rich and philosophically viable account of the good life as the spontaneous expression of *genuine feelings*. He was one of the most

central, celebrated, and creative thinkers within the late-Ming “cult of feelings,” and significant aspects of his view remain both viable and interesting today.

The titles of Li Zhi’s major works reveal much about his bold and iconoclastic character: *A Book to Burn* (*Fenshu* 焚書) and *A Book to Hide* (*Cangshu* 藏書).⁹ The letters (generally in fascicles 1–2), miscellaneous writings including essays (fascicles 3–4), historical commentaries (fascicle 5), and poetry (fascicle 6) from the former work comprise a six fascicle, or chapter, book commonly considered the most controversial and imaginative of Li’s works. In the preface to this collection, Li Zhi explains the title of his book:

A Book to Burn includes responses to questions written to me by my dearest of friends (*zhi ji* 知己). Because these letters come so close to what gives sustenance to contemporary scholars, and since these letters strike at the heart of their chronic diseases, if these scholars were to read these letters they would certainly wish to kill me. Therefore I desire to burn this book. I say that I must burn and discard it. I cannot keep it. . . . When I declare that I desire to burn this book, I say so because the book grates upon people’s ears. When I declare that I desire to engrave the blocks for this book, I say so because the book speaks to people’s hearts (*ru ren zhi xin ye* 入人之心也).¹⁰ As for those who find my work grates upon their ears, they most certainly will succeed in killing me, which is something that merits fear. But I am sixty-four *sui*.¹¹ If one of my essays speaks to the heart of another, then perhaps I may find somebody who understands me! I take joy (*xing* 幸) in those few who might understand me and therefore have carved these printing blocks.¹²

Historian Timothy Brook helpfully calls on the metaphor of the changing seasons to schematically illuminate the socio-historical developments in Ming China. The period begins in the winter, a time of stability, strict adherence to role-specific duties, and careful attention to farming. Spring, from the mid 1400s through the 1550s, brings emerging social mobility and economic prosperity. In summer, from the mid 1500s through the fall of the period in 1644, mobility and prosperity yield to corruption and greed.¹³ Li Zhi’s life spans both the spring and summer. Throughout his writings, there exists boundless evidence of Li’s frustration with what he referred to as the “chronic diseases” of his age—the corruption, superficiality, materialism, extravagance, and greed that plagued late 16th century China. He was equally frustrated with ways of thinking embodied in the stereotype of the cramped, narrow-minded scholar-bureaucrats who unreflectively embraced the

teachings of the great “orthodox” neo-Confucian, and arguably the most influential Chinese thinker, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200).¹⁴ While Zhu Xi is in fact a brilliant and subtle writer and one of the greatest synthetic thinkers in any culture, from his own time through the present, he has persistently been adopted as a symbol of a thinker who unyieldingly holds fast to a given tradition, social hierarchy, and stifling rituals. Li commonly refers to this type of individual as a “gentleman of the Way” (*daoxue xiansheng* 道學先生), an oft-used derogatory term meaning a pedantic and rigid scholar wanting in creativity and spontaneity.

Li’s tonic for the malady of his age is in many respects its opposites: “joy,” “true” or “soul friends” (*zhi ji* 知己), “desire” (*yu* 欲), deep “understanding” (*zhi* 知), and the resonance between “hearts” (*ru ren zhi xin* 入人之心) expressing genuine feelings and thoughts. As we will later see, Li never offers a specific, narrow prescription for living life well but rather uses character sketches, metaphors, wit, irony, and humor to draw us into looking at the world from new perspectives; in this way Li gestures toward a general direction where we might find and develop our own distinct vision for living life well. Li does insistently and vigorously condemn what he believes are narrow, stifling, and enervating ways of living life; with no ambiguity he censures the vice of “phoniness” (*jia* 假), the overly tutored, the ornate. At the same time, his vision celebrates a wide variety of ways of living life well. Central to Li’s loose, broad, and accommodating normative ideal is the virtue of “genuineness” (*zhen* 真),¹⁵ and specifically genuine self-expression. In one of the most often-cited passages from among his writings, he speaks of this virtue:

The child-like heart-mind is the genuine heart-mind (*zhen xin* 真心). If one denies the child-like heart-mind, then he denies the genuine heart-mind. As for the child-like heart-mind, free of all falsehood (*jia* 假) and entirely genuine, it is the original heart-mind at the very beginning of the first thought. Losing the child-like heart-mind is losing the genuine heart-mind. Losing the genuine heart-mind is losing the genuine self. A person who is not genuine will never again regain that with which he began.¹⁶

The text of *A Book to Burn*, the preface of which I have quoted from above, was first printed in the relatively small but nationally prominent Macheng 麻城 county,¹⁷ in the inland Huguang province,¹⁸ in the 18th year of the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1590).¹⁹ There exist reproductions of various editions of the *A Book to Burn*;²⁰ however, neither the original manuscript nor copies of the first printed editions remain. The first edition was carved on wood blocks, likely from the pear tree, and printed on what was most probably bamboo paper.²¹

Publication of *A Book to Burn* immediately elicited both deep admiration for and outrage against Li. When it was first published, Li was living in relative solitude. Five years earlier, in 1585, he had sent his wife, his son-in-law, and his one surviving daughter²² back to his natal home. Soon thereafter, in 1588, his wife died, but Li remained in Macheng county and did not return to Jinjiang for the funeral. At the invitation of the two most well-known brothers of the nationally powerful Zhou lineage, Zhou Sijing 周思敬 (*jinshi*, 1568) and Zhou Sijiu 周思久 (*jinshi*, 1553),²³ Li retreated to live on the wooded cliff of the north shore of Dragon Lake, in Macheng county, in the Cloister of the Flourishing Buddha (*Zhifo yuan* 芝佛院), one of a complex of Buddhist temples constructed by the Zhou brothers around the lake, a place renowned for its natural beauty.²⁴ The cloister was home to more than 40 monks, but Li considered it an intellectual and spiritual refuge rather than a place for Buddhist worship.

Despite protests from a number of friends, Li, a self-described “Confucian,”²⁵ shaved his head that summer soon after moving into the Cloister.²⁶ He declared he shaved his head purely for pragmatic reasons—to symbolize a severance from Confucian duties and specifically familial obligations back in Jinjiang. But many saw Li’s newly tonsured state as evidence of his commitment to Buddhism. Li himself wittily writes of the tension between “Confucianism” and “Buddhism”: “I too simply follow the masses. Not only do I follow the masses and consider Kongzi²⁷ to be a sage, but I also follow the masses and worship him.” And, in a last line that radically reframes and alters the meaning of his essay, Li adds, “And so, I follow the masses and worship Kongzi while in the Cloister of the Flourishing Buddha.”²⁸ Such a technique—unexpectedly throwing the reader off kilter in the last moments of his essays, letters, or commentaries—is typical of Li Zhi. In his writing Li reframes conventional ways of looking at the world, turns our heads, and entices us to move toward new directions. If we are looking for specific formulas and detailed prescriptions for living life well, Li Zhi will leave us deeply dissatisfied. While there are general directions and places to look for living the good life, Li would argue that to offer specifics or details is to mislead. The best we can do for others is to help each individual find his or her own heart and mind, what Li conceives of and calls the child-like heart-mind.

In spring of the year 1590, living in the Cloister, having just published his controversial book, Li leisurely journeyed southwest over 300 kilometers to the county of Gong'an 公安, in what was then Huguang province, and there, the Yuan brothers (Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1560–1600), Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610), and Yuan Zhongdao), nationally renowned for their literary achievements, heard

of his presence and eagerly came to meet with him.²⁹ In “Writings of Extravagance at the Oak Forest” (*Zuolin jitan* 柞林紀譚) Yuan Zhongdao leaves us with a record of their conversation. Zhongdao was struck by Li’s impassioned nature and describes Li as “bursting with ideas and wild with ardor” (*hua duo dian kuang* 話多顛狂).³⁰ Yuan Hongdao was the founder of the Gong’an school of literature, and his two brothers were renowned members of this group. The school, named after their natal home, espoused the genuine, the spontaneous, and the expression of ardent feeling as opposed to the overly tutored and imitative. Li is widely considered to be by far the greatest single intellectual influence on the Yuan brothers.³¹ After a second visit with Li, in 1591 at the Cloister, Zhongdao writes,

Only when [Hongdao] met Longhu [Li Zhi] did he realize that until then he had been culling worn-out phrases and had thoughtlessly stuck to conventional opinions, as if he were crushed under the language of the ancients and a vital spark was completely covered up. But then the floodgates opened, and like a down feather carried along by a favorable wind, like a giant fish sporting in a huge waterway, he was able to be the master of his thoughts, rather than be mastered by them, was able to manipulate the ancients, rather than be manipulated by them; when he spoke forth, each word flowed out from his innermost being.³²

While many literati such as the Yuan brothers found inspiration in Li Zhi’s life and works, many others were vexed or even outraged by both. One such individual was Li Zhi’s one-time intimate friend Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596, *jinsi* 1556).³³ Like Li Zhi, Geng Dingxiang identified with the Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) school of learning. Wang Yangming is one of a handful of the most influential thinkers in Chinese history. His thought is “wild” (*kuang* 狂) rather than restrained, intuitive and spontaneous rather than synthetic and logical, and some insisted, unorthodox and “Buddhist” rather than truly “Confucian.” The neo-Confucian Lu-Wang school, the school of the mind, in one part bears his name. Along with Kongzi and Zhu Xi, Wang is without doubt one of the greatest Confucian thinkers and one of the greatest thinkers in Chinese history.³⁴

Within the Wang Yangming school of learning, both Geng and Li saw themselves as part of the most free-spirited branch, the Taizhou, a school to which as we saw earlier the Zhou brothers also belonged.³⁵ The school derives its name from the natal home, Taizhou prefecture, south of the Yangzi River, of the man regarded as the founder of this school, Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541).³⁶ The son of a salt farmer and with only five

years of formal education in a small village school, Wang Gen studied under Wang Yangming, and in 1529 founded his own school of learning. Those who identified with this school were often characterized as “wild Channists” (*kuang chan* 狂禪), Chan (Japanese: *Zen*) being one of the least tradition-bound schools of Chinese Buddhism, who were independent, populist, and eccentric. From a school of learning centered on Wang Yangming’s teachings, it grew into one of the most influential intellectual movements in 16th century Jiangnan (or lower Yangzi region), a geographic, economic, and most importantly, for our purposes, cultural area within the southern reaches of the famously long Yangzi River, distinguished for its urbanity, affluence, economic prosperity, and abundance of both natural and cultural resources. The Taizhou school claimed as members both literati and commoners, including a woodcutter, a potter, stonemasons, merchants, and agricultural laborers. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695), editor of the well-known *Records of Ming Scholars* (*Ming ru xuean* 明儒學案), writes that under the influence of the Taizhou school, Wang Yangming’s teachings “spread like the wind over all the land.”³⁷

Li knew all four Geng brothers well, and had spent time as their houseguest in Huang’an 黃安 county, neighboring and until 1562 part of Macheng county, immediately after his retirement from official service. He stayed with them from 1581 until 1584, when the more free-spirited and youngest Geng brother, Geng Dingli 耿定理, passed away. Soon after Geng Dingli’s death, Geng Dingxiang and Li Zhi increasingly quarreled over Li’s unorthodox behavior, intellectual views, and Li’s neglect of his family obligations.

In 1590, the year *A Book to Burn* was published, Geng Dingxiang had just retired from his quite successful official career, his last post being the powerful position of Minister of Revenue. A substantial portion of *A Book to Burn* consists of letters in response to Dingxiang, and one scholar has argued that the book can most illuminatingly be read as a set of sharply critical and personal comments on Dingxiang’s views and way of life.³⁸ In one letter Li writes in exasperation to Dingxiang, “And so, the person who desired to learn the teachings of Kongzi, that is, Mengzi, was unable to go beyond being a mere follower of Kongzi. I deeply regret that he [Mengzi] was not a sage. And you say that I wish to follow Mengzi!”³⁹ Li Zhi found Dingxiang unimaginative, hypocritical, lacking in intellectual and moral courage; Dingxiang was incensed by Li’s published criticisms.

It was also in 1590, that Geng wrote “A Letter Asking for Admonition” (*Qiu jing shu* 求儆書)⁴⁰ in which he vented his frustration against Li’s words and describes them as “evil sounds unworthy of entering one’s ears.”⁴¹ Geng Dingxiang was not the only one vexed by Li’s writings.

In 1602, Li was charged with three crimes: deviant views, sexual promiscuity, and confusing Buddhism for Confucianism.⁴² The Wanli emperor ordered Li to be arrested and his books—including Li's *A Book to Burn*—to be banned and burned.⁴³ Li's life and thought are fraught with complexity and sometimes uncomfortable strain and tension; and so too was the reception of his *A Book to Burn*. The book stirred up anger and fear among many literati. And yet it inspired as many others. One literatus wrote in 1625, "even though Li's books are prohibited, still they circulate broadly among the populace."⁴⁴

II. THE CULT OF *QING*

Li's ethics of genuine feelings, the central subject of my book, grows out of a vibrant discourse that developed in his time and place. The events surrounding the publication of Li's *A Book to Burn* give us a glimpse into this intellectual world. The Yuan brothers insisted on unfettered, spontaneous expression; Wang Gen argued for "spontaneity" or "naturalness" (*ziran* 自然), the virtue of the feeling of "joy" (*le* 樂), and loving and caring for the self. If we turn from 1590, or the 18th year of the Wanli reign, to 1598, the 26th year, we find another example from one of the most prominent voices within the late 16th century "cult of feeling" or *qing*, the great late-Ming dramatist Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616). The preface from his drama of true love entitled *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭), dated 1598,⁴⁵ is perhaps the most quoted passage on the subject of *qing* in the late-Ming. When the play premiered, it was so popular that one literatus remarked, "When the published edition of the play first came out, there was no man of letters or scholar without a copy on his desk."⁴⁶ Based on a poem Tang Xianzu wrote mourning Li Zhi's death, we know Tang was familiar with Li's work and admired him.⁴⁷ Tang was a student of one of Li Zhi's teachers, Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515–1588),⁴⁸ and it is apparent that Tang was much influenced by the writings of the Taizhou school in general.⁴⁹

Tang writes in his famous preface:

Love comes from a source unknown, yet it grows ever deeper. The living may die of it, by its power the dead may live again. Love is not love at its fullest if one who lives is unwilling to die for it, or if it cannot restore to life one who has died. And must the love that comes in dreams necessarily be unreal? For there is no lack of dream lovers in this world.⁵⁰

The word *qing*, translated in this passage as "love," is portrayed as the all-powerful sustaining force of life. If we use the language of virtue,

which in this context is well-warranted, *qing*, often translated variously also as “desire,” “feeling,” or “sentiment,” trumps traditional Confucian virtues such as benevolence (*ren* 仁), dutifulness (*yi* 義), observance of the rites (*li* 禮), and wisdom (*zhi* 智).⁵¹

This valuing of *qing* also is found in the preface, composed by the nationally influential editor and publisher of popular literature Feng Menglong,⁵² to his widely read collection of over 800 love stories entitled *History of Desire* (*Qing Shi* 情史). Like Tang, Feng too was influenced by Li Zhi as is evidenced by the frequent appearance of quotations from Li Zhi’s works in Feng’s writings. It is unlikely that Feng and Li ever met, but Feng clearly was familiar with Li Zhi’s writings and there is evidence that Feng had read Li Zhi’s commentary on the *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳).⁵³ In his preface to the *History of Desire* Feng writes:

With *qing* the unrelated become kin.
 Without *qing* even kin become strangers.
 Not having *qing* and having *qing* are worlds apart.
 I desire to establish a school of *qing*,
 To instruct all living things.
 The son faces his father with *qing*;
 The minister faces the emperor with *qing*.
 The same holds true for all other relationships.
 Things in this world are like loose coins.
Qing is the cord that strings them together.
 Just as loose coins are strung together by a cord,⁵⁴
 Even those from far corners of the earth can become couples.⁵⁵

In this work too, *qing* trumps “orthodox Confucian” virtues such as filial piety towards parents, duty to ruler, or obligations between brothers. “Desire” or “love” is the very fabric of the life well lived. The renowned scholar of Chinese literature Anthony Yu speaks of Feng’s call for establishing a religion of *qing* as “nothing short of a trans-valuation of Confucian values.”⁵⁶ As we shall see, at least in the writings of Li Zhi, the valuing of *qing*, what I render as “feeling”—as well as of other ideals such as the expression of desire, genuineness, and spontaneity—is at times *trans-valuing* and at other times *reinvigorating* the tradition of “Confucianism” or “Confucian” thought.

Li Zhi was a key intellectual figure in late 16th century China. As noted above, he was intimate friends with the Geng and the three Yuan brothers. He may have been influenced by and clearly deeply influenced the writings of Tang Xianzu and Feng Menglong. In the following chapters we will have the opportunity to point to other significant interlocutors who also were prominent figures in the late-Ming discourse on the

related subjects of spontaneity, feelings, the genuine, and desire: Li's close friend from the Taizhou school Jiao Hong 焦竑, his teacher from the Taizhou school Luo Rufang 羅汝芳, his pupil Mei Danran 梅澹然,⁵⁷ perhaps better known as the young widowed daughter of the powerful Mei Guozhen 梅國楨, among others.

III. SECONDARY LITERATURE, METHODS, AND AUDIENCE

A. EVOLUTIONARY, HISTORICALLY REDUCTIONIST, AND *PHILOSOPHICAL* READINGS

Although at present western language studies of Li are limited to a number of articles, book chapters, and one edited volume,⁵⁸ he has received well-deserved and extensive scholarly attention in Chinese and Japanese⁵⁹ ranging across the subjects of metaphysics, literature, women, politics, history, and ethics. Much of the extant scholarship on Li can be divided into two general approaches. One places Li within an “*evolutionary*” framework⁶⁰ and sheds light on his work by examining his ideas within the larger framework of intellectual and literary developments.⁶¹ A second reads Li Zhi as a figure deeply rooted or even mired in and “reduced” to the sentiments of his specific *historical* time and place.⁶² While there should be no doubt either that Li's ideas did contribute to later intellectual and literary developments or that he is indeed a product of his time and place, Li is also something else; his writings lay out a striking and robust *ethics*. Among the views for which I shall argue is that he is a thinker we ought to engage and bring into the growing body of international religious-philosophical discourse on the importance of desires and the expression of feelings, as well as the ideal of authenticity or genuineness.

In 1970, intellectual historian Wm. Theodore de Bary noted in his path-breaking study on Li Zhi and individualism, “Despite the considerable literature on Li [Zhi], a full-length study of this important figure is badly needed.”⁶³ While at present a number of such monographs do exist in Chinese and one in French,⁶⁴ almost forty years later, still, no full-length study of this significant Chinese thinker exists in English. He is a fascinating and important figure in Chinese cultural history and one of the best-selling and most widely read authors in his own time, late-Ming China,⁶⁵ but his life and thought have remained almost wholly inaccessible to English-speaking audiences.

While there exist monographs on Li Zhi in Chinese and French, these extant works—studies from which I have benefited immeasurably—tend to present Li either within an evolutionary or historically reductionist framework. Both are fruitful frameworks; at the same time,

as with any method of study, both have their particular inherent limitations. For one, such approaches are not effective for treating and presenting works as interesting and valuable *in their own right*. In one way or another, they tend to favor history and context over the content of the work itself. In my study of Li Zhi, I will aim to present his thought as valuable in its own right by studying his ethical views. I take seriously the historical rootedness of his ideas and at the same time am firmly convinced that his writings ought not only be reduced to their historical context; his works deserve to be read, critically analyzed, and celebrated as the masterful philosophical and literary works that they are.

B. READING LI ZHI AS A WRITER

While I argue in this book that ethics is an integral part of Li's thought and writings, equally central to my argument is that Li is importantly different from our contemporary conception of a religious ethicist or a moral philosopher. Li was a writer: he was a truly gifted short essayist, a remarkable master of the art of writing letters, a good poet who wrote short verse, a shrewd historian who effectively defended unorthodox views, a passionate, astute, and vitriolic social critic of his time, and a creative thinker who effectively challenged and imaginatively amended prevailing views on a number of subjects including government, metaphysics, and ethics. In his own time and in the centuries following his death he was most celebrated as a literary critic. What is arguably the most influential commentary on the great Ming novel the *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) is attributed to Li Zhi. Countless volumes and articles have been written on the "Li Zhi commentary" and the authenticity of this attribution.⁶⁶ Li was a master of canonical literature, and at the same time he was a staunch defender of the value of traditionally marginalized works and especially fiction. In multiple ways Li plays a significant role in Chinese intellectual and literary history, and in my work I shed light upon Li's important role in the vibrant late-Ming world of *writing*.

Clearly, contemporary western distinctions among literary genres—e.g., fiction, philosophy, history—and disciplines—e.g., literature, philosophy, religion—have little if any hold in Li Zhi's time and place. Li's ethical views directly impact on his literary criticism, and his assessment of literary and historical figures, as well as his views on aesthetics, are themselves expressions of his ethics. In the following chapters I draw out just how centrally important a subtle and sure grasp of his ethics is to understanding his work in general, including his more widely studied literary criticism and literary theory.⁶⁷ In Li Zhi's writings, what we in our time conceive of as ethics, aesthetics, or history all comprise a seamless whole. To more fully understand and appreciate his work, we

absolutely must see and analyze the *multiple* dimensions of his thought: literary, historical, and, fundamentally, *ethical*.

C. REPERTOIRES, METAPHORS,
NARRATIVES, AND FAMILY RESEMBLANCES

Scholarship on the “cult of *qing*” increasingly strives to shed light on the diversity of views and the fine nuances within this discourse regarding a wide range of subjects including the origins of feeling⁶⁸ and its relation to other ideals such as “spontaneity.”⁶⁹ Another aspect of my work on Li Zhi involves the exploration and use of effective methods for studying a concept as slippery, intangible, and amorphous as *qing*, or “feeling,” which is inextricably intertwined with a cluster of other ideals. I look for methods that effectively capture change, ambiguity, and elusiveness while at the same time seeking for what might seem, considering the subject matter, to be unattainable: I seek for a substantive, clear, and precise understanding of Li’s ethics of the expression of genuine feelings.

The various ways in which I proceed in my study include considering a *repertoire*⁷⁰ of related ideas batted back and forth within a certain cultural milieu, including expression of feelings and fulfillment of genuine desire, rather than seeking to study one specific ideal or “tradition”; identifying and shedding light on historical and literary *characters*⁷¹ and *metaphors*⁷² in Li’s writings; and looking for *family resemblances*⁷³ rather than a core essence or set of unchanging attributes in Li’s views on ideals such as genuineness and spontaneity. In the following chapters I will have opportunity to discuss these various methods and how I adopt and use them—or in the case of metaphors, how I adapt particular theories—to shed light on Li’s thought. Here, let me say a few words regarding the concepts of traditions and repertoires.

Much scholarship on Li Zhi has sought to illuminate his work by identifying him as a member of one or another school, or trend of thought. One scholar writes, “Li Zhi has been labeled a Confucian, Buddhist, Legalist, iconoclast, progressive, nihilist, populist, individualist, and more.” Li Zhi, this same scholar continues, is in fact “a rather dramatic exponent of relativism.”⁷⁴ In light of much of what already has been said about the spontaneous expression of genuine feeling serving as a normative ideal for Li Zhi and many others of his time, this last claim is difficult to accept. This mistaken portrayal of Li’s philosophy sheds a clear and revealing light on how critically important it is to understand his ethical views not only on their own but as a way to grasp other, related aspects of his thought. Even more central for the purpose of our argument, while illuminating Li and his thought by casting him

as working *within* or *against* a certain school of thought or tradition can certainly yield helpful insights, such a perspective can and has obscured certain nuances and details of Li Zhi's ideas.

Historian of religion Robert Campany makes the following insightful remark about the framework of "schools" and "traditions":

The use of such suffixes [-isms and -ist], rampant in the study of Chinese religions (where we have the big three of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) and elsewhere, amounts to a kind of shorthand, a convenient way to generalize over vast numbers of particulars. But it is also a sleight of hand, creating in three key strokes an entity that, in addition to its sudden existence as a thing among other things, is further implied to have the property of systematicity and therefore to be a well-integrated and clearly demarcated whole, such that aspects or parts of the whole must resemble each other more strongly than they resemble any outside aspects or parts.⁷⁵

Campany proposes that instead of conceiving of religions, and I would add religious thinkers, as parts of a *tradition*, an often more productive framework is to examine thinkers, practitioners, and movements as engaging a number of "*repertoires*" of resources whether ideas, concepts, practices, or symbols. This is the general approach I follow in my study of Li Zhi. Rather than examining him primarily as a member of a tradition or even as a syncretic thinker weaving together ideas from diverse traditions—whether "Confucian," "Buddhist," or "Daoist," for example—I adopt a looser category of analysis that, I argue, sheds more light upon Li's thought. Instead of examining the ways in which Li affirms or trans-values a particular tradition or school of thought, I show how Li Zhi both newly imagines and reinvigorates a "repertoire" of virtues having to do with desire, expression of feeling, spontaneity, and genuineness. Li's ethics of genuineness is one expression, a powerful, rich, and interesting one, within the late-Ming "cult of *qing*." By presenting a portrait of him and his views, in one small but distinct way, I see my work as contributing to the consideration and use of effective methods for illuminating the subtle and diverse voices within this discourse on a subject as important—but also as intangible, slippery, and amorphous—as feelings.

D. COMPARATIVE THOUGHT

While this book is intended as a sketch of Li Zhi and his writings from a *philosophical* perspective, I treat the intellectual and socio-cultural

historical context seriously, albeit briefly. After all, Li Zhi is most interesting and fruitful to us for what he actually said in his time and his place, rather than what we now might *wish* he had said. This introductory chapter provides a brief, yet substantive *synchronic intellectual historical* context for Li Zhi's writings by way of focusing on one particular moment: the publication story of Li's *A Book to Burn*, a book that is most central to *this* book. The following chapters proceed from a close *textual* reading of one of his essays (Chapter Two), to a discussion of the *diachronic intellectual historical* context within which Li Zhi situated his writings (Chapter Three), to an analysis of *philosophical* issues in Li's works (Chapter Four), and conclude with a suggestive *comparative* philosophical analysis of Li Zhi's views on genuineness (Chapter Five).

Too often Li Zhi has been misread using the language and concerns most relevant to the particular reader's time and place (e.g., readings of Li as a proto-Marxist, liberal humanist, proto-capitalist). This book on Li Zhi's work begins with the words and phrases Li Zhi chooses, the conversations surrounding the publication of what is arguably his most significant book, and then moves toward and concludes with a suggestive broader comparative analysis. A central argument in the following chapters is that Li Zhi is indeed relevant, deeply relevant to our time and place, and we really ought to see him as a rich resource for penetrating ideas regarding ethical issues that cross traditional cultural delineations and that are significant to us today; at the same time, to uncover what Li Zhi *does* say, we must firmly commit ourselves to reading him within his historical context. I see no reason to doubt that comparative religious and philosophical thought is both viable and fruitful, given enough attention to the context—socio-historical, literary, linguistic—of a thinker's ideas.⁷⁶ Many recent studies in comparative religion or philosophy begin by discussing the viability of such an approach. One scholar effectively frames the heart of the matter when she asks, "Is the comparative study of religion obsolete? Should it be?"⁷⁷ I argue that comparative study is not obsolete; neither should it be.⁷⁸

E. AUDIENCE

My intended audience includes Sinologists seeking to learn more about an influential and fascinating thinker from the late-Ming period; religious and philosophical ethicists who may know much or little about China, but regardless are interested in a study of a thinker with powerful and I believe in our time often neglected insights regarding the virtues of spontaneity, self-expression, and genuineness; scholars of Ming-Qing China⁷⁹ whether of religion, literature, or history interested in an in-depth study that employs various methods to capture, without

flattening, one powerful instance of the wide and diverse “spectrum”⁸⁰ of conceptions of *qing* in the late-Ming. I write my work for such readers and have aimed to give my critical analysis the depth that would make it of interest to specialists by carefully selecting and focusing upon specific moments, particular essays of Li Zhi’s, narrowly defined but broadly relevant themes, as well as making use of footnotes to situate my contribution to Li Zhi studies, Ming-Qing studies, and religious and philosophical ethics.

Still, in the end, this portrait of Li Zhi and a sketch of his thought began and remains for me first and foremost a book for those interested in Chinese thought without necessarily a background in ethics or China studies. To this end, I have chosen to use language accessible to those without a specialist’s knowledge, and I begin this book gradually introducing Li Zhi to the non-specialist by walking the reader through a close textual reading of one of Li’s essays (see Chapter Two). I structure each subsequent chapter around a particular well-known essay of Li Zhi’s and in the appendices include heavily annotated translations of these works. In this way the student, whatever his or her degree of familiarity with China studies, is able him- or herself to wrestle with the primary material at hand in translation. With this study of a heretofore unfairly neglected thinker in English language scholarship who surely falls far outside the stereotyped view of the cramped and pedantic Confucian gentleman, my hope is that students will come to see, even more clearly and vividly than perhaps they already do, just how truly diverse, varied, and fascinating “Confucian,” or *Ru*,⁸¹ thought is, and to appreciate the real relevance to our contemporary lives of Li’s ideas on genuineness, self-expression, and feelings. My work on Li Zhi began as a doctoral dissertation on his views on women. In this book, also on Li Zhi, I have wholly re-imagined my approach and, from the beginning, written with my students foremost in mind.

IV. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Following this introduction, in Chapter Two of this study, entitled “Life Stories (傳),” I illuminate Li’s thought by studying his own narrative of his life story—his birth, marriage, official life, and death. I do so by giving a close textual analysis of one of Li’s well-known essays, “A Sketch of Zhuowu” (*Zhuowu lunlüe* 卓吾論略). By employing the approach of close reading, I seek to give the reader an appreciation of the deep and self-conscious manner in which Li skillfully manipulates genre, words, and quotes from classical texts. I also show that in multiple ways at every point and throughout his works Li expands the world of writing in order to more fully accommodate the expression of the “genuine” and of

“feelings.” In particular I examine the ways in which Li adopts, amends, and subverts conceptions of the proper life journey as presented by earlier thinkers, with particular attention to Kongzi 孔子 and Mengzi 孟子. Throughout my analysis, I examine Li’s presentation of himself against two other widely read biographies of Li, one by his friend, the literary critic Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道, and the second, a well-received modern biography by Rong Zhaozu (Jung Chao-tsu) 容肇祖. I use Rong’s biography to lay out a “conventional” biography of Li, and point to significant differences in “facts” or style among these three biographies in order to show how Li’s account is distinctive in repeatedly arguing for the virtue of genuineness. In describing her analysis of, or “commentary” on, literature, Martha Nussbaum writes, “The philosophical explanation acts, here, as the ally of the literary text, sketching out its relation to other forms of moral writing.”⁸² I see my analysis of Li Zhi’s “autobiography” as a commentary that serves to show us how to read the characters, the choice of words, and the allusions to classical texts for our moral development.

Chapter Three, “The Heart-Mind (心),” is structured as a commentary on Li Zhi’s famous essay “On the Child-like Heart-Mind” (*Tongxin shuo* 童心說) and shows how Li adopts, rejects, and amends the conceptions of the mind articulated by the earlier thinkers. I begin the chapter by tracking and carefully exploring the references skillfully laid out in Li’s essay—to the *Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳), the *Mengzi* (孟子), the *Platform Sutra* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經), and the works of Wang Yang-ming and Luo Rufang. This allows me both to illuminate Li’s essay and provide a brief yet substantial intellectual historical context for Li’s ideas. I then use categories of analyses identified in the first portion of the chapter and apply them to a detailed study of the metaphors and images Li uses to shed light on Li’s concept of the child-like heart-mind. While much scholarship argues that Li’s conception of the mind, or heart-mind, is undeveloped though often innovative or influential, by examining images of revealing and concealing, and of health and illness in Li’s works, I show Li’s conception of the mind is philosophically coherent and powerful and that what I refer to as his “preservation” model of self-cultivation offers a distinctive and robust conception of moral development.

In Chapter Four, “Virtue (德),” I focus on another well-known essay, “On Miscellaneous Matters” (*Za shuo* 雜說), and argue that Li conceives of the spontaneous expression of genuine feelings as the necessary and sufficient condition for living the good life and turn to the question: What does Li imagine *genuine* feelings to be? In answering this question I first identify a cluster of features manifested by *any* feeling Li would consider to be genuine. Second, I examine the idea of “self-satisfaction”

(*zi de* 自得) as described throughout Li's writings and show how such a sense enables one to know when one's expression is indeed genuine. Third, I identify the limits Li draws around his conception of the genuine by exploring some of his core metaphysical beliefs. I go on to show that Li puts forth an ethics of genuine desires that adopts and assumes concepts within the rich repertoire of what I refer to in shorthand as "orthodox Confucianism"—whether regarding metaphysics, conceptions of the self, or key virtues such as loyalty and righteousness. Within this world, he substantively amends and re-imagines "orthodox Confucian" concepts in a way that both reinvigorates and newly imagines a cluster of ideals that he identifies with the tags "feeling," "genuine," and "desire."

In my fifth and final chapter, I conclude by arguing that Li Zhi's ethics can both be understood as an example of and a help in illuminating what contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor refers to as an "ethics of authenticity."⁸³ A Li Zhi-inflected ethics of genuineness or authenticity would give rightful place to what is all too often ignored and dismissed as too naïve to have faith in within our modern ethical discourse: the truly natural and pure. In Li we find powerful resources for developing an ethics of genuineness that takes absolutely seriously the ideas of playfulness, spontaneity, a purity of love—or a raw sense of terror and horror at the grotesque—existing prior to language and culture. Another insight we can take from Li Zhi is perhaps among what we truly need to be reminded of in our contemporary society: there is, or at least can be, something undeniably powerful in the written word and world. And so, in our on-going, local, and fragile efforts at shaping and re-shaping a vibrant conception of the genuine—our struggles daily to live the noble ideal "to thine own self be true"⁸⁴—the story, the essay, the poem matters, or *can* matter, profoundly. While my book aims at providing a sketch of the writer Li Zhi, or of Zhuowu, and his writings, through the following chapters, I also hope to convince some readers that in Li Zhi—and I would suggest within the wider, fervent, and passionate discourse of 16th century, late-Ming China—we find a creative source for meaningful, important, and what in many ways in our time are relatively neglected insights concerning an ethics of genuineness or, the virtue of desire.

CHAPTER TWO

Life Stories (傳)

Reading “A Sketch of Zhuowu: Written in Yunnan”

I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we turn to a close textual analysis of “A Sketch of Zhuowu: Written in Yunnan” (*Zhuowu lunlüe: Dian zhong zuo* 卓吾論略: 滇中作),¹ one of the most widely cited, though not so often critically analyzed,² of Li’s essays.³ The title of the essay identifies the piece as a “commentary” or *lun* (論) and indeed the piece begins like most conventional biographical commentaries throughout Chinese history. Li writes: “Kong Ruogu said, ‘I am of an age to have met the Layman Zhuowu and I am able to provide a sketch of his life.’”

Traditionally the commentary is a small space of no more than a few lines reserved for the historian or narrator’s subjective interpretations. It is a written form with a long history most commonly dated back to the *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE).⁴ Through the centuries, the 25 dynastic histories including that of the Ming adopted much of the structure of Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian*. The *lun*, or commentary, is most often paired with the historical “biography” (*zhuan* 傳). Traditionally, these two genres are quite distinct from each other in form and content.

The distinction between the commentary and the biography always is clearly marked. In addition to the difference in length, there is a physical separation between the two forms. The commentary is easily identifiable, too, in that it is commonly marked by a short formulaic introduction of the author. For example, throughout the *Records of the Grand Historian* the commentary often begins, “The Grand Historian

says . . ." (*Taishigong yue* 太史公曰). Following this traditional structure, Li begins his essay, "Kong Ruogu says . . ." (*Kong Ruogu yue* 孔若谷曰).

Whereas the contents of the *zhuan* are drawn from verifiable sources, the *lun* is a small place of relative freedom from literary conventions where the historian or narrator offers his subjective interpretations. In form, the traditional historian's commentary runs but a few lines in length in contrast to the more substantive biography. In "A Sketch of Zhuowu" Li adopts and adapts the *form* of the commentary and stretches its capacities for expression of an individual's inner world; his commentary extends on to several pages, much beyond the length of a traditional commentary and instead, approaching the length of the biographies found in dynastic histories. At the same time, Li Zhi adopts in whole the *substance* of the traditional commentary; "A Sketch of Zhuowu" concerns and describes the realm of feelings and unverifiable reflections. He seeks to describe the world of each individual's distinctive and spontaneous feelings and thoughts, in contrast to a long tradition of authoritative teachings and canonical texts. In the course of this work, Li Zhi often refers to the "child-like heart-mind" (*tong xin* 童心) and uses it as a symbol for this interior world. In Chapter Three we will return to and offer a close analysis of this term, which is central to Li's thought and appears throughout his body of writings.

Let us turn briefly to the identity of the narrator who guides us through "A Sketch of Zhuowu." At least one respected scholar has examined historical sources in an unsuccessful attempt to identify Kong and uncover his life story.⁵ If we turn away from historical sources and attend to the characters themselves, i.e. 孔若谷 *kong ruo gu*, we clearly see examples of Li Zhi's central concerns and method of argumentation. In the first three characters of the essay, Li already is adroitly and wittily working to open the imagination, and to challenge traditional distinctions and hierarchies. *Kong ruo gu* can aptly be translated as "Great-like-the-Valley" or "Open-like-a-Ravine."⁶ Our narrator is presented as boundless, nothingness, and completely imaginary.⁷ Throughout the rest of the essay, Li adopts and adapts conventional forms of and quotations from the classical literary and philosophical world; over and over again we will see how he, in turns subtly and boldly, amends and overturns them, in the service of the imagination and of genuine feelings and thoughts. With Kong Ruogu as our guide, we the readers walk into a world of multiplicity and diversity where the lines between fact and fiction, between the spoken and the written word, between virtues and vices cross and blur, and where the very existence of these demarcations is cast into doubt. With these tactics, Li skillfully opens up room and creates space within the literary and philosophical world for the

spontaneous expression of the genuine.⁸ Not only does Li employ a wide range of tactics, he also effectively writes in a variety of genres.

Li rarely if ever presents his views in a logical and discursive form more familiar to philosophers in our time. Instead, he plays with images, metaphors, classical allusions, and character development and writes in a broad range of literary genres. One effect of using such diverse forms of writing is that the range of Li's writings engage different capacities significant to living a good life: rational calculation, sensitivity to a wide range of feelings, or a subtle understanding of a given tradition, and with nuance engages different readers whose various moral capacities are developed to different degrees.

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum convincingly argues for the need for different genres of writing if one is to fully and effectively explore moral life in all its richness and complexity: "only the style of a certain sort of narrative artist (and not, for example, the style associated with the abstract theoretical treatise) can adequately state certain important truths about the world, embodying them in its shape and setting up in the reader the activities that are appropriate for grasping them."⁹ Li Zhi's body of work presents the case with even *more* sensitivity than Nussbaum does to multiplicity and difference. Nussbaum insists that in addition to the traditional philosophical discursive form, a certain narrative form and the novel in particular is an especially effective genre for nuanced exploration and analysis of moral life.¹⁰ The abstract theoretical treatise is insufficient; it excludes too much of the world that is important to moral life. Li Zhi writes in a range of genres and, whatever his intentions, in this way expresses different truths about the world and sets up different activities for the reader to wrestle with different aspects of moral life. The novel, surely, but also poetry, essays, historical and literary commentaries, and personal letters, each are vital too and each is best suited for distinct modes of expression and offers the reader particular and often times unique challenges.

A significant portion of Li's body of work are commentaries—paragraph long or single word comments on traditional canonical texts such as the *Analects*, the *Mengzi*, and, as we pointed out earlier, the *Daodejing*, as well as comments on contemporary popular fiction such as the *Water Margin*. Through commentary on historical and literary figures, Li in turns stands with the viewpoints put forth in traditional commentaries, and in turns shifts the reader to different *perspectives* and new or radically new ways of seeing a character. In his commentary on the famous romance of the Han period writer Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 and his lover Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, Li counters the Han historian Sima Qian's commentary and asserts instead that their elopement and true union of

hearts is cause for joy, and certainly not shame.¹¹ In commenting on the biography of the tyrannical first emperor of China, Li insists that the emperor did more to bring peace and prosperity than devastation and pain, and ought to be considered a paragon of virtue.¹² The effect of Li's commentaries, often times no more than a single word scribbled in the margins or a brief phrase inserted within the main text, can be to shift our perspectives and set forth new ways for interpreting the world. His commentaries serve as a guide—one that is particularistic, improvisatory, and concrete, rather than systematic and theoretical—gently leading us to certain texts and ways to read them in a way that nudges and seduces us into examining the world from alternative perspectives and to see historical and literary personages, events, and viewpoints in a different light.¹³

Within Li's body of writings, most pronounced in his poems and letters, he too describes the world of *feelings* and his own emotional responses to the affairs of everyday life as well as larger trials and triumphs: he responds at times with anger, exasperation, grief, love, wonder, delight, desire, snobbery, pleasure, regret. The possible effects of Li's portraits of his own affective life are many. Li's own emotional responses are often described in brief but rich detail and one can see them as, borrowing Nussbaum's phrase, "setting up in the reader the activities" to exercise and strengthen her own affective capacities. The reader has an opportunity to consider the appropriateness of Li's emotional responses, and the events and issues are described by Li in a way that provides fertile ground for evoking emotional responses in the reader herself, whereupon the reader might consider the appropriateness of her own feelings.

Li's affective responses are at times simple and passionate, and at other times complex and conflicted. One obvious place where Li Zhi records his feelings of doubts and regrets and thereby, whatever his intentions, enables the reader to reflect upon Li's responses is in regard to his abandonment of his wife. In a number of letters and poems Li takes one perspective and then another, at times lauding his long-suffering and devoted wife, at other times sorrowfully regretting that he could not live out his life by her side. Instead, he chooses to fully give himself over to pursuing the life of the mind, spiritual insight, the sustenance of like-spirited soul-friendships, for something great enough in life for which he can die.¹⁴ Late in life he abandons his wife; when we read through his poetry and letters, it is hard to think otherwise than that he does so—and surely ought to do so—if not with regret at least with deeply felt pain.

Upon his wife's death he writes to his son-in-law, "She surpassed the likes of those today who are referred to as students of the Way. . . . Even

though I am a hard-hearted man, how can I not feel deeply!”¹⁵ In a poem, also written after her death, he laments, “I did not rid myself of friends who were impoverished/How much less so a wife who endured years of poverty with me!/ . . . Your husband had his heart set on the world,/And deeply regrets that you were not able to follow!”¹⁶ He admires her virtues and at the same time bemoans that she is shortsighted and does not share his aspirations in life. While other thinkers within the Confucian tradition, such as the Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), do imaginatively propose structural changes that could change the plight of women, Li Zhi fails even to begin considering such possibilities. What he does do and he does do well, insightfully, and powerfully is to shed light on the view that his wife’s, and women’s, life possibilities are wholly unjustly and severely fettered by the way that the social world has been constructed. Playing on the word “shortsighted” (*duan jian* 短見), he writes in a letter, “Women live within the inner chambers while men wander throughout the world. Clearly there exists vision that is shortsighted and that is far-sighted.”¹⁷ Li did see women, and his wife, as emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually shortsighted. But, as he wittily points out through his play on language, he insists this is due to their being restricted in their travels, in their work, in their daily lives; it could be otherwise and he wishes it were. He writes, “In our times we simply see women as shortsighted creatures. Isn’t this grievously wrong?”¹⁸ His wife’s and women’s lives, for the most part, are lived isolated within the four walls of the inner quarters of the home, toward the back, away from the prying eyes of visitors and the ever-changing world. Through the multiple forms of literature Li adopts and adapts—including poetry and letters—he gives himself the space and language to explore the realm of feelings, and the world of ambiguity and ambivalence that is part and parcel of the affective world in all its richness and complexity. This world that Li explores contrasts sharply to the logical and precise realm found in abstract philosophical treatises.

These different genres—commentaries, poems, letters—each have their distinct virtues enabling the expression and cultivation of different aspects of a vibrant and vigorous ethical life. Essays too are central to Li Zhi’s body of writing and it is most obviously within this form, and “A Sketch of Zhuowu” certainly falls within this category, that Li effectively works to reframe and reclaim references and allusions from classical texts. In this way, Li moves the reader to rethink and celebrate *tradition*, and to see it as one necessary and deeply meaningful part of our ethical life. We can for ourselves with regard to our culture, and in his own writings Li Zhi does, embrace, expand upon, amend, or even jettison parts and pieces of the shared culture of our time and place; but Li assumes, as do most if not all Confucian thinkers, that we surely cannot deny our

shared tradition and start wholly anew. Tradition, and for Li Zhi this primarily takes the form of the written world, is a rich resource that is given to us and that undeniably and powerfully shapes our aspirations, fears, and desires, and which we must reflect upon, reshape, and recurrently claim afresh if we are to fully live life well. Li Zhi ably adopts and adapts a wide range of traditional genres to explore and argue for an ethics of genuine expression. Let us return to the genre at hand, the biography, and more specifically, Li Zhi's autobiography.

II. NAMES

Biographies most commonly begin with the names of the individual under study. After Li Zhi's death, one of his most widely read books, *A Book to Burn*, was published with a prefatory biography by Li's good friend and one time student Yuan Zhongdao.¹⁹ In Yuan's short piece, he begins: "His name was Li Wenling, and he was also known as Li Zaizhi 李載贄."²⁰ The preface of Rong Zhaozu's modern chronological biography, dated 1957, begins: "Li Zhi was also known as Zhuowu or Hongfu."²¹ In the first three lines of his *Critical Biography of Li Zhuowu*, Rong Zhaozu begins by listing Li Zhi's many sobriquets. His birth name (*chu ming* 出名) is Zaizhi. His "style" (*hao* 號) is Zhuowu and also Duwu 篤吾. He was born in Quanzhou, the auspicious land of Chan Master Wenling, and so Li adopted the name the Layman of Wenling (*Wenling jushi* 溫陵居士). He too adopted the names the Layman of Baiquan (*Baiquan jushi* 百泉居士), the Father of Vastness (*Hongfu* 宏父), Longing for Zhai (*Si Zhai* 思齋), the Old Man of the Dragon Lake (*Longhu Sou* 龍湖叟), and the Bald Old Man (*Tu Weng* 禿翁).²² Li Zhi, as with most any literatus throughout Chinese history, is known by many names.

If we turn to the introductory paragraph to *Li's* autobiography, we find a different presentation. Li introduces us to just two and no more than two of his names: Zhuowu (卓吾) and Duwu (篤吾). These two are indeed styles of the historical Li Zhi. But there is, as always with Li, something more to these choices of names. The narrator, Kong Ruogu, tells us:

The Layman is known by many names. "Zhuowu" is simply one of his names. The character 卓 is also not pronounced in one single way. The Layman pronounces it like the standard reading of 卓 (i.e., *zhuo* with the meaning "outstanding" or "upright"). When it appears on an official register, it is pronounced like the standard reading of 篤 (i.e., *du* with the meaning "sincere").

As we more carefully explore this brief explanation, we discover that in the course of introducing his names Li cleverly makes a statement

about virtues and vices, and distinctions between the written and spoken language.

Li Zhi is known, Kong tells us, as 卓吾. The first character, 卓, means “outstanding” or “upright.” The second character, 吾, means “oneself.” When Li refers to himself, he pronounces his name following the standard pronunciation of 卓. In contrast, when Li’s name appears on the official register as 卓吾, officials pronounce the first character of his name according to the standard pronunciation of 篤. Two definitions of the character 篤 are of particular interest to us. One is “genuineness,”²³ and the other “seriously ill.”²⁴ The character Li Zhi refers to himself as the “Outstanding” or “Upright Self”: “the Layman refers to himself according to the standard pronunciation of 卓.” On the other hand, those in the bureaucracy refer to him on one level as the “Genuine Self,” and on another as the “Deeply Sick Self.”

As noted earlier, the virtue of genuineness is at the heart of Li’s thought, and Li indeed identifies himself as being in touch with and expressing his genuine thoughts and feelings, or at least aspiring to do so. In contrast, throughout his writings he portrays government bureaucrats as hypocritical and unimaginative. Li Zhi writes in one memorable description spoofing the pedantic scholar-bureaucrat:

There once was a gentleman from the School of Principle who wore dignified platform shoes and walked in large strides. He dressed in a generously long-sleeved robe with a wide sash. With the obligations of morality as his cap and the principles of human relations as his garments, he picked up paper and ink stick—one, two—quietly touched his lips to them—three, four—and then said to himself that he was Kongzi’s disciple.²⁵

In contrast to the individual in touch with his innermost feelings and thoughts, the pedantic scholar is embellished, veiled, and covered over in his platform shoes, long sleeved robe, wide sash, and the trappings of morality and principles. Because Li does not abide by the norms of society, scholar-officials see him as morally “ill.” Li too sees himself as ill, but only because he is a man in touch, or striving hard to be in touch, with his genuine intuitions in a society that everywhere suppresses or maims them. By carefully and cleverly picking out particular details of his life story, Li presents an autobiography that in one of its many aspects serves as a witty statement on virtues and vices.

Li was born and grew up in the coastal prefecture of Quanzhou, the county of Jinjiang, in the southeast province of Fujian, and following the introductory paragraph of his autobiography Li makes reference to his natal home. Here, we can read Li as challenging the conventional

privileging of the written over the spoken, and the language of the urban over the speech of the rural. Kong narrates:

“Even in Li’s own natal home in the countryside, some say ‘Du’ and others say ‘Zhuo’ without coming to any final agreement.” The Layman said, “In my local dialect, 卓 and 篤 are pronounced the same. Country folks cannot make the distinction and so refer to me using either pronunciation.”

In the modern form of the Fujian dialect, the characters 卓 and 篤 are not pronounced exactly the same, but they are very similar. The first is pronounced “tau,” the second “tuk.” Li cleverly exploits this similarity or sameness in pronunciation in his native dialect. As described by Li, in the *spoken* dialect of rural, southern Quanzhou, people do not and cannot make a distinction between the “upright” and “genuine” (卓) on the one hand, and those catalogued by society as “sick” (篤) on the other. Individuals in the countryside do not self-consciously sort others into the categories of the genuine and hypocritical, the healthy and the sick, and such a lack of self-conscious distinction and discrimination suggests a life lived in tune with the spontaneous and the genuine.

Among the numerous different names that Li Zhi could have used to introduce his autobiography, he chose 卓吾 and 篤吾. By drawing our attention to the multiplicity of meanings and pronunciations of these two names, Li gives us a taste of what is to come in his essay. Li spoofs the hypocritical and unimaginative scholar-bureaucrat and privileges the values and life of people in the countryside. In these early lines of “A Sketch of Zhuowu” Li claims ground for what I argue throughout this book is at the very heart of his thought: the virtue of “genuineness” (*zhen* 真) and desire, and an ethics founded on the spontaneous expression of true “feeling” (*qing* 情). Thus far we have done no more than study the very first line of Li’s “autobiography” and examine the names Li uses in his essay to refer to himself. Yet, already we see how Li is able to make larger and central philosophical points through the skillful, subtle, and at times almost imperceptible manipulation of words, phrases, and literary references. It is by stretching and reworking the very fabric of the traditional world of writing that Li articulates his vision of the good life. The written and the lived world, the world of fiction and of fact, are blurred, and amending the world of writing undeniably transforms our lived life itself.

III. EARLY CHILDHOOD

After Kong Ruogu introduces Li’s names, the date of his birth, and the names of his mother and father, Kong offers a few sentences regarding

Li's early life. As is typical of conventional biographies on individuals of great promise, Li makes note of his early literary talent. Kong narrates:

When Li was 12 *sui* he wrote "Discourse on the Old Farmer and the Old Gardener" (*Lao nong lao pu lun* 老農老圃論).

The Layman said, "At this time I already knew the questions asked by Fan Chi 樊遲 when he encountered the old man carrying a pole and a basket. The eminent person Qiu Yiji²⁶ could not bear to hear such views and so he said, 'What a petty man is Fan Xu 樊須!' When he completed his essay, his fellow students praised the work. The multitudes said, "What a fine son Li Baizhi has."

Li not only plays with names and literary genres in order to create room for the expression of particular virtues, he also skillfully uses literary references to give depth and substance to his claims. In including in his narration a conversation between Fan Chi and Kongzi, Li Zhi clearly refers to a specific story, found in section 13.4 of the *Analects*.

The first part of 13.4 follows:

Fan Chi wanted to study how to grow grain. The Master said, "In that line, I'd be less use to you than an old farmer (*lao nong* 老農)." Fan Chi then wanted to study how to grow vegetables. The Master said, "In that line, I'd be less use to you than an old gardener (*lao pu* 老圃)."

After Fan Chi had left, the Master said, "What a petty man is Fan Xu!"²⁷

The title of Li's childhood essay, "Discourse on the Old Farmer and the Old Gardener," parallels Fan Chi's questions first regarding growing grain and then vegetables, and echoes Kongzi's response where he first speaks of the old farmer, and then the old gardener.

Li's passage unambiguously echoes the story line of *Analects* 13.4. The passage too refers to "the old man carrying a pole and a basket" and such a reference is found in two passages in the *Analects* as well.²⁸ One is 18.7; another is 14.41.²⁹ In *Analects* 18.7 an old man carrying a pole and basket chastises Kongzi's disciple Zilu, "Don't know how to move your four limbs, can't you tell the five grains apart?—who is your 'Master?'"³⁰ Certainly this is a rhetorical question. The old man regards Zilu's master, who is none other than Kongzi, as a fool.

Jean-François Billeter in his book *Li Zhi: Philosophe Maudit (1527–1602)* helpfully offers a translation of the lines regarding Li Zhi's childhood "Discourse" that takes into account the relevant passages in the *Analects*. Billeter translates, "J'a-vais parfaitement compris que la

question posée par Fan Chi (à Confucius), m'a-t-il dit un jour, était une question frondeuse."³¹ While Li Zhi simply mentions the "questions" posed by Fan Chi, Billeter helps the reader interpret Li's passage by inserting a *description* of the question. In Billeter's rendering, the question "était une question frondeuse," was an "irreverent question." It is rhetorical, irreverent, or rebellious in nature, and thus one rooted in disingenuousness. Such a translation is in keeping with the spirit of Li Zhi's words, and a condemnation of the overly artful question is certainly in tune with Li's moral philosophy as a whole. Li identifies with his early childhood vision of the world, and by narrating the story of his early childhood "Discourse," Li Zhi too is condemning the overly artful and the disingenuous.

The strengthening and development of the moral imagination can be seen in ways as analogous to the strengthening of the physical muscle and, as such, requires working through a set of well-conceived and progressively difficult exercises. Among the skills we need to approach moral problems well are attentiveness to ambiguity, the perception of nuance, and a fine grasp of the delicate world of feelings. An effective training regimen involves both easy tasks for beginners, and more difficult exercises as one advances. In "A Sketch of Zhuowu," we clearly find Li providing for readers of diverse reading skills. So often with Li Zhi's writings, his finest points are in the discrete and hidden details, and this is the case in Li's allusion to yet another passage in *Analects* 13.4. Such subtle allusions can be read as the more difficult tasks, or moral and spiritual exercises,³² Li sets out for the more advanced.

In the second part of 13.4, Kongzi lays out a number of virtues: "respectfulness" (*jing* 敬), "obedience" (*fu* 服), and last of all, "sincerity" or "true expression of the genuine" (*yong qing* 用情):³³

If those in higher positions love ritual, then none of the common people will venture to be without *respect*. If those in higher positions love rightness, then none of the common people will venture to act without *obedience*. If those in higher positions love trustworthiness, then none of the common people will venture to act without *true expression of the genuine*. And if such a condition prevails, then the people from the four lands adjacent, bearing their little children strapped to their backs, will gather around. What need to study grain growing?³⁴

The characters for "respect" and "obedience" occur numerous times throughout the *Analects*, whereas *qing* 情 appears only twice.³⁵ In *Analects* 19.19, the character *qing* clearly is used to mean "case" or "situation."

Analects 13.4 is the single place in the *Analects* where *qing* is used to mean the “genuine.”

Li Zhi himself provides a commentary on the *Analects*³⁶ most likely written after he composed “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” though he says nothing on the virtue of *qing* in his commentary on 13.4.³⁷ Any literatus of Li’s time, regardless of whether he had written a commentary on the text, surely would have been familiar with both the famous neo-Confucian Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200) commentary and an earlier work attributed to He Yan 何晏 (d. 249 CE). Both gloss the characters *yong qing* as true expression of one’s feelings. The *Collected Commentaries on the Analects by Mr. He and Others* (*Lunyu Heshi deng jijie* 論語何氏等集解), a widely read commentary on the *Analects*, is a Wei period work and is a compilation of numerous commentators in different historical periods. In this work we find He citing the Han period scholar Kong Anguo 孔安國: “*Qing* means ‘genuine feelings.’ It is saying that the people are transformed by those above and each in turn responds with sincerity.”³⁸ The neo-Confucian Zhu Xi glosses 情 as “sincerity” (*cheng* 誠). Zhu Xi comments, “The character *qing* means sincerity. The phrase *yong qing* means to be sincere in dealing with superiors.”³⁹

As we have seen, two widely respected commentaries on the *Analects* from two different historical periods both interpret the character *qing* in 13.4 as meaning sincerity, or genuine expression of one’s feelings. Again, aside from *Analects* 19.19—where *qing* clearly means “case”—13.4 is the only other place in the *Analects* where we find the character. Among the many stories from Li’s childhood that he might have chosen to narrate his autobiography, he selects one that centrally involves *Analects* 13.4. When looking for support in the *Analects* for the virtue of genuineness in expression of thoughts and feelings, 13.4 would undoubtedly be the obvious choice.

If we began reading Li’s autobiography with a common caricature of Confucianism, or the *Ru* tradition, in mind, where famous Confucians such as Kongzi or Zhu Xi advocated stifling or repressing the emotions, Li Zhi’s skillful reading of both the *Analects* and its later commentaries unambiguously shows us a quite different point of view. Li’s discussion of his childhood looks like most any conventional biography, including mentioning Li’s great literary promise already revealed in his youth. But further analysis of Li’s references to *Analects* 13.4 subtly rectifies our reading of the classic and gently reclaims one small part of the philosophical, the traditional, the Confucian world—*Analects* 13.4—for those who are invested in the true expression of feelings. Surely Li Zhi is showing us how to read the *Analects* and how to read in general: with attention to the particular words, phrases, and passages in a text, and

with our own eyes. We must read it for *ourselves*, rather than accept the readings given by others.

IV. OFFICIAL CAREER

In Li's discussion of the Civil Service Examinations and his official career he uses different methods to open up space for the expression of the genuine. Rather than approaching his topic with subtlety and nuance, Li directly and boldly mocks contemporary society and many of its cherished norms. Instead of providing a text dense with references to canonical writings, Li is relatively silent and repeatedly turns away from discussion of his official life. Let us first turn to Li's comments on the Civil Service Examinations.

Kong Ruogu narrates:

When Zhuowu was a bit older, he often found himself confused and unsettled. He studied the commentaries and annotations, but did not critically examine himself. He was unable to carve the teachings of the master Zhu Xi deeply upon his heart. He blamed himself, and wished to abandon his studies. But with a great deal of time and nothing for him to do to pass the days, he sighed and said, "All of this is nothing but simply play-acting. My studies are no more than plagiarizing and superficial reading. Not even the examiners understand each and every detail of Kongzi's teachings!"

And so he sought out the most popular and widely read eight-legged essays⁴⁰ of his time and recited several pieces each day. By the time of the examinations he had memorized nearly five hundred essays. When the exam topic was given, he merely copied, transcribed, and recorded what he had memorized. He received high middle honors.

The Layman said, "This luck of mine could not be better. What's more, my father is elderly, and each of my younger brothers and sisters have reached the age of marriage."⁴¹

Li mocks the examinations and attributes his success to luck rather than merit. The verbs Li uses—"copying" (*zuo* 作), "transcribing" (*shan xie* 繕寫), "recording" (*teng lu* 謄錄)—sharply contrast with those he uses when he speaks admiringly of great writers and their literary works.

Of the latter Li writes:

As for those who are truly able to write . . . in the beginning none possess the slightest intention to write. Their bosoms are filled with various indescribable and wondrous events. In their throats

are things that they desire to spit out but do not dare to. In their speech, time and time again, they have countless things they wish to say but for which there is no proper occasion to speak them. These thoughts accumulate to an unimaginable height and are stored for so long that in time the force of these thoughts cannot be stopped.⁴²

In the end, these writers “spew out jade and spit out pearls.” Rather than internalizing *external* standards, such writers are in touch with their deepest and most genuine feelings, which accumulate within. When these feelings have piled up and reach a critical mass, they cannot help but “spew” and “spit” out their innermost thoughts and emotions.

In “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” which we will study in the following chapter, Li brings together the moral and the aesthetic; like many educated Chinese, for Li Zhi, aesthetic practices such as writing and calligraphy are a form of moral cultivation.⁴³ Throughout his work Li celebrates a diversity of methods for self-cultivation, but his greatest interest and most prominent focus is on the practice of reading and writing. Li condemns the type of writing that comes from copying and transcribing and asserts that while it can be “artful” (*gong* 工), it produces inferior literature and produces “fake” (*jia* 假) people who lose their true selves. Li writes:

Now, if one’s mind is comprised only of the Principles of the Way, which one hears and sees, then what are spoken are all words of the Principles of the Way; they are not the spontaneous words of the child-like heart-mind. Though these words may be artful, what do they have to do with oneself? How could this lead to anything other than fake people speaking fake words, enacting fake actions, and producing fake writings?⁴⁴

In contrast, “spontaneous” (*zi chu* 自出) words further nurture and sustain one’s connection to one’s “genuine” self.

Surely Li did participate in and enjoy the benefits of the world of the Civil Service Examinations and official life. But just as he does with the conventions of literary genres and philosophical references, Li both plays within and against the conventional world of the scholar official. He participates in the examination system, but with utmost caution and fully self-conscious of its failings. The examinations, Li writes, are “play-acting” (*xi* 戲), distinct from the world of the “spontaneous” and the “genuine.” Li takes part for a time in this game with a clear idea and careful calculations of what specific benefits he might attain through this limited participation: “And so he accepted an official position,⁴⁵

welcomed and cared for his father, and completed arrangements for the marriages of each of his younger brothers and sisters.”

His concerns are immediate, material, economic ones—marriage for his siblings and caring for his father—rather than socially created values such as the garb of honor or status. In narrating his experience with the Civil Service Examinations, Li decries the life of unreflective consumption of external standards and in particular the mindless memorization and recitation of canonical texts. On the subject of the examination system, and throughout his writings, Li foremost insists on the virtue of expressing one’s distinctive and genuine thoughts and feelings.

While Li baldly mocks the examination system, what is most striking about his discussion of his official life is his relative silence on the subject. Li only briefly touches on his official career and then immediately turns away. One way to highlight Li’s general lack of attention to his official career is to turn back to the subject of his names. Li describes in considerable detail why he adopts names such as “The Layman of Wenling,” “The Layman of Baiquan,” “The Layman the Father of Vastness,” and “The Layman Longing for Zhai.” But he gives only cursory attention to his official titles and fails to mention several of them at all. We know from other sources that Li’s first official position was as Director of Education (*xianling* 縣令) in Gongcheng 共城, Henan province. Li was born in the early years of the Jiajing reign,⁴⁶ and he served in his first official position toward the end of the period, from the 35th to the 39th year, or from 1556 to 1560. But in his autobiography, Li never does give his official title or describe his obligations beyond referring to his service as an “official position” in Gongcheng. Li writes of his first appointment:

And so he accepted an official position, cared for his father, and completed arrangements for the marriages of his younger brothers and sisters.

The Layman said, “Upon first requesting an official position, I set my hopes on a convenient place such as Jiangnan. I did not intend to travel 10,000 *li* to Gongcheng, and leave my father and cause him to worry. Even so, Gongcheng was where the Song period official Li Zhicai spent his days. And the master Shao Yong considered the place the *Nest of Peace and Happiness*.⁴⁷ The master Yong resided in Luoyang and traveled as far as 1000 *li* to study the Dao with Zhicai. If my father and son hear the Dao, even though I am 10,000 *li* away, that will be fine. I’ve also heard master Shao threw himself into his studies and late in life did attain understanding. It was not until he was already forty that he returned to Luoyang and began to arrange for his marriage. If he had not heard the Dao, he would not have married.

“I am 29 years old and have mourned the death of my eldest son, grieving most deeply.⁴⁸ I have not immersed myself in the Dao but instead have only wallowed in my feelings of grief. When I observe the ways of Shao Yong I am deeply ashamed!”

The *Nest of Peace and Happiness* is located up above Hundred Springs on Mount Sumen. The Layman was born in Quan.⁴⁹ And it was an auspicious place for the Chan Buddhist Master of Wenling.

The Layman said, “I am a person of Wenling. I should take on the style ‘The Layman of Wenling.’” One day when wandering above Hundred Springs he said, “I was born in Quan and have served as an official in Quan. Quan and I are destined to be together!”

And so he refers to himself as “The Man from a Hundred Springs” and also styles himself “The Layman of a Hundred Springs.”

In concluding his narration of Li’s time in Gongcheng, the narrator Kong Ruogu tells us, “He languished in a Hundred Springs for five years and never did hear the Dao.”⁵⁰ In the course of this rather lengthy section on his time in Gongcheng, Li devotes but a few words to his official position. In contrast, he not only refers to his several, newly adopted names, but in detailed exposition he sets these names within a larger context regarding his spiritual aspirations. This reveals his marked preference for the emotional and spiritual over the professional aspects of life.

When later in “A Sketch of Zhuowu” Li does mention his official titles, he does so in the most cursory way. After doing so, he immediately turns toward the more mysterious and less circumscribed subjects of life and death. Kong Ruogu tells us, “In the end he was appointed to the Academy in Nanjing⁵¹ and he departed.” The following sentence begins: “Several months later, he received news that his father, His Honor Baizhai, had died.” In another passage, again we find Li only momentarily touching on the details of his official life, and then immediately turning our attention to the spiritual realm. Kong Ruogu later narrates, “[Li Zhi] was honored as an Erudite of the Imperial Academy, a position of the same rank he formally had held in Nanjing.”⁵² The following sentence tells us, “Soon afterward, an announcement arrived notifying Li of the death of his paternal grandfather Zhuxuan. On this same day, the Layman’s second eldest son also fell ill and died in the official accommodations.”

In writing his own biography, Li turns our attention to the details of his spiritual and emotional life rather than the focus in conventional biographies to titles, exam successes, and professional achievements. In “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” Li puts forth positions on a wide range of subjects including the Civil Service Examinations, moral philosophy, and as we will discuss in the following pages, on the subjects of women and death.

In his explorations of each of these subjects, Li skillfully selects what to write and what to omit, and crafts unique and revealing ways to speak through his words and in his silence. Through such writing, he creates an essay that radically breaks from the form of traditional biographies and autobiographies, and opens the world of writing to allow fuller and richer expression of subjective experience.

V. MARRIAGE

Three individuals are at the heart of “A Sketch of Zhuowu”: Li Zhi, the narrator, Kong Ruogu, and Li Zhi’s wife, Madame Huang 黄宜人.⁵³ Most of what we do know about Li Zhi’s wife comes from his own writings.⁵⁴ While others have neglected his wife’s story, Li devotes at least several poems and one letter to mourning her death. By using the poem, the letter, and the traditional biographical form to write about both himself and his wife, he attends to his self and to those traditionally neglected in the world of writing such as women in general or his wife in particular. It is also his and her internal world, and perhaps our internal world too, that is meaningful content for us to consider in reflecting upon the life well lived.

While we find little information on Li Zhi’s wife’s life—aside from Li’s own writings—in recent times, archaeological sources have emerged as a second resource for information on her life. We can find quite detailed information regarding what is generally agreed to be her tombstone and tomb inscription. According to Madame Huang’s tomb inscription, she was born on the 8th day of the 6th month of the *guisi* year of the Jiajing reign—or June 29, 1533—and died in Wanli 16 on the 3rd day of the intercalary 6th month—or July 25, 1588. She became Li Zhi’s wife at the age of 15 *sui*, Jiajing 6, or in 1547. Li Zhi would have been 21 *sui*.⁵⁵ The details regarding Ms. Huang’s tombstone are quite extensive and often revealing. At the time of discovery, one part of her tombstone was propping up the wall of a well; another was found supporting an old Longan tree. Part of the tablet for her tomb inscription served as a small bridge for a footpath close to her tomb.⁵⁶ Whatever purpose her tombstone has served, by choosing to turn our attention to this form of a text we can uncover parts and pieces of the neglected story of Madame Huang’s life.

Madame Huang plays her most substantial roles in Li’s presentation of his life narrative on two occasions, both times she is engaged in conversation with Li Zhi, and both times she expresses her feelings while he attempts to suppress both his and her feelings. We first encounter Li Zhi’s wife when he informs her that he intends to return home south to Fuzhou to bury his father and grandfather. He wishes to leave her and their three daughters near Beijing while he spends the year attending to

his filial duties. In response to what may sound like a rather odd plan, and one many later scholars of Li have found puzzling, his wife nevertheless responds quite reasonably. She sees merit in her husband's plan but still expresses her desire to go with him so that she can see her aged and ailing mother:

It's not that what you say is untrue. But my mother is elderly. She is widowed and lives for me. Certainly I am willing to be here. But she weeps for me day and night to the point that she is blinded in both eyes. If she sees that I have not returned, she will certainly die.

Madame Huang then reveals her genuine feelings: "When she had not yet finished speaking, tears came down like rain." But her words and her deep feeling had no effect on her husband: "The Layman was not moved. Madame knew that in the end she would not be able to change his mind." And so, in turn she holds back these feelings:

She held back her tears, changed her expression, and admitting her faults said,

"Alright. Alright. First thing, when you see my mother, tell her that I am fine as always and in good health. There is nothing to worry about. At another time she will see me. I will work hard and help out with matters. I will not return, and I dare not complain."

He then packed up his bags, and asked a family member to arrange to buy land and plant seeds according to his wishes.

Li wholly suppresses his feelings, neglects hers, and turns away from both to embrace the traditional external standards of filial piety. His choice leads to what are unambiguously disastrous ends: in Li Zhi's absence the harvests were barren, his wife and eldest daughter barely eked out a living, and two of his three daughters died of starvation.⁵⁷

Only upon his return to his wife after three years absence does he learn of his daughters' deaths. Kong Ruogu describes his wife's response:

At this time Madame Huang's tears were already at the tips of her eyelashes. But when she saw the Layman's expression alter, she acted according to custom and asked about the burial matters and her mother's well-being.

Li appears rather detached and unresponsive upon hearing the devastating news. While the character Li Zhi's commitment to *external standards* indeed leads to tragic ends, his wife's *feelings* lead one to alternative and what might have been better choices. As Nussbaum eloquently insists,

“emotions are not only not more unreliable than intellectual calculations, but frequently are more reliable, and less deceptively seductive.”⁵⁸ Arguably, Madame Huang’s feelings—the genuine ones—rather than the character Li Zhi’s rational deliberations would indeed have served as a more reliable indicator regarding better and worse choices. While foremost in Li Zhi’s writings and central to his views is his belief that perceptiveness and deep sensitivity to our emotions is important and at the heart of living life well, at the same time, it is certainly not the case that Li sees feelings as our sole resource for living an ethical life. We will discuss this subject, along with the criteria for identifying a genuine feeling as truly genuine, in Chapter Four. Suffice it to say for now, for Li Zhi traditional norms and rational calculation do play a meaningful role in our deliberations as to how to live life well. Li is not a radical thinker who wholly jettisons tradition but rather, a thinker who has mastered the traditional canon of literature and passionately strives to reform, amend, and embellish upon what is given.

A few lines later in the essay we find Li’s wife depicted as, once again, full of genuine and irrepressible feeling; Li Zhi himself is described as controlling and stifling his emotions and obtuse to his wife’s distress. He writes, “Before she had finished speaking, tears came down like rain.” In response, “The Layman remained unmoved.” His response then shapes hers, whereupon she controls her feelings: “Madame knew that in the end she would not be able to change his mind. She held back her tears, changed her expression.” And again, “At this time Madame Huang’s tears were already at the tips of her eyelashes.” In response, Li Zhi reveals an expression of disapproval: “But when she saw the Layman’s expression alter, she acted according to custom and asked about the burial matters and her mother’s well-being.” He describes his wife’s response as expressing “genuine feelings” (*qing zhen* 情真). In contrast, he “corrals his feelings and controls them” (*jiao qing zhen zhi* 矯情鎮之). Her feelings pour forth immediately and spontaneously, whereas it is only after long and convoluted reflection that Li realizes how devastated he truly feels: “It is not until now that I feel like one of the teeth on the bottom of my platform clogs has broken off!”⁵⁹ This passage comes after Li’s discussion of his formal childhood education and his preparation for the Civil Service Examinations. Perhaps striving to meet external standards set by society has interfered or even damaged his connection to his inner world and his own child-like heart-mind. He is void of or at least blind to the world of emotions, and only after repeated conversations with his long-suffering wife, who is portrayed as deeply expressive and richly perceptive of her feelings, does he begin to realize what is truly within his own heart. Here we find that reading the right stories—in this case, the story of his wife’s life—and dialogue with

the right people—again his own wife—can serve to awaken or gently re-awaken one’s nascent emotional sensibilities.

Throughout our essay of interest, Li Zhi’s wife is depicted in a wholly sympathetic light. Pei-yi Wu in *The Confucian’s Progress* effectively describes Li’s portrayal of his wife. Wu writes:

Certainly Madame Li comes out far better in the episode, judging from the facts as presented. . . . The story told . . . epitomizes the woes of women in the premodern world—the death of almost all her children in infancy, long separation from her own mother, an unfeeling and unsympathetic husband with whom she could not share grief and whose long absence from home exposed her and her children to hunger and disease, and the resulting necessity to strive for survival—could not be told better by feminist historians.⁶⁰

In “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” the character Li is surely presented as the emotionally insensitive and obtuse husband. Repeatedly in the story he represses his wife’s feelings and in response to his emotional boorishness she attempts to stifle her genuine and natural sensibilities. Of all the characters in his autobiographical essay, Li’s wife is portrayed most sympathetically and best embodies the virtue of expressiveness of feelings and thoughts that is Li’s own ideal.

If we look back to the first paragraphs of “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” we find a deeply sympathetic depiction of another significant woman in Li Zhi’s life: his mother. At times, Li Zhi asserts his views baldly and boldly; at other times he expresses his thoughts and feelings quite subtly and almost imperceptibly. In his description of his mother’s death, we find him working in the latter mode. Here we see another example of Li Zhi presenting a challenging exercise that enables one to fine-hone one’s reading skills and is fitting for the perceptive, those who are morally and spiritually advanced. Li begins with several lines regarding his sobriquets, turns to the date of his birth, and then writes, “When Li was an infant his mother, the esteemed Madame Xu, passed away. From a young age he was orphaned and nobody knows who raised him.”⁶¹ Of interest to us is the term “orphaned” (*gu* 孤). The character commonly means to be without a father, even if the mother is still alive. In the *Zhongwen da cidian* 中文大辭典 the first definition of *gu* is “to be without a father” (*wu fu ye* 無父也). The second and only other definition of *gu* with the sense of being orphaned is “to be without one’s father and mother” (*wu fu mu ye* 無父母也). The character is rarely if ever used, and never found in the dictionary, with the meaning of a child who is without a mother but whose father still survives.⁶² However, Li does use the term in this third way, and by doing so, subtly and yet to a remarkable

extent, he raises the significance of the mother's or at least *his* mother's influence on the child's life. Li refers to the motherless younger Li Zhi as "orphaned," despite the fact that his father still lived and was involved in Li's life and very directly so in his education.

If we look to other writings of Li on the subject of women, there too we find him speaking most admiringly of women. In his essay mockingly entitled "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They Are Shortsighted," Li writes:

This person with a woman's body and a man's insight is perhaps the sort of person Kongzi wandered throughout the world in search of. He desired to meet her just once but could never find her. In our times, we simply see women as shortsighted creatures. Isn't this grievously wrong?⁶³

In "A Sketch of Zhuowu," Li portrays his wife most sympathetically as genuine in her feelings and thoughts and spontaneous in her expression. Within the context of not only "A Sketch of Zhuowu" but also Li's larger body of writing, Li's depiction of his wife reflects his admiration of a number of virtues traditionally attributed to women in general:⁶⁴ spontaneity, emotional sensitivity, expressiveness of one's inner state.

VI. DEATH

"A Sketch of Zhuowu" begins and ends with the subject of death. How one dies and how one's body is treated and death is mourned are its central themes. Early on in the essay Li speaks of how his mother died when he was but an infant. Li's eldest son dies in 1555; Li's father dies soon after Li begins his appointment at the Academy of Nanjing, and Li returns to his natal home to observe the traditions of mourning. After his grandfather and second eldest son die, Li again returns to his natal home to bury both. During this period he bemoans the fact that he had delayed so long burying his great-grandparents. Li exclaims to Kong Ruogu:

My great-grandparents passed away more than fifty years ago. The reason I did not bury them at that time is because I was impoverished and had no means to obtain a burial plot. This is a great violation of custom. . . . Nothing can atone for my crime of being unfilial. This time when I return to my natal home, I must find a resting place for all three generations.

After observing his filial duties and burying all three generations, Li returns to his wife and discovers, as we have seen, that in his absence his

two younger daughters had starved to death. An analysis of Li's views on death and dying reveals much about his philosophy in general. In the following pages, I focus in particular on Li Zhi's visions of his own death.

Toward the end of "A Sketch of Zhuowu" Kong Ruogu says:

One day [the Layman Li Zhi] told me, "You have known me for a long time. When I die could you please write an inscription for me? If I die in the hands of friends, then do as my friends instruct. If I die on the road, then definitely throw me in the waters or cremate me. Under no circumstances should you leave my bones for others to take care of. There is no need to write an inscription in the second case. If you could write a short biography, that would be fine."

Throughout Chinese history, writers have used and adapted quotations from classical texts to support their own views. Li too employs such methods with distinct adeptness. In considering his own death, Li Zhi clearly plays off a passage on Kongzi's own death narrative found in *Analects* 9.12. Here Kongzi says to his disciples, "it's not as though I were dying on the road, is it (*yu si yu dao lu hu* 予死於道路乎?)"⁶⁵ Li adopts this very line from 9.12 and writes, "If I die on the road" (*ruo si yu dao lu* 若死於道路). Li Zhi transforms Kongzi's rhetorical question into a conditional directive, offering provocative instructions for how to dispose of his body under certain conditions.

In this well-known passage of Kongzi's apparently impending death, Kongzi lays out the virtues of a good death. It is *genuine* in feeling, rather than one of deception (*zha* 詐) and deceiving (*qi* 欺). It is in the arms of friends and supported by relations and rituals constructed by culture rather than on the roadside, alone and isolated from society. The *Analects* passage follows:

The Master was gravely ill. Zilu directed the disciples to attend him in the manner of retainers. When the Master had recovered somewhat, he said, "How long you go on, You, practicing these deceptions (*zha* 詐)! To pretend that I have retainers when I have no retainers—who would I be deceiving (*qi* 欺)? Would I be deceiving Heaven? Moreover, rather than dying in the hands of retainers, isn't it better that I die in the hands of you, my disciples? And although I may not be entitled to a grand funeral, *it's not as though I were dying on the roadside, is it?*"⁶⁶

If we turn to another Confucian classic, the 3rd century BCE *Xunzi* 荀子, we find another description of a good death in terms of the two virtues

of being *genuine* in feeling and *social* in nature, and of occurring within a network constructed by culture. Xunzi writes in his well-known chapter on rituals: “to fail to bury the dead with sincere generosity (*zhong hou* 忠厚) and reverent formality (*jing wen* 敬文) is the way of a miser.”⁶⁷ In citing and adapting the final line of *Analects* 9.12, Li Zhi embraces part of the traditional Confucian conception of the good death, that of genuine sentiment and “sincere generosity,” and at the same time jettisons another part, that of social relations, rituals and “reverent formality.”

In Chapter Four I will argue that Li Zhi believes attending to our genuine desires is central to living life well. At the same time, Li does not believe fulfilling genuine desires is itself sufficient to a good life. The demands of human relationships, our human nature, and the culture we inherit matter too. As the philosopher Charles Taylor writes, “modes that opt for self-fulfillment without regard . . . to demands of any kind emanating from something more or other than human desires or aspirations are self-defeating . . . [and] destroy the conditions for realizing authenticity itself.”⁶⁸ In both embracing and rejecting parts of the Confucian tradition, Li Zhi attends to his cultural inheritance—in particular, the world of writing with its words, traditional genres, and allusions to classical texts—embracing parts of what have been passed down to him, while at the same time ably amending pieces of what are given.

Among Li’s large body of writings are commentaries on the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi*,⁶⁹ and the Four Books, which are the *Great Learning*,⁷⁰ the *Doctrine of the Mean*,⁷¹ the *Mengzi*, and of interest for our present purposes, the *Analects*. In Li’s commentary on *Analects* 9.12, he chooses to focus on the lines referring to the “deception” by Zilu and the “deceiving” of Heaven. In the margins next to these lines Li scribbles the character “furious” (*hen* 狠)!⁷² Like Kongzi, Li Zhi is repelled by deceptiveness, as well as by the related vices of hypocrisy and disingenuousness.

In one way, Li’s quoting from *Analects* 9.12 serves to affirm Kongzi’s insistence on genuineness as central to the good life and death. At the same time, Li does not simply cite Kongzi’s narrative; instead he selectively quotes from the passage in a way that negates certain of Kongzi’s ideas about a good death. Kongzi imagines his death to be good as long as he dies within the safe harbor of the arms of true friends: “it’s not as though I were dying on the roadside, is it?” In stark contrast, Li Zhi is perfectly content dying alone, on the road, away from home, and off the path constructed by culture: “If I die on the roadside, then definitely throw me in the waters or cremate me.”

In a second way Li Zhi mocks Kongzi’s formulation of a good death as one that occurs within the reassuring net of culture and accords with its established norms. In the *Analects*, mutilation or any other disfigurement of the body, for example through tattooing, is a source of acute

anxiety. A description of Master Zeng in *Analects* 8.3 well illustrates this anxiety. While ill in bed Master Zeng sighs:

“Uncover my feet! Uncover my hands!” . . . “The *Odes* say,
 ‘Fearful and cautious
 As if looking down into a deep abyss
 As if treading upon thin ice.’
 Only now can I be sure of having made it through safely.”⁷³

To keep the body intact until death is a Confucian filial duty. For Master Zeng, imminent death brings relief from anxiety over the possibility of mutilating his body. In contrast, Li Zhi feels no distress at or disapproval of the thought of cremation or the act of tossing his corpse into the waters. Bodily mutilation, so terrifying to Zengzi, is in fact the, or an, essential detail of Li Zhi’s own death as narrated by Yuan Zhongdao. Let us turn from the character to the writer Li’s own death.

Toward the last decade of the 16th century, Li Zhi found himself increasingly persecuted by more conservative officials. In April of 1602, the Chief Supervising Secretary in the Ministry of Rites, Zhang Wenda 張問達 (d. 1625), wrote and presented a memorial to the emperor impeaching Li Zhi for his heretical behavior. Zhang Wenda wrote:

Li Zhi, who was an official in his early years, has shaved his head in his old age. Recently he has printed a number of books, including *A Book to Hide*, *A Book to Burn*, and the *Great Virtue of Zhuowu*, which circulating throughout the country, work to mislead and confound the minds of men. He takes Lü Buwei and Li Yuan to be wise schemers, considers Li Si to possess great talent . . . Zhuo Wenjun to be a true companion, the Emperor of Qin to be the rarest treasure among the emperors, and the words of Kongzi to be all but unreliable. . . . When he lived temporarily in Macheng, he indulged freely in shameful conduct, disporting with worthless fellows in Buddhist temples, sharing baths with prostitutes in broad daylight, and inviting wives and daughters of respectable people to come to a temple to listen to his discourses—some of whom went so far as to bring bedding and pillows to spend the night there.⁷⁴

Shortly thereafter Li Zhi was arrested and imprisoned in Tongzhou, near the capital Beijing, waiting to be sent back to his natal home to be tried as a heretic and traitor. It is here that Li chooses his death. In Yuan Zhongdao’s short biography on Li Zhi, he devotes several lines to the subject:

The gentleman was taken to prison. . . . There he wrote poems and read books. One day, he asked the prison guard for a razor. The prison guard arrived. The gentleman took the razor and cut his own throat. His *qi*⁷⁵ did not fully dissipate until two days later.

The prison guard asked, “Monk, are you in pain?”

The gentleman pointed to his hand and wrote, “It does not hurt.”

The prison guard again asked, “Monk, why did you cut yourself?”

He wrote, “I am an old man of 70. What more is there for me to seek?”

And then he died.⁷⁶

In the 30th year of the Wanli 萬曆 reign,⁷⁷ in the third month, on the 15th day—or November 23, 1527—at the age of 76 *sui*, Li Zhi writes the conclusion to his own lived life story.⁷⁸ Some have interpreted Li’s suicide as an act of desperation. Others read the story of his death as one of courage and power. As Li’s friend Yuan Zhongdao narrates the final ending, Li’s *qi* or “life energy” was so powerful that it was not until two days later that he died.

VII. CONCLUSION

In “Testimony,” an essay written in his later years, Li Zhi reflects upon his life. He writes in one section, “Lamenting Life’s Passing” (*Gankai pingsheng* 感慨平生), of the essay:

People say that once one has adopted the tonsure one is simply a Buddha, and such a life is superior to the secular life. Now I have taken the tonsure, but I do not claim to be superior for it. There was simply no other way. I did not adopt the tonsure because it was desirable to do so. It was not because I could only practice the Dao by adopting the tonsure. Cannot one stay at home (i.e. not become a monk) and practice the Dao?

All my life I have disliked being controlled by others. But as soon as one is born one’s body is controlled by others. . . . The control and restraint follow one into the coffin and grave where the control and restraint suffered is even crueler. I would rather wander in the four directions and not return home. I had a strong desire to seek for friends, for kindred spirits, but nowhere did I find any. And so, it was only from my unwillingness to be controlled even one bit by others that I left my post and refused to return home. This is the genuine intention of my original heart.⁷⁹

As with Li’s written autobiography, his own lived life too can be read as a struggle against a conventional life narrative. In some respects Li

conforms to traditional expectations. He considers it his duty to arrange the marriages of his siblings and to bury his father and grandparents observing proper “traditions of mourning.” And yet, in 1588 at the age of 62 *sui*, he refuses to return to his natal home and, instead, shaves his head and adopts the tonsure. Li’s refusal to return home, his adoption of the tonsure, his suicide—we can see these as some of the methods Li used to free himself from the conventional expectations and traditional obligations to family and society at large.

In *1587: A Year of No Significance*, Ray Huang concludes his chapter on Li:

If [Li Zhi] had slipped from the picture in 1587, the year before his tonsure, he would have remained historically obscure yet at the same time would most definitely have saved himself immeasurable agony. As it happened, his subsequent twenty-five years of toil and trouble proved to be only futile. . . . Yet, that quarter of a century of Li Zhi’s life was not a total waste. He provided us with an invaluable record, without which we would perhaps never be able to fathom the depth of intellectual frustration that characterized his era.⁸⁰

Huang’s characterization of Li’s deep “frustration” is quite appropriate. Li’s reflections on taking the tonsure and his view and vision about his death support the idea that his was a life acted in part out of hope, but even more so out of frustration and anger. In his essay “On the Five Deaths” (*Wu si pian* 五死篇) Li writes, “Since there is none who truly knows me for whom I can die, I will die for those who do not truly know me in order to vent my anger.”⁸¹ Such remarks, which we find scattered through his works, give a profoundly palpable sense of Li’s deep frustration and disappointment in life.

But there is another perspective on our writer and thinker. If we turn to Li’s entire corpus of writings, for the most part we find a quite different and, arguably, equally substantive world. Time and time again Li uses refreshing, witty, playful, and effective methods for subverting, inverting, and adapting the conventional narratives, genres, techniques, and references from canonical literature that he found so frustratingly constricting. It is clear Li has created and given to us a written world that does skillfully and in turns subtly and boldly creates space for the expression of true feelings and genuine thoughts. In this chapter we have seen a number of specific ways he carries forth this task in the course of “A Sketch of Zhuowu.” In Chapter Three, we shall examine how he does so in yet another well-known essay.

In the concluding lines of “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” Li explicitly returns to the world created by writing. He lays out a number of possible scenes for his own death and then asks Kong Ruogu, “If I die on the

road . . . you could write a short biography, that would be fine.” Kong replies, “How can I claim to really understand the Layman? At another time, some Gu Hutou will truly know him.” Gu Hutou, better known as Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (341–402 CE),⁸² was a renowned and free-spirited painter, writer, calligrapher, poet, and, most significantly for our present purpose of developing an interpretation of “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” a buffoon. Gu lived in a period, roughly the 3rd through 6th centuries, when elite members of society valued eccentricity and spontaneity above all else. We find a number of anecdotes about Gu in the widely read work *A New Account of Tales of the World*, commonly attributed to Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444 CE). *A New Account of Tales of the World* presents a collection of character sketches of 626 historical figures from the Wei-Jin period (c. 220–420 CE).⁸³ Richard Mather in his translation and study of this work helpfully organizes literary figures from the Wei-Jin period into two types. He refers to the first of his two types as those who favor “naturalness” (*ziran* 自然) and the second as those who insist on conforming to the “Moral Teachings” (*ming jiao* 名教) of the Confucian school.⁸⁴ Mather further notes that generally speaking the most admirable characters in *A New Account* are those who favor “naturalness.” They value an unconventional life lived at the margins of society focused on good conversation, intimate friends, and fine literature. Gu Kaizhi certainly fits such a description.

References to Gu can be found in the introduction of Li Zhi’s *Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*. Here, Li writes that *A New Account* and Li’s close friend Jiao Hong’s *A Collection of Classified Reading Notes* (*Leilin* 類林)⁸⁵ are like “pieces of gold. . . . These writings possess an ineffable quality and can penetrate to the core of what is true.”⁸⁶ Li admires the quality and depth of feeling and thought revealed in these works. Li Zhi then refers briefly to two tales in *A New Account*:

When the eye of the gentleman in the painting was dotted, his stern face was given life and spirit. When three cheek hairs were added to Pei Kai’s portrait, one truly began to sense his spirit. To such a degree, Gu Kaizhi conveyed what cannot be conveyed.

Gu sees the true essence of the characters and, whether through the simple addition of three cheek hairs or the dotting of the eyes, is able to capture the ineffable and distinctive spirit of a particular individual.

Arguably the most prominent character from the *A New Account* is Xie An (332–385 CE). Earlier in “A Sketch of Zhuowu” Li employs an image that finds its source in a story about Xie An.⁸⁷ In describing his reaction to the death of his two daughters, Li writes, “It is not until now that I feel like one of the teeth on the bottom of my platform clogs has

broken off!” A deeply self-conscious writer like Li Zhi who was intimately familiar with *A New Account* surely was aware that his reference finds its source in “The Biography of Xie An,” found in the dynastic history the *Jinshu* 晉書. Whether it is Xie An or Gu Kaizhi, the admirable historical figures Li directly or indirectly refers to in “A Sketch of Zhuowu” are often those from the Wei-Jin period who are characterized by their commitment to the “naturalness” viewpoint.⁸⁸

The concluding lines of “A Sketch of Zhuowu” leave the character Li’s life unwitnessed, unwritten, and full of possibility. On the one hand, we are given the geographic location of the bustling city of Nanjing, a center of culture including publishing, politics, and trade in Li Zhi’s time. It was also a place where Li served twice as an official.⁸⁹ On the other hand, in the concluding line of this work, Kong suggests the remote western province of Yunnan, at its most southern reaches. There, Li served as prefect and was known for his free and easy method of governing. It is a place of difference and diversity, at the very margins of the empire.⁹⁰ According to the title of our essay of interest, the piece was written in Yunnan: “A Sketch of Zhuowu: Written in Yunnan.”

The character Kong Ruogu narrates:

I have written an essay offering a general sketch. Afterwards, I traveled far and wide and did not see the Layman for a long time. And so I have not recorded anything from his times in Nanjing onward. Some say the Layman died in Nanjing. Others say he is still in southern Yunnan and has not yet died.

We know that Li Zhi did not die in Nanjing. Let us turn to the following chapters to see what did happen.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Heart-Mind (心)

Reading “On the Child-like Heart-Mind”

In the concluding remarks to his preface to the Western Chamber, the Farmer of the Dragon Ravine stated, “Those who understand me shall not say I still possess the child-like heart-mind (tong xin 童心).”

—Introduction to Li Zhi’s “On the Child-like Heart-Mind”

Oh! Where can I find a genuine great sage who has not lost his child-like heart-mind and have a word with him about culture?

—Conclusion to “On the Child-like Heart-Mind”¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Upon reading the title of Li Zhi’s famous essay “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,”² surely any literatus in his time would immediately have recalled earlier references to the term of art at the heart of Li’s philosophy.³ Its *locus classicus* is the canonical historical text the *Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳).⁴ Commenting on year 31 of the reign of the Duke of Xian, the narrator laments about the then 19-year-old⁵ Zhao who would later take the throne after Xian: “He still had a child-like heart-mind, and from this the gentleman knew he would not come to a good end.”⁶ In this early source, the term *tong xin* is used in a derogatory sense; one who possesses a child-like heart-mind is naïve, immature, and inexperienced in the ways of the world. As a result, such a person is bound to come to a bad end.

In the first words and line of Li’s essay the reader is led to yet another—though distinctly less obvious and certainly non-canonical—reference to the term. Li chooses a different kind of literary source:

fiction rather than history and romance rather than politics, and quotes from one of countless commentaries on the 13th century play the *Western Chamber* (*Xixiangji* 西廂記).⁷ Widely performed and read in Li's time, the play celebrates the powerful passion and true love between a brilliant scholar and a beautiful maiden. The story begins as the two fall in love and consummate their illicit passion, unfolds as they overcome traditional barriers to their great romance, and concludes as at last the two joyfully join in marriage. This storybook version of the lovers' union finds its original telling in the Tang period with a markedly different ending in a way demanding to be read as a cautionary—rather than celebratory—tale, entitled *Yingying's Story* (*Yingying zhuan* 鶯鶯傳).⁸ In this telling, freely acting upon one's spontaneous passions and desires leads to grief and tragedy. The brilliant scholar falls with mad desire for the heroine, she no less so for him; and for a brief moment in time they blissfully delight in each other's arms. But later he chooses to turn away from this deep love, desire, and passion, and thereby abandons her. Both later marry: presumably in neither case for passionate ardor or true love.

In carefully choosing and explicitly referring to the *Western Chamber*, we can all but assume Li was deeply aware that upon reading the first lines of "On the Child-like Heart-Mind" the attentive reader would at once consider the story in its earlier (cautionary) version. In the first section of this chapter I will show that attending to and examining what is prominently absent in Li's writings is at many points no less critical to understanding Li's argument and his philosophical vision than attention to and analysis of what he explicitly writes, cites, and claims. In the course of his essay Li insistently argues against and jettisons what in the end the scholar in *Yingying's Story* chooses to live out: rigid, pedantic, homogenized thinking with its symbol that of the stifling and unimaginative scholar of the—however unfairly attributed—Zhu Xi school of Confucian thought. Instead, Li gestures towards, celebrates, and argues for ideals pursued and cherished in the *Western Chamber*: spontaneity, genuineness, abundance in feeling, and passionate desire.

Li Zhi quotes not from the *Western Chamber* itself, but from a commentary and amongst them, Li chooses a 1582 edition. The commentator is anonymous—identified in his work only as "The Farmer of the Dragon Ravine"—and concludes his preface with an explicit reference to the "child-like heart-mind":

Having leisure in my humble home, I casually punctuate the *Western Chamber*. . . . Alone, I hold the text and chant its verses on windy and rainy days or beautiful moonlit nights. I while away the time, and break the strains of poverty and sadness. *Those who understand me shall not say that I still possess the child-like heart-mind.*⁹

We are introduced to a weary scholar, lonely, sad, and while doubtful this is the case, in his words, he is impoverished. With leisure on his hands, he reads and comments upon this most celebrated of love stories and concludes with a longing lament for a child-like heart-mind he no longer possesses.

Now, if we turn to the final lines of our essay at hand, we find neither *scorn*, as in the *Commentary of Zuo*, nor *lament* over what might be, as in the commentary on the *Western Chamber* but rather, joyful *celebration*; Li Zhi seeks for and delights in the words and company of those who cherish, attentively nurture, and hold onto their child-like heart-mind.

And so, the Six Classics, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi* have become nothing more than crib sheets for those belonging to the School of Principle, a fountainhead for phonies. Certainly these texts cannot shed light on matters by speaking directly from the child-like heart-mind. Oh! Where can I find a genuine great sage who has not lost his child-like heart-mind and have a word with him about culture?¹⁰

The concluding line is a play on a sentence from the writings of the early Daoist Zhuangzi (ca. 369–ca. 286 BCE), and one that no reader in Li's time would miss.¹¹ Li Zhi is a remarkably skilled writer, and we see in this essay that, among what he achieves through the course of the piece, he leads us through a tangle of texts and allusions and adroitly guides us through this rich written world while reformulating, claiming, and staking for his purposes the concept of the child-like heart-mind. Li is a writer who takes the literary world absolutely seriously and works with exquisite wit, erudition, and painstaking attention to the finest of nuances within this medium to write and rewrite a vision for a life well lived.

As we have already seen with Li's reference to a commentary on the *Western Chamber*, attention to terms of art, allusions, and texts that Li Zhi all but explicitly leaves out are *critical* to understanding his views. In analyzing Li Zhi's concept of the child-like heart-mind—a metaphor most central to illuminating his philosophical ideas—I begin by pointing to and briefly describing the relevant ideas behind a select number of key terms of art that one can assume he had in mind and thoughtfully and self-consciously chose to forego: “the original heart-mind” (*ben xin* 本心),¹² the “genuine heart-mind” (*zhen xin* 真心),¹³ “pure-knowing” (*liang zhi* 良知),¹⁴ and “the infant heart-mind” (*chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心).¹⁵ In “On the Child-like Heart-Mind” Li Zhi himself refers only once to the first two terms and never uses either of the latter two, both common Confucian terms in wide circulation among literati in late-Ming China. Nevertheless, analysis of these terms is critical to understanding his philosophy.

Li's concept of the heart-mind has received significant scholarly attention, much of which has sought to discern and illuminate a consistent system of thought in Li's work.¹⁶ Such an approach has led a number of scholars to conclude that Li's writings on the subject are, while innovative, muddled and inconsistent in the end.¹⁷ Others have interpreted Li's apparently contradictory assertions regarding the heart-mind as presenting an ethics of relativism where anything goes.¹⁸ Still others have approached Li's writing in a highly selective manner, focused on those selections and passages that logically cohere, and on this basis have argued that he is a Mengzian¹⁹ or a proto-Marxist,²⁰ for example. Such studies offer thoughtful analyses of Li's writings based on broadly learned scholarship, and yet too often they conclude that the main value of Li's work is the help it can provide as a means to better understand his age²¹ or the inspiration that it provided other more careful, systematic, and substantial thinkers.²² Now certainly Li's writings *are* valuable in pursuing either of these worthy goals; he helps us to gain insight into his times, and he does inspire the development of later schools of thought and social-political movements.²³ But such interpretations—indeed deeply illuminating of other important aspects of Li's writings—all seriously underestimate or wholly overlook the intrinsic value and power of Li's philosophical vision.

As we have seen, Li concludes the last lines of his "On the Child-like Heart-Mind" with a play on the *Zhuangzi*. Much revealing scholarship has been devoted to understanding Zhuangzi's method and possible motivations for writing,²⁴ and those very same explanations help shed light on Li Zhi's approach. Like the *Zhuangzi*, Li's writings present ever-shifting perspectives often in bewildering contradiction with each other. He writes in multiple genres and in a variety of tones. Like the *Zhuangzi*, Li's writings push and prod, gesture toward new horizons, shift us away from our conventional ways of viewing the world, and nudge us into loosening our ever-tightening grip on narrow, stifling, and enervating views of living life. Much of the scholarship that underestimates or neglects the intrinsic philosophical power of Li's writings reads his works as discursive texts with logical arguments and a formal system of thought to be systematically analyzed and unraveled. But as we already can foresee, if indeed Li's style of writing is in ways similar to Zhuangzi's, Li's do not lend themselves well in any way and at all to such an approach and here, I take a different tack and instead, identify, describe, and analyze a cluster of pronounced images found in Li's writings and show how these come together to present a clear, consistent, and powerful picture.²⁵

I will argue through this chapter that Li's conception of the mind is philosophically coherent, rich, and compelling and shall do this both through an analysis of the pronounced places of *silence* or relative silence

in Li's writings—most specifically, the historical terms for the heart-mind that were so readily available to him that we can assume he self-consciously chose to forego—and through a study of the words, images, and rich and substantive *metaphors* and *images* that Li chooses and fills out to explain his concept of the heart-mind and his philosophical view at large. The most comprehensive and representative treatment of Li's child-like heart-mind is found in his “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” and I turn back to an analysis of this essay.

II. SPEAKING WITHOUT WORDS

A. FORGOING TERMS OF ART: THE “ORIGINAL HEART-MIND” (*BEN XIN* 本心)

In the paragraph that follows immediately after the quote from the Farmer of the Dragon Ravine, Li writes:

The child-like heart-mind is the genuine heart-mind (*zhen xin* 真心). If one denies the child-like heart-mind, then he denies the genuine heart-mind. The child-like heart-mind is free of all falsehood (*jia* 假) and entirely “genuine” (*zhen* 真); it is the “original heart-mind” (*ben xin* 本心) at the very beginning of the first thought. To lose the child-like heart-mind is to lose the genuine heart-mind. To lose the genuine heart-mind is to lose the genuine self. A person who is not genuine will never regain that with which he began.²⁶

As we have seen, in the first lines of his essay Li claims the term of art most central to his essay and philosophy at large—the “child-like heart-mind”—and now he points the reader to two other terms of art: *ben xin* 本心 and *zhen xin* 真心. The term *ben xin* finds its *locus classicus* in passage 6A10 of the *Mengzi*. The 4th-century BCE Confucian classic is arguably one of the most influential and interesting writings in the *Ru* tradition. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this classic in Chinese history. In Li Zhi's time, the *Mengzi* was one of the Four Books, which were central to the Civil Service Examinations taken by most every literatus from the 14th through the end of the 19th century.²⁷ Mengzi's view of the mind was an important idea throughout the course of Chinese philosophy and attained a preeminent position among Confucians in the Tang and later periods. Surely *any* student of the work—including any literatus in Li's time and place—would be familiar with this passage that likens the choice between life and righteousness to choosing between fish and the rare delicacy of bear paws. Mengzi concludes that one who chooses with the lower, appetitive parts of the self and foolishly sacrifices

moral integrity in order to preserve his life, however difficult the choice, has lost contact with what is a person's native, most precious, and greatest moral resource, the "original heart-mind." Mengzi concludes, "This is what we refer to as losing one's 'original heart-mind' (*ben xin* 本心)."²⁸ Li uses this and other terms²⁹ that find their original source in the *Mengzi*, but in the end he chooses another term, *tong xin*, as his primary term of art to refer to the pure, innate, moral mind. Given his preference for this distinctive expression, which does *not* occur in the *Mengzi*, it is reasonable to infer that Li self-consciously both identifies with and distinguishes his view of the heart-mind from that of Mengzi. It is critical to review three aspects of Mengzi's conception of the heart-mind, which are relevant and illuminating to our analysis of Li Zhi. We begin with a passage from the *Mengzi* that reveals a number of the core elements of its view.

You must not be like the man from Song. There was a man from Song who pulled at his grain plants because he was worried about their failure to grow. Having done so, he went on his way home, not realizing what he had done. "I am worn out today," said he to his family. "I have been helping the grain to grow." His son rushed out to take a look and there the plants were, all shriveled up. There are few in the world who can resist the urge to help their grain to grow. There are some who leave the plants unattended, thinking that nothing they can do will be of any use. They are the people who do not even bother to weed. There are others who help the plants grow. They are the people who pull at them. Not only do they fail to help them but they do the plants positive harm.³⁰

Immediately this agricultural metaphor, one among countless within the classic, points us to a central thesis in the *Mengzi*: our moral intuitions are our greatest moral resource, but they are no more than mere and fragile *sprouts* (*duan* 端) or sensibilities³¹ of virtue requiring *development*³² and cultivation. This metaphor also reveals to us a second aspect relevant to our analysis of Li. Mengzi grounds his ethics in what is given by nature, our *human nature*, and in particular the idea that it is profoundly satisfying to connect with these inborn germs of goodness and to nurture and develop them. This reveals the proper course of development for our native sprouts, just as the proper course of development for the Farmer of Song's tender sprouts is to develop into full grown and robust plants. Mengzi argued that this is a natural organic process that required gradual development. As we shall see, Li is like Mengzi in that he too *grounds* his ethical views in an account of *human nature*. Li, though, does not share Mengzi's distinctive view that the heart-mind at birth is simply a fragile sprout that requires careful nurturing—allowing

neither neglect nor overzealous cultivation—in order to fulfill its intended course of development. Mengzi's *development* model, as we will later see, differs in important respects from Li's model of the heart-mind, which I refer to as a *preservation* model of the heart-mind.

Another significant difference between the views of Li Zhi and Mengzi concerns the particular *content* of the heart-mind. Mengzi describes four sprouts of virtue, specifically of compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and right and wrong. He believes in a specific path of moral development and in a well-defined and relatively *narrow* conception of the life well lived. One simple example will suffice for our purposes, a story from *Mengzi* 3A5 regarding filial piety. In this passage, Mengzi describes a son's reaction to the death of his parents and asserts that a virtuous son will act in a particular way, one that is the natural development of nascent inclinations common to all healthy humans. Mengzi writes:

Presumably there must have been cases in ancient times of people not burying their parents. When the parents died, they were thrown in the gullies. Then one day the sons passed the place and there lay the bodies, eaten by foxes and sucked by flies. A sweat broke out on their brows, and they could not bear to look. The sweating was not put on for others to see. It was an outward expression of their innermost heart. They went home for baskets and spades. If it was truly right for them to bury the remains of their parents, then it must also be right for all dutiful sons and benevolent men to do likewise.³³

This passage shows that Mengzi believes healthy humans have in common a particular set of inclinations that when properly cultivated, develop into specific ethical dispositions that in turn engender particular kinds of actions.³⁴ As we shall see, Li Zhi had a much broader and looser conception of what the genuine heart-mind might lead a cultivated individual to do. He also thought that the heart-mind could be developed through a variety of means and in particular that a much wider range of texts and practices could help one realize one's genuine nature and act in accordance with the moral heart-mind.

B. FORGOING TERMS OF ART:
THE "GENUINE HEART-MIND" (ZHEN XIN 真心)

Li Zhi found inspiration from a wide range of texts: the early pre-Qin Daoist text the *Daodejing* for which he provides a commentary,³⁵ the great Ming novel the *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) for which Li is attributed with one of the most influential commentaries,³⁶ and

Confucian works such as the *Mengzi*³⁷ and the *Analects*.³⁸ We know Li immersed himself in certain Buddhist texts; repeatedly in biographical accounts we find mentioned Li's admiration for the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing* 金剛經).³⁹ And we can all but assume that any literatus of late-Ming China who was deeply interested in Buddhist ideas would also be intimately familiar with a Buddhist sutra widely circulated and received during this time and most relevant to our discussion here, the *Platform Sutra*.⁴⁰ In the classic, we find one of the most well-known and influential examples of the term *zhen xin*.⁴¹ Early on the central figure in the sutra, the illiterate woodcutter who would become Chan Buddhism's Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, preaches:

The deep concentration of oneness is the "genuine heart-mind" (*zhen xin* 真心) at all times, walking, staying, sitting, and lying. . . . Only practicing the genuine heart-mind, and in all things having no attachments whatsoever, is called the deep concentration of oneness. The deluded man clings to the characteristics of things, adheres to the deep concentration of oneness, thinks that practicing the genuine heart-mind is sitting without moving and casting aside delusions without letting things arise in the heart-mind. . . . This kind of practice is the same as insentientcy and the cause of an obstruction to the Dao. The Dao must be something that circulates freely; why should he impede it? If the heart-mind does not abide in things the Dao circulates freely; if the heart-mind abides in things, it becomes entangled.⁴²

For the limited purpose of aiding in our discussion of Li Zhi, I want simply to note two respects in which Li's conception of the heart-mind is meaningfully similar to the concept of the genuine heart-mind found in the *Platform Sutra*. The first similarity concerns *ease*. The genuine heart-mind properly functioning is the heart-mind in simple and natural motion—walking, staying, sitting, and lying. In contrast, deluded practice is the sort that "clings," "adheres," "obstructs," and "entangles." The ease and naturalness of living true to one's genuine heart-mind is in relevant ways similar to Mengzi's description of self-cultivation. For Mengzi, too, cultivation of one's innate sprouts requires effort, and attentive and even arduous effort, but when done properly, feels satisfying. The *methods* of self-cultivation in the *Platform Sutra*, in the *Mengzi*, and in Li's work share the quality of natural ease, which brings joy throughout the process of cultivation.⁴³

Such ease and naturalness in self-cultivation can helpfully be contrasted with the theory of self-cultivation found in the writings of the early Confucian, or *Ru*, thinker Xunzi (ca. 310–220 BCE). Xunzi's vision of

self-cultivation requires controlling and reforming nature rather than, for example, nurturing the natural growth of one's nascent sprouts. Xunzi's focus on reformation can be seen in his use of metaphors that describe self-cultivation as going against the natural bent of human nature. He writes:

A warped piece of wood must wait until it has been laid against the straightening board, steamed, and forced into shape before it can become straight; a piece of blunt metal must wait until it has been whetted on a grindstone before it can become sharp.⁴⁴

Throughout his work, Xunzi uses metaphors of artisanship and conveys the sense that self-cultivation does not consist of following nature but rather, re-shaping natural impulses. Our moral task is to internalize rituals and learning that function as dikes, pipes, and reservoirs for forming anew our feelings in a way that best allows us to satisfy our needs. Xunzi offers what Ivanhoe refers to as a *reformation* model of self-cultivation.

A second aspect of the genuine heart-mind found in the *Platform Sutra* that can aid us in understanding Li's conception of the child-like heart-mind also concerns the method of self-cultivation. In the *Platform Sutra*, we find what we can helpfully refer to as a *discovery* model of the heart-mind in contrast to Mengzi's of *development*. We find another example of a discovery model of the heart-mind in Wang Yangming's conception of the heart-mind as "pure knowing," the human heart-mind in its aware and active mode. Let us describe the discovery model by turning to Wang's views.

C. FORGOING TERMS OF ART:
"PURE KNOWING" (LIANG ZHI 良知)

Three points regarding Wang's concept of the heart-mind are relevant to our understanding of Li: (1) Wang's *method* of self-cultivation as one of discovery, (2) his idea that the heart-mind is directly manifested in a *faculty* of "pure knowing," which results in a strongly context-dependent ethics, and (3) the way in which Wang *grounds* his ethical philosophy in a comprehensive, speculative metaphysical scheme.⁴⁵ Li's concept of the heart-mind is similar to Wang's in respect to the first two points I shall examine but differs from Wang's view in the last. Wang is arguably the most significant Confucian thinker of the Ming period (1368–1644), Li openly acknowledged his debt to and admiration of Wang and his philosophy, and Li is commonly identified as a member of the Taizhou School,⁴⁶ as we noted earlier, the most free-spirited branch of the Wang Yangming school of Confucianism.

Wang believes people are immoral because their genuine self, more specifically their genuine heart-minds, are obscured by selfish desires. Wang commonly uses metaphors such as the sun obscured by clouds, or the mirror by dust to describe the heart-mind in this deluded state:⁴⁷ “The heart-mind of the sage is like a clear mirror. . . . The only fear is that the mirror is not clear, not that it is incapable of reflecting a thing as it comes.”⁴⁸ And again, “The sage’s mind is like a clear mirror, whereas the mind of an ordinary person is like a dull mirror. . . . The effort is to be directed toward the active role of polishing.”⁴⁹ In analogizing the heart-mind to the sun, Wang praises the insight of a student who responds, “One’s innate knowledge can only be obscured by material desires. It is within him and can never be lost. Similarly, clouds may of course obscure the sun but the sun is never lost.”⁵⁰

Wang borrows the term “pure knowing” (*liangzhi*) from Mengzi⁵¹ but transforms its meaning. For Wang pure knowing is an innate, perfect, and fully formed moral faculty, which is always aware and always capable of motivating action. While all are born with the same quality of pure knowing, individuals are born with varying qualities of “psycho-physical stuff” (*qi* 氣). Those who attain moral enlightenment relatively easily are endowed with clearer *qi* than those who must struggle long and hard in the process. The aim of self-cultivation is not to rid oneself of *qi*—which is not possible for any actually existing creature or thing—but to clarify and thus *discover* one’s natural endowment of muddied *qi*. In humans, muddied *qi* manifests itself as selfishness which leads one to act in ways that further disturb, agitate, and roil one’s *qi*, resulting in further murkiness and obscuration. It is by exercising one’s pure knowing in the proper way—remaining vigilant and reflecting on one’s reactions to the actions, events, and situations in everyday life—that one’s *qi* can be clarified. The project of clarifying one’s *qi* is not unlike the way in which the sun burns away clouds that obscure it. If one does not exercise one’s pure knowing, it is because of the torpor and delusion that result when one’s *qi* is cloudy due to the presence of selfish thoughts and material desires. The act of getting oneself to exercise one’s pure knowing is an act of willing, where willing is conceived of primarily as a form of attention. One just has to *do* it. The negative regard Wang had for selfish thoughts can be seen vividly in the following passage:

There is no let-up in this work [of self-cultivation]. It is like getting rid of robbers and thieves. There must be the determination to wipe them out thoroughly and completely. Before things happen, each and every selfish desire for sex, wealth, and fame must be discovered. The root of the trouble must be pulled up and thrown away so that it will never sprout again. Only then can we feel fine.

At all times be like a cat trying to catch a rat, with eyes single-mindedly watching and ears single-mindedly listening. As soon as an evil thought begins to arise, overcome it and cast it away. Be as decisive as in cutting a nail or slicing a piece of iron. Do not tolerate it or give it any consideration. Do not harbor it and do not allow it any way out.⁵²

The enlightened sage is one who has vigilantly driven out and keeps at bay the distorting effects of selfish thoughts, and thereby allows his pure knowing, comprised of “principle” (*li* 理), to shine through, guide one, and operate unimpeded.

Wang describes pure knowing as a faculty that enables us to act morally, and he grounds morality in a vision of the unity of all things. Wang writes:

The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body (*yi ti* 一體). . . . As to those who posit a separation between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are petty men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he do so. Forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things is not only the genuine condition of the great man. Even the petty man is no different. Only he makes himself petty.⁵³

Wang’s notion of pure knowing is central to his vision of ethics, and he grounds this ethics in a *metaphysics* that envisions all in the universe as a unified body.

I want to describe one last aspect of Wang’s thought which we will rely upon to illuminate Li’s conception of the heart-mind: Wang’s *context-dependent* conception of ethics. For Wang, the only criterion for right action is that the action spring from the unimpeded operation of one’s pure knowing. Unlike certain other Confucians such as Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310–220 BCE) or Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 CE), who argue that the standards for morality and right action can be found in a canonical body of classics, for Wang and generally speaking for those in the Taizhou school who find inspiration in Wang’s ideas, right and wrong are highly context-dependent. This does not mean Wang is a relativist who believes anything goes. He maintains a clear distinction between right and wrong but insists that these always are keyed to particular times, places, and contexts. All humans whose pure knowing operates properly will choose to act in what is morally the same way under the same or relevantly similar conditions, though their actions cannot be codified into rules.

Wang believed the standard for right action exists within and is available to all who sincerely seek for and follow their pure knowing. We see Wang's inward turn and reliance upon the heart-mind in passages such as the following:

The important thing in learning is to acquire it through the exercise of the heart-mind. If words are examined in the heart-mind and found to be wrong, although they have come from the mouth of Kongzi, I dare not accept them as correct. How much less those from people inferior to Kongzi! If words are examined in the heart-mind and found to be correct, although they have come from the mouths of ordinary people, I dare not regard them as wrong.⁵⁴

For Wang, there indeed exist absolute rights and wrongs in the world, and these moral truths can be readily grasped by one's pure knowing. Wang writes, "In the bright mirror's response to things, what is beautiful appears beautiful and what is ugly appears ugly."⁵⁵ With the idea of pure knowing in hand, Wang is able to offer an alternative to the traditional Confucian view that truth resides in classical texts or earlier historical precedents. For Wang, moral truth is entirely context-dependent and pure knowing is the faculty that is able to grasp these radically context-sensitive truths.

D. FORGOING TERMS OF ART:

THE "INFANT HEART-MIND" (*CHIZI ZHI XIN* 赤子之心)

Luo Rufang 羅汝芳⁵⁶ was a contemporary of Li Zhi, also of the Taizhou school, and widely known in his time for both his charismatic public lectures and his concept of the heart-mind as the "infant heart-mind," a term he without doubt knowingly borrowed from the *Mengzi* but substantively transforms in meaning.⁵⁷ Though Li and Luo most likely never met, Li was aware of and informed about Luo's ideas. One reason Luo is of such particular interest to us is terminological: Li's preferred expression for the moral heart-mind, the child-like heart-mind (*tong xin*), is quite similar to yet surely self-consciously distinct from Luo's. Philosophically speaking, several characteristic aspects of Luo's philosophy are important for understanding Li's views: (1) Luo's *method* of self-cultivation, which values the free expression of one's natural desires, (2) his *grounding* of ethics in a comprehensive metaphysical theory, and (3) his views concerning the *content* of the heart-mind, which results in a relatively narrow conception of right and wrong. As we shall see, Li is like Luo in regard to the first aspect but differs from him when it comes to the latter two.

Luo understood himself and his philosophy as responding to the notion that sagehood necessitates the repression of one's spontaneous feelings and thoughts. According to Luo's biography found in Huang Zongxi's *Records of Ming Scholars*, in his youth he set his heart on moral awakening and, to achieve this end, shut himself in a temple and engaged in a prolonged process of meditation. After exerting himself in this manner for some time, not only did he fail to achieve enlightenment, but he also became spiritually sick. In seeking a cure for his self-inflicted malady, he found a teacher who prescribed letting his natural feelings spontaneously emerge and flow wherever they will, rather than trying to control and repress his passions.⁵⁸ Luo followed this advice and soon was restored to health. According to the biography, his philosophy of spontaneity is sparked by this formative experience. Whatever the truth of this story, the picture of a determined adolescent struggling to reign in his passions offers an effective contrast against Luo's ideal of the spontaneous heart-mind of the infant.

As a disciple of the Wang Yangming school, Luo studied Wang's teachings concerning pure knowing and was particularly interested in the notion that this faculty was innate though obstructed at birth. Inspired by Wang, he developed his own vision articulating a view of humans as born with an innate and perfect capacity for morality which, if preserved or if wholly recovered, would naturally enable them to become full moral beings. Luo strongly emphasized the spontaneity and naturalness most characteristic of the actions of an infant. All people are born with this "infant heart-mind"; a sage simply is one who has preserved or re-discovered this heart-mind and allowed it to remain in or come fully back into play.

In arguing for the value of the spontaneous expression of feelings Luo claims, "You must realize that your feelings (*qing* 情) are your human nature."⁵⁹ As such, to remain true to one's nature is to express rather than repress one's feelings. In describing the spontaneous expression of feelings he provides the exemplar of a "good mother caring for her infant. She does not know she does it and yet she does."⁶⁰ Feelings of love and caring readily manifest themselves so long as artificial obstructions, such as false teachings or excessive meditation, are removed. Again, Luo describes the spontaneous expression of feelings when he writes:

What child at birth does not long to suckle at the mother's breast?
Or desire to be held by her father? What father or mother is not
fond of holding and nourishing his or her child? What brother
or sister does not enjoy watching and protecting his or her little
brother or sister? Humans possess this goodness, a natural disposition (*liang shan* 良善).⁶¹

Again, these feelings of love and caring arise untutored and are at the heart of a life well lived; they are the source of a profound sense of ease, joy, and fulfillment. In describing his spontaneous response to contemplating the cosmos, the self, and the Dao, Luo repeatedly uses terms such as “joy” (*le* 樂), “pleasure” (*xin xin* 欣欣), and “desire” (*yu* 欲). The sage is one who acts spontaneously and such unimpeded expression of one’s nature results in the most pleasant and deeply satisfying of lives.

Like Wang Yangming, Luo grounds his ethics of spontaneity in a metaphysics that insists at the deepest level that the heart-mind and the myriad things in the universe are “one body” (*yi ti* 一體): “The great person thoroughly understands that all under heaven is one body.”⁶² And also, “When the mind has spent itself, there is no mind and there is nothing that is not the mind. This is nature; this is the heavenly. This one thing is the common thread of it all.”⁶³ We act in the best interest of all things under heaven because we are one with all of Nature.

A third and final element of Luo’s concept of the heart-mind that is relevant to our study of Li Zhi is his relatively narrow and specific conception of the good. Despite his insistence on spontaneity and the free expression of feelings, Luo believes that our best resources for living the good life are conventional virtues exemplified in canonical Confucian texts. For Luo, all those who give themselves over to being guided by the heart-mind of the infant spontaneously act according to (conventional) virtues such as “filial piety” (*xiao* 孝), “love and respect for elder brothers” (*ti* 悌), and “loving kindness” (*ci* 慈).⁶⁴ As a result, he envisions the good life as one lived in accord with a specific and narrow set of virtues that exist as an explicit ethical standard, a *universal criteria*, applicable to all. As we shall see, while Li is similar to Luo in placing great value on spontaneity and the free expression of feelings, Li differs in that he offers a much broader and more accommodating vision of right and wrong.

In the following section of this chapter I will use and expand upon the categories of analysis delineated thus far—a development in contrast to a discovery model of self-cultivation and the mind, the grounding of ethics in *anthropology* as opposed to metaphysics, a context-dependent, *particularist* and uncodifiable view of ethics⁶⁵ in contrast to generalized, universal criteria for right and wrong, the valuing of spontaneity and *desire* over controlling and restraining one’s emotions, and a *broad and accommodating* conception of the good life as opposed to the narrow adherence to traditional norms and values—to illuminate Li’s concept of the child-like heart-mind. I will show that Li’s views are, with exception of the first pair where his view is neither strictly a development nor a discovery model, more like the first member of the pairs I have listed above and less like the second.

III. SPEAKING THROUGH METAPHORS

A. METAPHORS OF REVEALING AND CONCEALING

Not only does Li give shape to his conception of the heart-mind through silence, but he also richly fills out his vision through the skillful use of images and metaphors: the eye, dress, the body in movement or in health and illness, the acts of eating and sleeping. I want to examine two sets of metaphors and here begin with images of revealing and concealing. When Li raises criticisms, he uses the language of accessorizing literature with clever writing techniques, covering with clothes, following and so being hidden within the masses, or concealing and masking through the vices of hypocrisy and deception. In contrast, when speaking of what is good and desirable, Li writes about things that are readily seen or revealed, such as the eye seeing without impediment, or luminous virtue.

According to Li, many of our worst vices are those that obscure, cover, conceal, or mask the metaphorical pearl or jade. Our innate and perfect heart-minds are obscured by selfishness and our moral and spiritual task is to engage and preserve the original, wholly developed, and purely good heart-mind within us all. Li argues vigorously against “deception” (*shi zha* 飾詐),⁶⁶ the merely “decorative” or “embellished” (*hua gong* 畫工),⁶⁷ excessive concern about the judgments of others, which leaves one vulnerable to feelings of “shame” (*chi* 恥).⁶⁸ He condemns those who are obsessed with appearances, who “worry whether or not others think of one as wealthy, powerful, accomplished, and useful.”⁶⁹ One of the core themes of “On the Child-like Heart-Mind” is Li’s condemnation of “phoniness” (*jia* 假), a vice which masks and obscures the genuine. Li writes of this vice:

[I]f one speaks phony words with a phony person, then a phony person will be pleased. If one speaks of phony affairs with a phony person, then a phony person will be pleased. If one discusses phony literature with a phony person, then a phony person will be pleased. When everything is phony, then nowhere will there be anyone who is displeased.⁷⁰

Li believes the content of one’s child-like heart-mind consists of “genuine” (*zhen* 真) “feelings” (*qing* 情) and “desires” (*yu* 欲), and expression of these genuine thoughts and feelings connects one to an abundant and powerful source. But those who are “phony” cannot bear the powerful presence of the genuine and find a seductive but shallow form of comfort in its antithesis: the stifling, enervated, rigid life of phoniness.

Li speaks out against “artifice” (*gong* 工) and whatever else “obstructs” (*zhang* 障) the genuine within us. In the same essay, he describes as virtues the “genuine” (*zhen* 真) and the “spontaneous” (*zi chu* 自出). Li is not a revolutionary but a reformer who works within the Confucian fold and skillfully and arduously strives to reclaim and amend—and at times to reject—traditional Confucian ideals in his effort to articulate and envision an ethics of genuine expression. While rejecting certain traditional Confucian virtues—such as filial piety, loyalty to one’s king, or strict adherence to a particular set of rituals—he also strives to reclaim the Confucian ideal of “genuineness”: it is actions that mask one’s genuine self—deception, artifice, hypocrisy—that most concern Li.⁷¹

The theme of masking or concealing also can be seen in Li’s use of images of dress and clothing. The hypocritical, the deceptive, the artificial are often described as dressed in ornate and layered clothing. In a clever essay poking fun at the self-important literatus, Li Zhi begins his essay “In Praise of Liu Xie”:

There once was a gentleman from the School of Principle who wore dignified platform shoes. . . . He dressed in a generously long sleeved robe with a wide sash. With the obligations of morality as his cap and the principles of human relations as his garments, he picked up paper and ink stick; one, two, he quietly touched his lips to them; three, four, he then said to himself that he was Kongzi’s disciple.⁷²

This gentleman elevates his self by standing atop platform shoes and conceals the genuine under layers of clothing: long sleeves, a wide sash, a cap of morality. Little if anything is spontaneous in his actions and his movements are mechanically choreographed to the demands of an external rhythm beating “one, two,” and “three, four.”

Li embraces and celebrates the clearly seen and openly revealed, as opposed to the masked and concealed, in his choice of metaphors for the heart-mind: “luminous virtue” (*ming de* 明德)⁷³ and as the “perfect all-reflecting Buddha wisdom” (*da yuan jing zhi* 大圓鏡智).⁷⁴ Li writes that the genuine writer puts his feelings to paper when “something in particular strikes the eye.”⁷⁵ This vivid image of eyes that see directly without impediment is repeated in numerous essays. In a playful piece entitled “Commenting on Kongzi’s Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha” Li criticizes the masses for blindly following elders, teachers, and conventional teachings without thinking for themselves. He writes, “Today, though people all possess eyes, nobody uses them.”⁷⁶

The child-like heart-mind—as described through such images as the eye, luminous virtue, the pearl and jade in their purity—is fully formed and perfectly functioning at birth. For Li, living a good life

involves nothing more or less than discovering and ceaselessly nurturing this birthright. Li's images of revealing and concealing are in many ways similar to Wang Yangming's of the sun obscured by clouds or the mirror by dust; it is a fully formed and perfectly functioning faculty possessed by all. Li Zhi employs various methods—irony, wit, and ridicule—to shake us out of our state of complacency and malaise so that we uncover and put into operation this resource for genuine action. At the same time, the images Li uses to convey his view of the heart-mind and the proper life for human beings are importantly similar to the agricultural metaphors of growth and development we find in the *Mengzi*. Certainly Li insists we *discover* our fully formed heart-mind; but he also requires—and this aspect makes Li similar to Mengzi—that we engage in ceaseless and joyful nurturing and *cultivation* of the child-like heart-mind. While Li's vision in important respects has characteristics in common with both a development and a discovery model of the self, ultimately he envisions and describes a model that is markedly different and one I will refer to as a *preservation* model of self-cultivation.

Li Zhi's conception of the heart-mind is similar to Wang Yangming's in that both believe the capacity is perfectly formed at birth. Wang, though, conceives of the perfectly formed heart-mind as obscured by selfish delusions; through self-cultivation one clears away these polluting desires. In contrast, Li Zhi emphasizes the purity of the child-like heart-mind and the baleful influences of society—particularly moral teachings—upon this innocent, original endowment. Li writes:

How is it that one could suddenly lose one's child-like heart-mind? From the beginning, aural and visual impressions enter in through the ears and eyes. When one allows them to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-like heart-mind is lost. As one grows older, one hears and sees the Principles of the Way [i.e., moral teachings]. When one allows these to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-like heart-mind is lost.⁷⁷

Li insists upon what at first has the *appearance* of a heroic and almost certainly implausible vision: we are born morally fully formed and perfect, that is “free of all falsehood and entirely genuine” at birth. In the remaining portion of this chapter and in the chapters following, I will show that in fact when we examine the details of his philosophy, his vision is not only plausible but compelling, and, as I will suggest in the conclusion, has much to offer to our contemporary ethical discourse. In the following pages, I turn to a mystifying and critical question: If indeed we are born with a fully formed and perfect heart-mind, why in such a case is self-cultivation necessary? To show the plausibility of

Li's vision and to address our question, I study Li's use of metaphors of health and illness.

B. METAPHORS OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Li Zhi is certainly not unique or original in using physical illness as a metaphor for moral corruption; we find such images throughout Confucian or at least neo-Confucian literature. To give one example, Wang Yangming uses metaphors of illness, prescription, treatment, therapy, and health throughout his writings. In a well-known story recorded by his brother-in-law, Xu Ai, we are told that Wang said, "Sages and worthies teach the way physicians prescribe medicine: always matching the treatment to the ailment. . . . They have no predetermined course of action."⁷⁸ While the use of illness as a metaphor for moral corruption is common throughout much of the history of Chinese thought, illness is particularly prominent and centrally important in the writings of Li.

Throughout his writings, Li describes the morally and aesthetically misguided as wounded or sick and the path of self-cultivation as consisting of healing, which leads to a return to one's original healthy state. He speaks of the misguided as possessing "chronic diseases" (*gu ji* 痼疾)⁷⁹ and "meditation maladies" (*chan ji* 禪疾)⁸⁰ and as being "blind and deaf" (*meng long* 蒙聾).⁸¹ Assuming a tone of mock self-effacement, Li refers to "the heart of the illness plaguing this wild and stupid man."⁸² He discounts the efficacy of persuasion and describes the injury or harm that often are the only results of such futile activity. He writes, "If I cry out to the point that I lose my voice, then I injure (*sun* 損) my life-energy. If I speak more, then I injure my body."⁸³ In concluding "On the Child-like Heart-Mind," Li speaks of illness and exclaims:

Who knows whether or not these writings really are the words of the sages? Even if these words did come from the sages, they were spoken to address a particular need, much like the case of prescribing a medication for a specific illness. The sages simply attended to specific situations and applied certain methods in order to save this dimwitted disciple or that inexperienced follower. While a particular medicine might cure one particular phony's illness, such prescriptions are difficult to administer to all patients.⁸⁴

Over and over again he uses the language of diseases, maladies, illness, and injury to describe those who are misguided. In the passage cited above and others that are found throughout his writing, not only do the constellation of metaphors involving illness, prescription, treatment, therapy, and health capture Li's views about how people go astray and

how to bring them back to the Dao or Way, but these images also powerfully convey the degree to which such difficulties are person specific and context-dependent.

Li describes the process of self-cultivation in terms of maintaining, healing, or returning to an original state of health, language consistent with the idea of moral torpor as a kind of illness or injury. Li prescribes a healthy regimen of “dressing, eating, and sleeping.” He writes, “In this world, everything simply concerns things that fall into the category of dressing and eating.”⁸⁵ In advising a friend, Li suggests, “if one simply has one night of peaceful sleep, then one will be at ease with oneself.”⁸⁶ These everyday measures—eating, dressing, resting, sleeping—are common and readily available methods for maintaining good health. Li’s prescription is simple and available to anyone. There is no need for, and Li rarely if ever speaks of, physicians or experts. Healing, in Li’s view, is for the most part self-healing and consists primarily of returning to and trusting in oneself. This is perfectly consistent with his general picture in which the child-like heart-mind is ever-present and remains in its original, pure state of spiritual health. We suffer because we allow ourselves to be corrupted by the phoniness of society; our wounds are for the most part self-inflicted. We heal ourselves, naturally and spontaneously, when we recognize the source of this malady and embrace and trust in our original heart-mind. Li writes of “loving myself,”⁸⁷ of “returning” to one’s original state,⁸⁸ of refraining from injuring oneself.⁸⁹ The task at hand is to prevent and heal injury and illness. The method of self-cultivation is one of *preservation* or *maintenance*, and in cases where one has lost contact with the child-like heart-mind, *healing*, rather than *development* or *discovery*, as found in Mengzi and Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy, respectively.

Wang Yangming and Li Zhi both use images of revealing and concealing, but their particular choice of metaphors is importantly different and carries profound implications for their respective philosophies. Wang’s preferred metaphors are ones such as the mirror obscured by dust or the sun by clouds, whereas Li chooses images such as the vices of phoniness and hypocrisy obscuring the child-like heart-mind, clothes covering the genuine person, or literary ornamentation effacing genuine literature. While the common theme of revealing and concealing highlights their shared conception of the heart-mind as fully formed at birth, this should not obscure the important differences that exist between the discovery and preservation models of self-cultivation. For example, Wang’s set of metaphors involves inanimate objects that are obscured or covered over: the mirror or the sun hidden by dust or clouds. For Li, what is hidden or obscured often is an organic entity, for example the heart-mind itself or the human body, which can be healthy

or ill and which grows and changes over time. These qualities of sickness, health, growth, and change are critical for understanding important features of Li's organic concept of the child-like heart-mind.

The language of health enables us to better understand Li's assertion that we are born with a perfectly formed child-like heart-mind, and yet at the very same time we must engage in ceaseless self-cultivation. The generic⁹⁰ child is born healthy and grows over time; what constitutes good health changes as one matures. We are perfectly happy to find an infant babbling and crawling along the floor and consider such behaviors signs of health, but we would be somewhat concerned about adults who behaved in a similar manner. Health is conceived of differently over the course of a lifetime, manifested differently across different groups of people, and while all healthy humans must work to maintain their health, different people require different sorts of regimens in order to succeed at this task. These are further important implications of Li's metaphors concerning illness, prescription, treatment, therapy, and health, and illustrate the richness and power of this related set of images. As noted earlier, his core metaphors succeed in capturing many of the most distinctive features of his views about how people go wrong as well as how they can work their way back to a good life. Preserving the original child-like heart-mind requires daily maintenance. The implications discussed above vividly express Li's context-dependent ethics, and they also show why it is wrong to consider him to be a relativist; while health is manifested differently for different people, in different contexts, and at different points in their lives, in the end, there still exists a shared, albeit flexible, standard. It is not the case that anything goes.

IV. WHY THE CHILD-LIKE HEART-MIND?

In the above pages we have shown how Li so skillfully claims the term the "child-like heart-mind" and forgoes terms of art that were easily and readily available to him. Through such analysis emerges a picture of Li's views on self-cultivation: we are born with a fully formed heart-mind and an ethical life requires us to daily strive to nurture and maintain this birthright. We then proceeded to fill out a description of his preservation model of self-cultivation by examining images and metaphors he uses in his writings. While his conception of the child-like heart-mind is part of a larger metaphysical scheme involving traditional Confucian notions, it is most directly and intimately tied to a distinctive view of human nature. Li conceives of human nature as comprised of fundamental *genuine* feelings which give rise to characteristic desires. These describe a general perspective or stance toward the world that he refers to often times as "self-interestedness" (*si 私*). Ultimately, it is our *true*

interests or *genuine* desires that make us human. The universal drive to satisfy one's genuine desires is, for Li, our fundamental nature and the best resource for creating a good life, not only for ourselves but also for those around us. Li writes:

Human beings necessarily are self-interested, and their heart-minds are comprised of these interests. Without self-interest there is no heart-mind. If a farmer self-interestedly desires to bring in a harvest in the fall, he will exert all his efforts in tilling the fields. If one who governs a household self-interestedly desires to grow wealthy, he will exert all his efforts in managing his estate. If one who pursues learning self-interestedly desires the rewards due to an official, he will exert all his efforts in preparing for the Civil Service Examinations. If a bureaucrat is not given emoluments, even if he is summoned to take an official position he will not accept. If a person is not esteemed with a high rank, then even if he is urged to take the position, he will certainly not respond. Even with a sage such as Kongzi, if he were not given the position of the Minister of Justice and the duty of an acting prime minister, certainly he would not settle down in the state of Lu for even one day. This is the way things naturally are.⁹¹

Li envisions individual humans as infinitely varied creatures each born with distinctive and ever-changing desires: for a life of the mind, a monastic life, power and status, a life of virtue. It does *nearly* seem that Li embraces a life of virtually any form and shape; while in fact he does not believe that anything goes, Li is one of the most distinctive among Confucian thinkers in his passionate appreciation of the grand *variation* of good lives. In one of many letters quarreling with his one-time friend Geng Dingxiang, Li writes:

The variety of people and things in this world are countless. If one wants all these people and things to abide by one's methods, then heaven and earth would not be able to function. . . . Each person pursues what he zealously desires, and each person seeks to pursue what he is good at.⁹²

Li grounds his ethics most directly in *human nature* and the human inclination to satisfy our individual desires; in this regard he breaks from earlier neo-Confucians, such as Wang Yangming, who explicitly appeal to speculative and comprehensive *metaphysical* schemes.⁹³ Li's vision of a good life is broad and loose; at the same time, it is not the case that his ethical vision necessitates or even accommodates the satisfaction of

simply *any* desire: the desires must be what he ceaselessly refers to as “*genuine*” (*zhen* 真). Li is not a proto-Marxist, proto-liberal humanist, proto-capitalist, or a relativist. He is one prominent voice within the late-Ming “cult of *qing*,” and in tune with the ideals in this time and place, Li articulates an ethics of the expression of *genuine* desires.

In his body of work on Confucianism Philip J. Ivanhoe has illuminated the diversity of voices within Confucian thought; one way he has done this is to argue, and in many ways persuasively, that one substantive and often underappreciated difference between early Confucian thinkers such as Mengzi, and neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming concerns the foundations that each provides for ethics.⁹⁴ Put too simply, early Confucians such as Kongzi, Mengzi, and Xunzi ground their ethics in anthropology or, more particularly, theories about *human nature* and moral psychology; Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming develop their ethical views out of comprehensive *metaphysical* schemes. Ivanhoe attributes this move from anthropology to metaphysics in part to the rise of Daoist and Buddhist thought from the 1st through the 9th century CE. While Li’s contemporaries such as Wang Yangming and Luo Rufang do ground their ethics in a grand metaphysical scheme, Li is a Confucian thinker who does *not* fall into this pattern but rather, returns to grounding ethics in *human nature*.⁹⁵ Li ties his ethics to an understanding of our human nature and insists our natural endowments range across a wildly varied spectrum of types. Rather than laud traditional Confucian virtues such as filial piety, benevolence, and ritual propriety, Li speaks in broader and looser terms when describing criteria that identify genuine desires. Furthermore, Li’s ethics cannot clearly be defined using the categories identified by Ivanhoe as one of *development* or *discovery*, but rather, Li borrows from and amends such ethical models and creatively sets forth what I referred to earlier as a *preservation* model of the self.

Li’s model shares important virtues with Mengzi’s developmental vision. Both conceive of our *internal* resources and especially particular instincts—for Mengzi, those he refers to as our “four sprouts,” and for Li, our genuine desires—as our best resource for living a good life. Such a vision can be contrasted against Xunzi’s, who argues that *external* resources—classical texts and teachers—most effectively enable us to reform our natural instincts and are our best resource for living well. By calling on our internal resources, Mengzi’s and Li’s ethical views appeal to our common intuition that the moral life can only be truly sustained when its original source is subjective, internal to ourselves. In Mengzi’s view, we are born with fragile inclinations toward good; we possess within us the most powerful resource for *becoming* the best version of ourselves. With Li Zhi, we *are* born with fully developed virtues lacking nothing; and yet, we must constantly and arduously strive to nurture

and preserve this original birthright. Li's is a deeply appealing and powerful ethical vision committed to a faith in our original complete virtue; we are not on a path to becoming a better version of ourselves, but instead, are born fully virtuous with self-cultivation as involving work analogous to the daily activities of maintaining the self through eating, dressing, resting, or the natural daily inclinations to express oneself through singing, dancing, writing. Such a view of ethical life as nothing more or less than daily maintenance of an innate and fully given capacity may seem naïve to some, but I believe it has much to contribute and is a welcome corrective to our contemporary ethical discourse, a subject which we will turn to in Chapter Five.

To the best of my knowledge, we never find an explicit explanation anywhere in Li's writings for why he chooses the term "child-like heart-mind" (*tong xin*), rather than other readily available terms such as "original heart-mind" (*ben xin*), "genuine heart-mind" (*zhen xin*), or "pure knowing" (*liang zhi*), to describe a pure, untainted heart-mind. Perhaps he thought these more abstract terms could not capture his vision of the good life as a tangible, flesh-and-blood disposition to satisfy ever-changing desires. For such an ideal the term "child-like heart-mind" (*tong xin*) seems most appropriate.⁹⁶ Whatever Li's intentions, attending to the sense of the organic and tangible conveyed by the term *tong xin* aids us in understanding Li's emphasis, in tune with the values of the late-Ming "cult of *qing*," on the corporeal and the human rather than the abstract and metaphysical, on the mercantile language of wants and needs rather than the more abstract moral language of right and wrong, and on the psychology of feelings and desires rather than on metaphysical theories of *li* and *qi*.⁹⁷ In the following chapter, let us further explore Li's turn to human psychology and his conception of human nature as one of seeking and desiring.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Virtue (德)

Reading “Miscellaneous Matters”

I. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we studied Li Zhi’s concept of the child-like heart-mind and showed that resources for living the good life—genuine feelings—reside within this heart and mind. In this chapter I turn to the question of how one knows that a genuine feeling is in fact “wholly genuine” (*chun zhen* 純真).¹ As noted earlier, Li believes the good life is *uncodifiable* and *particular*² to person, place, and circumstance; he is unable and does not attempt to provide a clearly defined standard or template for assessing feelings as genuine or phony. While Li cannot and does not provide any such precise formula or criteria for ethical action, by combing through his writings we find ways to distinguish between the genuine and the phony. Specifically, we can identify a cluster or family of characteristics that are shared by all genuine feelings. Not every feeling will manifest all of these characteristics on every given occasion, but this set of characteristics forms a *family resemblance* in the sense made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein:

Don’t say: “There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all—for if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look!³

If we turn to Li’s writings and do as Wittgenstein commands—“don’t think but look!”—we indeed discover a cluster of features that appear across the range of genuine feelings, and every instance of a genuine

feeling exhibits a significant number of these features. As I will show in the first part of this chapter, among features, an ethics of genuine feelings is one of *effortless* involvement; such a life is self-directed and motivated from *within*; it springs from a source of abundance and therefore offers a way of life that is *sustainable*. Such a life is *distinctive* and part of a world of diversity; it is also a life of *movement* and of ardent intensity and *power*. Li contrasts such a form of life with those characterized instead by stress and strain, lives that are unreflectively scripted, static, enervated, uniform, and fettered. These general descriptions point toward broad and irregular, yet real and palpable, differences in the shape of one's life.

Li's writings are rarely if ever systematic in nature; a careful logical analysis of his assertions most often leads us into a muddle rather than an appreciation of his rich and philosophically viable vision. Instead of examining Li's works as discursive texts, in the previous chapter we studied his thought by exploring some of his central metaphors and images and specifically, those of revealing and concealing, and of illness and health. In this chapter, I employ a similar approach and examine prominent paired terms of art, images, characters, and historical figures in Li's work. By contrasting such pairs—whether they be *terms* such as “the skills of an artisan” (*hua gong* 畫工) and “the skills of Nature” (*hua gong* 化工), *images* such as women and men, culture and Nature, “Confucianism” and “Buddhism,” *characters* such as his wife and himself, or historical figures such as Sima Qian and himself—we can discern features shared by a general way of life at the heart of which is the full expression of genuine feelings.

Throughout my study of Li Zhi I seek to let his writing speak for itself. At the same time, in elucidating texts the selection and use of categories of analysis is inevitable. My aim throughout is to employ categories that are at once effective in helping us understand Li Zhi, and that would be more rather than less familiar to a literatus from Li's time and place.⁴ In settling on such categories, I have benefited greatly from scholarship in the area of late imperial Chinese literature and in particular, from Martin Huang's study of *qing* 情, a term which he renders as “desire.”⁵ In *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, Huang analyzes the development of the novel in 16th through 18th century China and in this process distinguishes between at least two different kinds of desire. Without doing full justice to Huang's distinctions, one sort of desire is *yu* 欲; the other is *qing* 情. *Yu* is physical desire, and private in nature. *Qing* is spiritual and emotional desire and when properly cultivated, *qing* enables the flourishing of both the private and public spheres of life. *Yu* is subversive of traditional norms;

qing harmonizes the individual and society. *Yu* is excessive physical lust; *qing* at its most refined attains a golden mean. Huang then goes on to show that the late imperial novel begins in the 1500s with erotic fiction that both warns against and values *yu*—the physical, the excessive, the subversive—and then through the 1600s and 1700s moves toward *qing*—as regulated, as emotional and spiritual, and as harmonizing the needs of the individual and of society. In my analysis of Li’s conception of genuine *qing* 情, which I render as “feeling” or “feelings,” I adopt categories formulated by Huang in his work and identified by him as deeply familiar to literati culture in late imperial China. Li’s conception of genuine feelings is neither neatly what Huang identifies as *yu* nor as *qing*: I will describe Li’s conception of genuine feelings as properly *excessive* and *subversive* of conventional norms, and yet at the same time it is an *emotional* and *spiritual* desire or feeling that enables *society to thrive* at its best.⁶

While the search for family resemblances aids us in our efforts to recognize a genuine feeling as in fact *genuine* in nature, another way of identifying such feelings is found in what Li refers to as the sense of “self-satisfaction” (*zi de* 自得).⁷ In exploring this idea, I will focus on images concerning the satisfaction of basic physical needs and suggest that by depicting cases of such an instinctual sense, Li Zhi awakens or re-awakens readers to their intuitive ability to sense emotional self-satisfaction. Through a process of analogous thinking, attention is turned to the instinctive ability to sense and enjoy the satisfaction of a genuine feeling *as genuine*. After presenting these various ideas on how to distinguish genuine feelings, I turn to an exploration of Li Zhi’s metaphysics and show how it provides another way of illuminating his ethics by revealing an important delimitation on his conception of the genuine and genuine feeling.⁸ Li Zhi’s ethics finds its foundation in a conception of the child-like heart-mind that is one part of a specific conception of the proper structure of the social and Natural world. I will also examine the role dialogical relationships and reflection upon one’s given cultural tradition play in shaping a genuine life. In concluding the chapter, I turn to a final paired comparison that recurs throughout much of Li’s writing: between Li Zhi and the Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 90 BCE). Throughout this chapter my primary aim is to show that for Li Zhi, the expression of genuine feeling is an end in itself, and expressing one’s genuine feelings *well* is the necessary and sufficient condition for living the good life. As noted earlier, this requires us first to understand, What is a *genuine* feeling? Let us begin by turning to a characterization of Li’s conception of genuine feelings by studying our first set of paired terms of art.

II. THE “SKILLS OF AN ARTISAN” (畫工)
AND THE “SKILLS OF NATURE” (化工)

In the first lines of Li’s widely admired essay “Miscellaneous Matters,”⁹ he delineates two types of writing: the “skills of Nature” (*hua gong* 化工) and the “skills of an artisan” (*hua gong* 畫工).¹⁰ The former he lauds; the latter he censures. The “skills of Nature” are mysterious and cannot be made comprehensible by naming, analyzing, or cataloguing. Li writes, “When people search for the workmanship in these creations, no matter how they search they cannot find a trace.”¹¹ While he insists we cannot define the “skills of Nature,” he does shed light upon these ineffable skills by describing some characteristic features of their products or creations. For example, in this same essay, he tells us writings produced by the “skills of Nature” are like

feet that chase the winds and trail the thunder,
the sage whose sound echoes in the world and whose energy is
sought after by others . . .
writings that float over water.

Products of the “skills of Nature” cannot be reined in and *cannot be catalogued*.

In contrast, the “skills of an artisan” can be meticulously delineated, defined, and demarcated; while requiring arduous effort to perfect, such skills are easily grasped by the human mind. In staccato, four character phrases Li describes such writing:

[T]he story line is tightly written (*jie gou zhi mi* 結構之密),
the couplets are in perfect rhyme (*ou dui zhi qie* 偶對之切);
the writing follows set principles (*yi yu lidao* 依於理道),
in harmony with models and systems (*he hu fadu* 合乎法度);
beginning and ending echo each other (*shou wei xiangying* 首尾相應),
abstract and concrete are developed synchronously (*xu shi xiang
sheng* 虛實相生).¹²

There is clear structure and perfect symmetry in the skills of the artisan: the “couplets,” “beginning and ending,” “the abstract and the concrete.” The writing follows well-established rules whether these are “principles” or “proper models.” Rather than conveying a sense of movement—“chasing” (*zhui* 追), “trailing” (*zu* 逐), or “floating” (*xing* 行)—products of the “skills of an artisan” fit a defined mold and manifest the qualities of “tightness,” “perfectness.” The “skills of an artisan” result from a clearly defined regimen of arduous training whereby one internalizes external standards.

Embedded in the very first lines of “Miscellaneous Matters” are powerful images that further illuminate Li’s appreciation of lushness and *diversity*: vegetation (*bai hui* 百卉), birth (*sheng* 生), and the act of nurturing (*zhang* 長). These illustrate how his vision of the good life mirrors his conception of the natural world, imagined by Li as abundant, wild, and diverse in its life forms, never impoverished or tame. There is suggestive evidence that Li Zhi and the famous Ming playwright Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) were friends.¹³ It is clear that Tang knew of Li as he writes admiringly of him, and we can reasonably assume Li was familiar with if not the playwright himself then certainly the famous playwright’s work. For a reader of Li’s time, Li’s reference early in “Miscellaneous Matters” to images of lush vegetation may well have called to readers’ minds the central image of the abundant, overflowing world of diversity in “the garden gay with joyous cries”¹⁴ that gives birth to true love (*qing* 情) in Tang’s 1598 play the *Peony Pavilion*.¹⁵ The contrast between the “skills of Nature” and the “skills of an artisan” may also have evoked thoughts of a similar contrast within the *Peony Pavilion* between the verdurous, joyful life growing within the garden, and the staid, controlled, and regimented life of the pedantic Confucian tutor mechanically reciting an annotated interpretation of a poem on love found within the canonical *Book of Poetry*.

This embrace of the abundant, the life-loving, the unique—that which cannot be tamed or named—and the parallel rejection of the restrained, the fettered, the easily catalogued, is articulated again a few lines later in “Miscellaneous Matters” as Li celebrates the undeniable *forceful* power of the genuine. Li describes a truly inspired writer:

As for those in this world who truly (*zhen* 真) are able to write, in comparison to Mr. Gao, in the beginning none possess any intention to create literature.

Their bosoms are filled with such and such indescribable and wondrous events. In their throats are such and such things that they desire to spit out but do not dare to. On the tip of their tongues, time and time again, they have countless things they wish to say but for which there is no proper place to speak them. These thoughts accumulate to an unimaginable height and are stored for so long that in time the force of these thoughts cannot be extinguished.

This short passage from one of Li’s more widely admired essays surely gives us a glimpse into Li’s masterful command in his use of rhythm, precise selection of words, and vivid use of images.¹⁶ The rhythm of Li’s writing becomes more and more urgent and from one line to the next we see the words accumulating in number and overflowing, thereby

illustrating the very point he seeks to make. The events witnessed by a true author reside in the bosom and cannot help but make their way to the throat. The strength of Li's writing increases as he describes this state of affairs with an urgent desire to articulate in words what he feels within his breast.

Suddenly he sees a scene and his feelings are aroused. Something strikes his eye and his sighs multiply. He snatches another's wine glass and drowns his accumulated burdens. He pours out the grievances within his heart, and for thousands of years after, people are moved by his ill fortune. As he already has spewed out jade¹⁷ and spit out pearls,¹⁸ illuminated the Milky Way, and created the most heavenly writings, he then becomes self-satisfied, goes crazy, and howls loudly, sheds tears and cries with sorrow, and is unable to stop himself.¹⁹

In describing such a writer, Li simultaneously delineates the outlines of a good life. It is one that springs forth irrepressibly from feelings within—the “feelings are aroused” (*sheng qing* 生情) and the individual “feels” (*gan* 感)—and from this inner source one taps into a great spiritual abundance. The sighs “multiply” (*xing* 興), the years are “countless” (*qian zai* 千載), the cries become “deep” (*tong* 慟), the hollering “great” (*da* 大), the space that is traversed is as boundless as the “Milky Way” (*yun han* 雲漢) and infinite as the “Heavens” (*tian* 天). The writer infuses his writing and life with passion and fullness as he “strikes” (*chu* 觸), “pours” (*jiao* 澆), “snatches” (*duo* 奪), “purges” (*su* 訴), “spits” (*pen* 噴), and “spews” (*tuo* 唾). This undeniable force unfolds as expansive and limitless space, and unimaginably distant time.

III. WOMAN AND MAN

In “A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They Are Shortsighted”²⁰ Li describes those who live the good life as being unrestrained, acting from a sense of strength and power, and having access to the abundant resources of the larger expansive world. In this letter, Li focuses on the contrast between women and men, and between the “shortsighted” (*duan jian* 短見) and “farsighted” (*chang jian* 長見). Throughout the essay, he bemoans the fact that women are limited to the inner chambers and insists that a woman's “shortsightedness” is due to nothing more than the limited physical space to which she is restricted, which constrains the extent of her experience and opportunity.

Borrowing his wording from the canonical *Book of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記), Li describes women's lives: "A woman does not leave the inner chambers." He contrasts this image of women as fettered with a description of men: "a man shoots in the four directions like a bow of mulberry wood or a wild rubus dart."²¹ Li adds:

[W]hat the so-called shortsighted see is only what is within a room within the inner chambers. In contrast, the farsighted deeply investigate the clear, vast, and open fields. The moderately shortsighted hear and see only what happens within the life span of their children and grandchildren. The truly shortsighted hear and see only what happens within their life spans. The farsighted see beyond their physical bodies, transcend beyond the superficial appearances of life and death, and extend into a realm that is immeasurably, unimaginably large—a hundred, a thousand, a million, a billion, a kalpa-times larger.²²

Li sees women in his time and place as all too often static in their growth, fettered, enervated, unjustly restricted within the inner chambers, while men *move* and are free to roam with uninhibited force—like a flying arrow or dart.

Li not only argues against women's physical restriction within the inner chambers but also rails against the fettering of women's spirits, hearts, and minds. He expresses such criticisms in the course of discussing the traditional Confucian virtue of benevolence:

The "benevolent ones" observe the "wrongs" in the world and worry about them. Anxiously and unwearyingly, they desire to transmit these worries to later generations so that people will restrain themselves from doing "wrong." There are virtues and rituals to place restraints (*ge* 格) on one's heart, and laws and punishments to tie up (*zhi* 繫) one's four limbs. These are the beginnings of the wrongs committed by people.²³

When one seeks to use the "skills of an artisan" and thereby allows oneself to be "restrained" and "tied up" by conventional formulas and socially prescribed rituals, one's resources will be limited and one's expression constrained. But when one connects with the "skills of Nature," one taps into an ever-growing and regenerative natural source of energy and inspiration. Thus far, we have examined Li's essay "Miscellaneous Matters" and the contrast between the "skills of an artisan" and the "skills of Nature." By comparing and contrasting these two terms of art, Li points

us to a form of life characterized by an *abundance* in resources and energy, an ardent *intensity* and *distinctiveness* that celebrates the diversity of life and transcends clearly defined categories, and life-embracing, vital activity or *movement*—all of which contrast with the restrained and impoverished, the enervated, the uniform, and the static life that most people are led to pursue.

IV. LI ZHI AND MADAME HUANG

While Li's letters, short essays, and historical and literary commentaries have been much studied, his poetry has been relatively neglected. Within his body of writings are over 300 poems, most of which can be found in *A Book to Burn* and *An Addendum to a Book to Burn*.²⁴ His poetry has often and aptly been described as deeply expressive of feelings, free in form, and simple in language. I want to turn to one particular poem about his wife, which effectively highlights yet another powerfully symbolic oppositional pair within Li's work. The poem is entitled "Mourning Madame Huang" (*Ku Huang yi ren* 哭黄宜人),²⁵ which with little doubt was written soon after his wife's passing in 1588.

The short piece begins by lauding the virtues of his deceased wife, a marked contrast to the poem's description of Li, which is offered in the second part of the poem. Li presents himself as being in tune with his inner desires and acting from *internal* sensitivities; Li "desires" (*tan* 貪) the transcendence of the Buddha and "has his heart set" (*zhi* 志) on the world. Throughout this work, he uses words and metaphors that make clear his vision that the good life is rooted in and draws its energy from the *internal* world of the individual and is manifested in *spontaneous* expression.

In contrast, Li portrays his wife as motivated by the scripts of the external and conventional social world rather than internal sensibilities and desires. She embodies stereotypical Confucian virtues, such as "worthiness" (*xian* 賢), "filial piety" (*xiao* 孝), and the ability to sacrifice her own good for the well-being of the family (*yue ji shan chi jia* 約己善持家). Her life is one of retraction or impoverishment as she labors for others and "exhausts" herself, "sacrifices" for her family, and "acts frugally and with restraint." The ways in which her life was shaped by external pressures and the wear of such forces are inscribed upon her body. Her hair is "bound up"; her hands "chapped."

In contrast to her limited and restricted world, he lives in a world he chooses, shapes, and creates: one of depth, breadth, and bountiful *abundance*; he travels throughout the "four seas" and enjoys the "transcendence of the Buddha." He bids goodbye to her toward the end of

their lives, severs their relationship, turns away from conventional “Confucian” social obligations, and embraces “Buddhist” transcendence and the joys of *Nature*. He writes:

I said goodbye to you toward the end of our lives;
 Going near the waters and watching the fish at play;
 In the spring, amidst the mountains where only birds cry.

Li describes himself as being in *motion* and moving outward, delighting in the pursuit of transcendence and the “play” (*xi* 戲) of Nature. His wife is static, “abandoned” by him in the waning days of winter. Throughout the poem, Li employs powerful symbols—his wife and himself, the schools of “Confucianism” and “Buddhism,” the seasons of winter and spring, the restriction of rituals and the free play of Nature—to turn or return the reader to inner, bountiful, untutored thoughts and feelings.

The contrast between the “Buddhist” world of transcendence against a static world of restriction, limitations, and muddled confusion can also be found in Li’s poem mourning yet another person, in this case his eldest son, who died in 1589 in Macheng. This was the fourth and last of Li’s four sons to pass away, all within his lifetime. Speaking of the transcendent, Li advises his deceased son: “Find refuge in the honorable world of the Buddha.” Li concludes the two-line poem urging him: “Pull yourself out of and free yourself from sinking into confusion.”²⁶ In another poem mourning his wife’s death, Li speaks of her in Buddhist terms. He contrasts his wife as she actually lived, in a world of rites, norms, and social expectations that were forced upon her, against his vision of her in his dreams: in a transcendent world after her death. Li sets forth the contrast as one between the transcendence of a genuine Bodhisattva against a world of limitations and restrictions represented by the image of a women’s body. Li writes:

Today I know you have passed away.
 You now have truly become a Bodhisattva.
 Why did you need to transform into a women’s body,
 And only later become known as a Bodhisattva?²⁷

Earlier, we discussed how Li commonly describes acts of genuine feeling in terms of ardent intensity and *power*. Another feature common to his ideal of the good life concerns the quality of *effortlessness*. At least superficially the qualities of intensity and effortlessness may seem to present a contradiction, but Li in fact sees them often as intimately

related. The good life is one where “each person pursues what he zealously desires, and each person is sought for on the basis of what he is good at. Each person is employed in the way that best suits him.” Such a life is “easy” (*yi* 易) to implement and ensures that the “self is satisfied, the heart is at ease, and one’s days are restful.”²⁸

According to Li, the quality of “ease” or “effortlessness” in a life lived well also can be found in and is a defining characteristic of good writing. In describing his own work *Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake*, he writes, “This book can truly be approved of. Why? I say, it can be approved of because it is simple (*jian* 簡).”²⁹ In describing the way of a sage, Li writes in his introduction to *A Book to Burn*, “This book further develops the finest of the collected words of the sages and explains the ordinariness of everyday affairs. It is also able to cause readers to realize in one glance that to become a sage is *not difficult* (*ru sheng zhi wu nan* 入聖之無難).”³⁰

For Li, a life of “simplicity” and “ease” does not imply a lack of energy or effort. He praises individuals who are “greedy” (*tan cai* 貪財) and who “rush” (*qu* 趨) to obtain what they desire. He urges these individuals to “each follow (*cong* 從) their desires” and “each pursue (*cheng* 騁) what they are good at” in order to satisfy their greed and to fulfill their desires.³¹ Living the good life—whether it be farming, pursuing one’s studies, governing a state, writing a book, dancing and singing—does require concentrated effort and work. But such work is a result of deep, personal involvement that is natural to one’s sensitivities and inclinations and so proves “effortless” to perform. If we turn back to “Miscellaneous Matters,” we see Li describing those in touch with their genuine feelings as expressing themselves so naturally that they are “unable to stop themselves” (*bu neng zi zhi* 不能自止). In contrast, those who take their cues from the external world metaphorically “gnash” (*qie chi* 切齒) and “grind their teeth” (*yao ya* 咬牙); their actions reveal the stress and strain of insincere labor rather than effortless intense power.³²

In determining the proper course of action, the fine details regarding the actors, the nuances of the shape and texture of their inner desires, their respective characters and histories, all matter deeply in Li’s view. While Li Zhi does not—and in his view he cannot—offer answers in advance of the particular and concrete scenario,³³ he does give us hints and guidelines. Li Zhi argues against the timid, the merely conventional, the feeble, the brittle, the generic, the copied and transcribed, the static, and the stressed and strained.³⁴ He indeed takes an unambiguous normative position and points us unhesitatingly to one deeply compelling, and at the same time loose and general, way of life over other forms. These particular features we have identified as

descriptive of an *ethics of genuine feelings* are insufficient to reveal all genuine feelings, or to rule out every phony one. But Li Zhi's aim is never to give us a full, detailed, and unchanging account from the ground up of how to live one's life well. Li sees the life well lived as necessarily tailored to the concrete particulars of one's social and natural world and one's distinctive character, as lived improvisatorially in parts and pieces beginning from within one's own heart, or what he refers to metaphorically as one's "child-like heart-mind."

The identification of specific features is surely insufficient as a guide. But, as we will discuss in the following pages, Li does set forth other criteria for aiding us in uncovering, nurturing, and pursuing our heart's distinctive desires to live fully and well: a sense of self-satisfaction (*zi de* 自得); a *metaphysical view* that accommodates for individuals who follow their own distinctive genuine desires; the insights, deep satisfaction, and pleasure gained from *dialogical relationships* with soul friends; and self-consciousness of and serious reflection upon the rituals and norms given to each of us through the cultural *traditions* we inherit. Altogether, these criteria still do not give us a formulaic and exacting method for identifying a genuine desire and figuring out if it is one we ought to act upon; but Li Zhi's ethics is powerful and compelling precisely because it is particular to time, place, and person. His is an ethics that celebrates complexity, diversity, and the inner world of each distinctive individual. His writing moves us to look inward and mine the riches of our instincts and passionate desires, and serves as a powerful form of *therapy* for a world much too tied to unreflective acceptance of canonical texts, traditional conceptions of virtues and vices, and long-standing social norms.³⁵ In the following section, I want to dwell further on the question, How does one know that a feeling, and in this case one's own feeling, is indeed *genuine*? To address this question, we must understand what it is to "rest in self-satisfaction" (*zhi zi de* 止自得),³⁶ a term of art recurring throughout Li's work.

V. "SELF-SATISFACTION" (自得)

Li repeatedly points to "resting in self-satisfaction" as the key for understanding what it is to lead a good life. For example, in a letter to his intimate friend Ma Lishan 馬歷山, he provides commentary on the first lines of the Confucian, or *Ru*, classic the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學):³⁷ "If perfect goodness (*zhi shan* 至善) necessarily exists, this is because we have come to rest in and return to this perfect goodness. . . . By pursuing such a course, all people *rest in self-satisfaction* (*zhi zi de* 止自得)." When we read Li's commentary against the original text of the *Great*

Learning, Li's turn toward the internal sense becomes ever more apparent and pronounced.

The first lines of the classic follow:

The Way of *Great Learning* lies in letting one's inborn luminous virtue shine forth, in renewing the people, and in coming to rest in perfect goodness. Knowing where to come to rest, one becomes steadfast.³⁸

In Li's commentary on these lines from the *Great Learning*, he defines "perfect goodness" not as a particular and narrowly defined form of perfection but rather, as particular to the self—it is a sense of "self-satisfaction"—and so can only be determined subjectively. Li also speaks of the lack of or inability to exercise this *skill* of "resting"³⁹ at the point of "self-satisfaction" as the critical reason individuals fail to live life well: "If one spends all one's time guessing and discussing minute details, in the end there will never come a time when one has attained *self-satisfaction*."⁴⁰ Let us say a few more words about this particular skill and further describe the *sense* of "self-satisfaction."

Li insists that the special skill of "resting" at the right time and place is a key constituent of the good life: "Knowing that one should rest is the highest skill. Resting is what is needed!"⁴¹ In the same essay Li exclaims, "Ah yes! The difficulty in extending one's knowledge is in the skill of knowing when to rest."⁴² Li's emphasis on the importance of one's *internal* sense of satisfaction is even more pronounced when we read his commentary against the original text of the *Great Learning*. In the classic, "extending one's knowledge" is achieved through study of the *external* world, "the investigation of things."⁴³ We might ask, Is the skill of knowing when to rest in self-satisfaction given fully developed at birth or is it something one needs to acquire and cultivate through time? How does one develop or preserve such a skill? Li tells us, "If one studies but to the end of one's life never stops, this is because one does not know where to rest."⁴⁴ He repeatedly turns our attention to the importance of "resting," but does not provide much if any discursive analysis of what this entails. This, though, is typical of Li's style of presentation. While he does not offer us an account or theory of resting in self-satisfaction, by studying images of physical and emotional satisfaction that Li Zhi provides, we can begin to get a feel for and even sketch out an answer to this question.

Throughout Li's writings he speaks about the satisfaction of basic needs—eating, drinking, sleeping, and dressing—as lying at the heart of the life well lived. Satisfying such desires is necessary to a good life, satisfying them full and in the proper way is both necessary and

sufficient. Li writes, “Dressing and eating constitute human relations and the principle of things.” And later, “If it is other than dressing and eating, then it is absolutely severed from this world, and is different from the lives of ordinary people.”⁴⁵ And again in reference to the satisfaction of basic physical needs: “This matter is like that of hunger and thirst. If one is hungry, certainly one thinks to eat. If one is thirsty, certainly one thinks to drink. Is there anyone in this world who has not thought to eat and drink!”⁴⁶ Li too speaks of sleeping when one is tired and resting when one is weary.⁴⁷ He is certainly not the first to regard the satisfaction of basic needs as at the heart of living life well. This line of argument is well known in Chan Buddhism and central to the writings of Wang Yangming. In one vivid poem Wang writes:

When hungry—eat!
When tired—sleep!
This is self-cultivation;
It is an enigma within an enigma.⁴⁸

Li does not say too much more about the skill of “resting” when one senses “self-satisfaction.” Most people will agree that the urge to satisfy and the ability to sense satisfaction of basic physical needs are untutored, fully developed capacities common to all healthy specimens of the human species. Prompted by Li Zhi’s central symbol of the child-like heart-mind, we might take as an example the way an infant responds to hunger. Without tutoring, healthy newborn infants indeed possess the ability to recognize hunger, seek satisfaction, and enjoy satiation; they know when to cry out for milk and when they have had their fill. It is only more sophisticated adults who lose sight of such inborn, natural wisdom. In extreme cases, such as individuals who turn to certain external cues and embrace a certain image of the ideal body, one not only becomes unmoored from this native sense and source of satisfaction, the external ideal and norms one follows positively lead to harm.

Li’s conception of self-satisfaction goes beyond the fulfillment of the most obviously instinctual and basic of needs. He envisions humans as possessing an urge to seek the satisfaction of aesthetic and emotional desires as well. The characters he admires attend to their emotional life as they howl, spew, spit, dance, sing, and write. Li speaks approvingly of those who spend their days “singing to one’s satisfaction . . . and dancing to one’s satisfaction.” One might read such passages as describing a life of unrestrained self-indulgence rather than awareness of self-satisfaction. But Li contrasts the lives of these individuals living the good life with those who “do not know how to stop themselves” (*bu zhi zi zhi* 不知自止).⁴⁹ Li’s paradigmatic figures are ones who ably attend to the

desire for satiation. In another essay, Li points to satisfaction and the life of emotional and aesthetic expression when he describes people in a state well governed. Li writes, “[such people] delight in feasts and music, they drum and dance without becoming weary.” Again, one might read such references as supporting a life of excess. But if we continue reading, we see Li contrasts the former way of life with a stunted form that takes external sources as formulas for living life well. The characters Li acclaims attend to an inner sense of satisfaction rather than “await instructions on the Six Books, or laws and regulations.”⁵⁰

In *Mengzi* 1A7, a well-known story in the Confucian classic, King Xuan of the state of Qi asks Mengzi if despite his history as an unsuccessful ruler he might nevertheless possess the ability to become a true king. The King himself is doubtful, but Mengzi is quite hopeful as he is with humans in general. Mengzi responds by narrating a story from King Xuan’s own life.

I heard the following . . . The King was sitting in the hall. He saw someone passing below, leading an ox. The King noticed this and said, “Where is the ox going?” “The blood of the ox is to be used for consecrating a new bell.” “Spare it. I cannot bear to see it shrinking with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution.” “In that case, should the ceremony be abandoned?” “That is out of the question. Use a lamb instead.”⁵¹

Mengzi then adds, asking the King, “I wonder if this is true?” And indeed it proves to be so.

The small twinge of compassion the king felt for the ox may seem morally inconsequential. But Mengzi understands these “sprouts” (*duan* 端), however fragile and tender, to be our greatest moral resource. And so, throughout his discussions with rulers and students, and here in this dialogue with King Xuan, Mengzi sees his work as a teacher to be the very simple and yet difficult task of gently awakening others and building awareness and attentiveness to the merely nascent but undeniably native sense of compassion. When the king does gain awareness of his internal moral resources, he responds to Mengzi, “For though the deed was mine, when I looked into myself I failed to understand my own heart. You described it for me and your words struck a chord in me.”⁵²

I suggest Li Zhi’s images of self-satisfaction serve a similar purpose within his larger philosophical project. His tone is bold and even defiant at points in contrast to Mengzi’s gentler approach, and his conception of one’s native resources, as fully formed at birth, differs importantly from Mengzi’s where our greatest moral resources exist at birth but in only fragile and nascent form.⁵³ However, the point of similarity between

the two is substantive: just as Mengzi skillfully points to and seeks to awaken his readers to their native endowments, so too does Li Zhi. To a degree that Mengzi would not recognize or condone, Li believes the nature of genuine self-expression is specific to place, person, and time, and as such he is unable to offer readers a specific formula for living the good life. Instead, he gestures and turns our attention to our most precious resource, our child-like heart-mind. Like the early Confucian sage Mengzi, Li Zhi insists that our most pressing task is to preserve and cultivate this innate endowment.

In Chapter Three we examined the metaphor of health in order to understand better Li's view that the child-like heart-mind is fully formed at birth, and yet requires life-long cultivation. This same logic applies to our ability to "rest in self-satisfaction." As with basic physical needs, healthy specimens of human beings are born with both the *fully developed* urge to satisfy genuine desires and the sense to recognize and appreciate the satisfaction of such desires. To *preserve* this skill and this sense we must constantly tend to our natural desires as they grow and change throughout the course of our lives. When one does not know when and how much to eat, drink, or sleep, it is, in Li's words, because one is "ill" (*bing* 病). In describing the cause of such "illness," Li speaks of "losing" (*shi* 失) one's child-like heart-mind,⁵⁴ being "severed" (*jue* 絕) from one's sense of satisfaction,⁵⁵ and being "fettered" (*ji* 繫) by social norms, practices, and expectations.⁵⁶ Those who suffer such afflictions are cut off from the innate source of knowing that resides within.

We began this chapter asking how one knows that a feeling is a *genuine* feeling. We have attempted to shed light upon this subject first by identifying a cluster of features that describe such a feeling, and second by describing the sense of satisfaction one feels when one lives a life in which one fully expresses such genuine feelings. In the following pages, I want to examine Li's metaphysical views and show how these serve as a framework that sets limits and norms for Li's ethical vision.

VI. "WHEN EACH THING'S NATURE IS MANIFESTED,
NOTHING FAILS TO BE HARMONIOUS"⁵⁷

Central to Li Zhi's ethics of genuine self-expression is a celebration of the numberless possible ways of living life well. Given that such a view raises the possibility of conflicting forms or styles of life, one obvious question arises: How would individuals following the inner callings of their "child-like heart-minds" be able to live well as members of a single social world? Conflict and strife do appear to arise everywhere in Li's writing. In describing the sort of writer Li much admires, he writes: "[This writer] prefers to cause his readers and listeners to gnash their

teeth, and *desire to kill him and to slice him up.*"⁵⁸ Li writes in describing his *A Book to Burn*, "Because these letters strike at the heart of the chronic diseases of contemporary scholars, if they should read the writings they will certainly *desire to kill me.*"⁵⁹ Li speaks too of "making enemies" and "dispute" that "goes on without end to the point that I cry out almost to the point of becoming voiceless."⁶⁰

If we turn back to these passages, it is clearly those who are still blind followers of convention who desire to kill, slice, or dispute with those who express genuine thoughts and feelings.⁶¹ Notably Li describes both the former and the latter as filled with desire (*yu* 欲), but unlike the desires that spring from the child-like heart-mind, the desires of the blind followers of convention are phony—not genuine. For Li, a world of such phony desires is off kilter. It is at odds with the ideal natural order where each thing finds its particular place and thereby society and the Natural world move forward in rhythm and in harmony.

As we noted earlier, Li's virtuous individual cultivates and enjoys an awareness of a sense of "self-satisfaction." He refers to the mind of such an individual as the "child-like heart-mind," and at times as the "self-interested mind" (*si xin* 私心). Li believes that when each individual attends to his own genuine self-interests, all falls in place according to the natural order. He writes of the power of following one's "self-interested mind": "Drawing on one's strengths rather than dwelling on one's weaknesses, one reaps immeasurable advantages." And then contrasts such a world of "immeasurable advantages" with the conflict and strife of his contemporary world, which consists mostly of blind followers of convention. Such lives not only are unfulfilling for those leading them, they too contribute to strife, chaos, and suffering throughout society. Li writes:

But people of today are dragged into their pursuits through prejudices, and drawn into following conventional theories. They cannot help but desire to join the masses and muddle through life in order to seek perfection. . . . Because the world is in such a condition, in the end nothing is completed.⁶²

When the masses live lives in accord with formulaic teachings, they fall out of step with the rhythms of the natural world and "nothing is completed." The unarticulated contrast is Li's vision of the ideal and natural order: the diverse elements of the world move forward and work together in synchronized harmony, and all things spontaneously come to completion and fulfillment.

Li's vision of the harmonious relationship between self and society is particularly clearly articulated in a number of essays in his *A Book*

to Burn. One example is a vitriolic letter, one of many included in the volume, to the elder Geng brother, Geng Dingxiang.⁶³ Throughout the letter Li presents and contrasts his vision with that of Geng's. Geng is portrayed as one who hounds others into adopting a narrowly defined conception of the life well lived, which ultimately harms everyone: "If one desires all these people and things to abide by one's methods, then heaven and earth would not be able to function." In contrast, Li insists on the endless diversity of humans and things and the mad variety of values and norms: "There is infinite variety among the people and things in this world."

In the same letter, Li juxtaposes the early Confucians Mengzi and Kongzi, presenting Mengzi as a dim-witted follower of Kongzi who, like Geng, understands the world in overly simplistic and narrow terms. Li writes, "one person who desired to learn the teachings of Kongzi, namely, Mengzi, was not able to go beyond being a mere follower. I deeply regret that Mengzi was not a sage. And you, [Geng], say that I wish to follow Mengzi!" Li Zhi cleverly plays off a statement in *Mengzi* 2A2 in which Mengzi claims, "It is my hope and wish to follow the example of Kongzi."⁶⁴ But, Li insists, Kongzi "never instructed others to follow him" and Mengzi reveals his dim understanding and dull appreciation of the master's teachings in seeking to mimic them slavishly. Li carefully selects portions of passages from the *Analects* to confirm his point:

If Kongzi did instruct others to follow himself why is it that when Yan Yuan inquired about benevolence Kongzi responded, "Benevolence comes from *oneself*"⁶⁵ and not from others! Why did he say, "The students of antiquity studied to improve *themselves*!"⁶⁶ And why did he also say, "The gentleman seeks all from *within himself*!"⁶⁷

Following the narrow ways of Mengzi leads to a state where nothing good can be achieved. But when, as with Li's rendering of Kongzi, one honors the diversity of humans and their various aims and desires, the world falls into its natural harmonious rhythm. Li writes, "Kongzi never took himself as a model for others to follow. . . . And so, the sage is respected, *the myriad things all find their place*, and events follow as they should." In the very first lines of Li's letter, he articulates his ideal vision in which the Natural and social worlds fall into harmony when each individual follows his own genuine feelings: "To follow one's *genuine* nature, to deepen and broaden it, and with the rest of the world to serve the public—this is referred to simply as the Way."⁶⁸ And repeatedly in his quarrel with Geng Dingxiang, Li argues his point by returning to this underlying metaphysical vision, which embraces individual difference within a larger social harmony. Such a vision draws a clear demarcation

around Li's conception of the life well lived: an ethics of genuine feeling celebrates the diversity of human talents and temperaments, while holding onto the traditional Confucian ideal of the self as most truly the self when in harmonious relation with others.

Li transforms but does not depart from the *Ru* tradition. The core of his ethical ideal displays features common to every Confucian, an ideal that finds one of its most well known formulations in the early canonical Confucian text the *Great Learning*:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first governed well their own states. Wishing to govern well their states, they first ordered their families. Wishing to order their families, they first cultivated their own selves. Wishing to cultivate the self, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts.⁶⁹

The ordered society begins with the cultivation of the self. While Li embraces the flourishing of both self and society, Li's discussions rarely if ever focus explicitly upon the social order. Li's main concern and preoccupation is the initial step of cultivating the self. He devotes extensive and detailed discussion to a conception of self-cultivation that insists on the differences among and fundamental value of each individual's genuine internal and nascent sensibilities. In his letter to Geng Dingxiang, Li does not say much concerning the form or details of his ideal society aside from emphasizing that it is characterized by the qualities of harmony and activity. But we can gain a further understanding of his social ideal by examining his views on particular human relations.

One of the most succinct and well-developed formulations of Li's metaphysics is found in his relatively well-studied essay "Discussion on Husband and Wife: Reflections After Long Contemplation."⁷⁰ At the heart of this piece is an account of human relations and specifically, a particular way Confucians have defined social relations. Li adopts the traditional scheme of human relations as falling into five pairs, known as the "Five Relations" (*wu lun* 五倫), but reprioritizes the five in a way that further supports his vision of the good life as individuals flourishing in a fecund corporeal world of humans in various relationships with each other. Li's ideal is not a world of recluses, nor does he advocate a retreat or withdrawal into a serene state of mind or detached contemplation. He celebrates differences but sees the individual as flourishing in concrete, lively, and harmonious relationship to others. His paradigmatic figures may be erudite, but they are also embodied selves with child-like heart-minds satisfying corporal needs.

Throughout the essay, Li speaks against the atomistic individual severed and separated from others, linking this idea directly to a metaphysical view about the very nature of the universe. He writes:

Clearly, all things under Heaven are born from two, and never from a single entity. Still, there are those who say that One can give birth to Two, “Principle” (*li* 理) can give birth to “Qi” (氣), the “Great Ultimate” (*Taiji* 太極) can give birth to *Yin* and *Yang*. How can that possibly be?

The cosmos, the social world, human beings, and all things in the world are produced by the interactions that occur between dyadic relations. He continues:

In fact, only the two essences, *Yin* and *Yang*, and the two beings, man and woman, can give birth to human life. In the beginning there is no so-called One or Principle, and certainly no Great Ultimate. If we understand this, then in the end what is this so-called One? In the end where does this so-called Principle exist? In the end to what does this Great Ultimate refer? If Two comes from One, then where does One come from? A one and another one makes two. Principle and Qi are two, *Yin-Yang* and the Great Ultimate are two, the Great Ultimate and the Non-Ultimate are two. *No matter how you look at things, nothing does not come in pairs.* Yet, some have never seen this so-called One and yet hastily and rashly speak of it!

Li repeatedly returns to the husband-wife relation. He begins his essay:

Husband and wife are the origin of humankind. Only when there is husband and wife is there father and son. Only when there is father and son is there elder and younger brother. Only when there is elder and younger brother is there superior and subordinate.

Li envisions the husband-wife relation to be the foundation of all other human relations, and throughout the essay he ascribes to such unions the single, distinctive, and ultimately valuable feature of fecundity: the spousal relation is the “origin” (*shi* 始) of humankind and of all things, the creative “source” (*zao duan* 造端) of the universe, and possesses the ability to “give birth” (*sheng* 生) to human life. Li defines the virtue of fecundity in opposition to “Nothingness” (*wu* 無), the “nothingness of Nothingness” (*wu wu* 無無), which other schools point to as the origin

of the universe and regards such notions as nothing more than “talking on endlessly” (*duo yan shu qiong* 多言數窮).

The significance of Li’s prioritizing of the husband-wife relation is even more dramatic and pronounced when we read it against the background of classical formulations of the Five Relations. The *locus classicus* of the Five Relations is in the canonical *Doctrine of the Mean*:

The universal Way of the world is fivefold . . . ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friend and friend. These Five Relations constitute the universal Way of the world.⁷¹

A second early source for the Five Relations is *Mengzi* 3A4. In this text, the order of the pairs differs slightly as the father-son relation is placed first, the ruler-subject second:

Love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends.⁷²

Li adopts the structure of such classical formulations and identifies human relations as consisting of these five forms, but he amends the content of the Five Relations by identifying the spousal relation as foundational to all other relations.⁷³ A number of scholars have examined Li’s prioritizing of the husband-wife relation and argued that, through such efforts, Li envisions a “society composed of equals.”⁷⁴ If we compare the ruler-subject or father-son relation with that between husband and wife, the spousal relation does hold greater potential for being a relationship of social, political, or intellectual equality. But if equality was Li’s central concern in this letter, it would have been more effective to make his case by choosing to build his metaphysics upon the relationship of friend to friend.⁷⁵ The feature of the husband-wife relation Li picks out, repeatedly refers to, and celebrates is not *equality* but, as noted above, *fecundity*.

The characters “birth” (*sheng* 生) and “nurture” or “give life” (*zhang* 長) recur throughout his writings. In “Miscellaneous Matters” Li begins by saying, “Now as for what the heavens *give life* to, what the earth *nurtures*, and the varieties of vegetation found everywhere, people see this and delight in it.”⁷⁶ The “source of all things” is certainly a bountiful and *sustainable* source of life. “Giving birth” or “giving life” to all things surely involves *activity* or *movement* and is a form of production that requires an abundance of *power*. As in the case with flourishing individuals, ideal human relations and, by extension, society at large

tap into an abundant and sustainable source and display the qualities of movement, power, and effortless ease.

Li repeatedly associates the relationship of husband and wife with the qualities of joy, freedom, the expression of genuine feelings, and the embodiment of classical Confucian virtues. In describing life with his wife in an unrealized utopian world, he emphasizes the freedom from restraints and a sense of joy they would share. Li writes:

If it is still like the days of old, with restraints and barriers and lack of understanding, then we will never see a time when people have freed themselves. Now spirit and soul do exist; we know that the self does not die. Restraints and hindrances do not really exist; we create restraints and hindrances. Is this possible? Now this world of no restraints and no hindrances is the Western Pure Land, a world of complete joy (*ji le shijie* 極樂世界).⁷⁷

Such a world is overflowing with support; it is a world of “nourishment” and “no impoverishment.”

While Li imagines an ideal spousal relation with his wife in another world, he also points to historical examples that illustrate his ideal for the husband and wife relation. One such example is the marriage of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 and Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君. As with Li’s description of his imagined ideal relation with his wife, here too Li depicts the spousal relation as a bountiful source of joy. Zhuo Wenjun first meets Sima Xiangru as a young widow in her father’s home. Knowing that her father would not approve of her remarriage, she chooses to elope with her beloved. In his commentary Li exclaims, “Today those who know of Zhuo Wangsun’s daughter appropriately see her to be a great joy for him. What does he have to be ashamed about?” Li gives voice to a position unlike the conventional view where the father would be ashamed of a daughter who had not only remarried, thus seen as betraying her loyalty to her deceased husband, but also eloped, thus directly betraying her father by acting without his consent. A central and defining feature of the marriage between Zhuo and Sima is a mutual understanding of each other’s rich affective worlds. Li writes of Wenjun’s ability to deeply and genuinely understand Xiangru’s heart:

While the meeting of Emperor Wu and Xiangru was quite uncommon, there was yet another meeting that was also remarkable. . . . When the magistrate, Zhuo Wangsun, invited Xiangru to play, Xiangru simply strummed for himself. Who understood that Xiangru played the zither to *give expression to his heart*? . . . If it was not for the lady Zhuo, who would have been able to *truly hear* Xiangru?⁷⁸

Li describes their marriage as “the most perfect of destinies,” a direct quote from the classic the *Book of Changes*.⁷⁹ He continues: “Does the *Book of Changes* not say, ‘The same notes respond to one another; the same ether seeks out one another.’ The same light illuminates each other. . . . How could this be untrue?” Li selects passages that emphasize a distinctive resonance between two destined for each other: his vision of husband and wife conceives of this resonance as a central quality of an ideal spousal relation. Li’s focus on the subjective—the heart, the distinctive resonance, genuinely hearing another—sharply contrasts with Li’s description of Zhuo Wenjun’s father and his friends. Quoting from *Analects* 13.21 Li describes Zhuo Wangsun as lacking a rich inner state, “merely a vessel.” Wangsun’s guests are blind to Xiangru’s internal wealth and only see external trappings:

[Wangsun’s guests] were all dressed in the most refined of clothes. But where is the magnificence in that? In seeing Xiangru they only saw in terms of gold, and could not see him as a person. They only saw Xiangru’s poverty and did not see his wealth.

While Li’s vision of the ideal spousal relation attends to the subjective, the ineffable, the realm of feelings and the heart, the relation is repeatedly defined within the frame of classical *Ru* virtues. In describing the widowed Zhuo Wenjun’s elopement with Sima Xiangru, Li celebrates this unconventional joining of two souls, but is at the same time concerned with the traditional virtue of chastity and comments, “She properly protected her chastity. She did not inappropriately give away her body.” In his preface to *Collection of Writings Begun at the Lake* he describes the spousal relation as expressing the classical *Ru* virtues of benevolence, rightness, propriety, wisdom, and trust: “I say, if one understands the relation between husband and wife, then the five constant virtues can be understood.”⁸⁰

The genuine feeling and distinctive resonance between husband and wife is also limited by the classical *Ru* conception of correlative cosmology whereby the structure of individual relations, society at large, and the greater cosmos mirror each other; the relationship is both causal and isomorphic. In Li Zhi’s view, harmonious relations between husband and wife enable all things to manifest their nature and to find their fitting place in the world. He writes, “Now, if the relation between husband and wife is properly established, then amongst the myriad things, nothing will fail to find its proper state. Husband and wife are the origin of all things.”⁸¹ Again,

In the Great Harmony we can find the actualization of each thing’s nature. This Great Harmony is brought into existence through the

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

Li's ethics certainly cannot be described as relativistic. While he envisions the good life as including a wide range of forms, these harmonize with one another and constitute a greater, harmonious society; he has very clear and distinct ideas about right and wrong. There is diversity and variety in Li's vision; but it is hardly the case that anything goes. As we have seen, Li adopts traditional *Ru* concepts of the Five Relations, correlative cosmology, and the five virtues. He indeed amends and quite radically reforms the substance of these concepts by, for example, reprioritizing the Five Relations. Nevertheless, Li Zhi works within the boundaries assumed by many within the traditional Confucian fold.

Li Zhi articulates a metaphysics such that “[w]hen each thing's nature is manifested, nothing fails to be harmonious.”⁸² Such a foundational assertion, largely an expression of underlying faith, is unlikely to be satisfying to many contemporary people. At the same time, every conception of the life well lived assumes, sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly, a specific vision of the world. Throughout the Chinese philosophical tradition and in our contemporary world as well, we can readily find thinkers and traditions that rest their visions of the good life on a certain belief regarding the natural order of the world. If we turn to the early Daoist thinker Zhuangzi, and one whose writings had a profound influence on the orientation, shape, and to some extent the content of Li's philosophy, we see another example of a thinker who believes that if each individual finds his particular way of being in the world, the world will operate harmoniously.

Zhuangzi believes individuals who absorb and accord with the patterns of the Way live their lives without harming themselves or others. With the knife of Cook Ding as a metaphor for the virtuous individual, Zhuangzi writes, “There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about in.”⁸³ In our contemporary world, free market economics and the concept of the “invisible hand” serves as a clear example of a worldview that places faith in a natural order that is, if not one of harmony, certainly one that is considered by its defenders as right, desirable, and the way to sustainable flourishing.⁸⁴ Contemporary readers may wish that Li Zhi had presented a more fully developed and carefully defended metaphysical view. It can only seem naïve to believe that if every individual finds his or her distinct niche in the world that the cosmos will operate without conflict and harmoniously. But then,

well-received views regarding a natural social harmony certainly exist in our time. And in Li Zhi's time and place, the broad features of the metaphysical view he embraced were widely and readily accepted and had a venerable history. Li Zhi himself refers us to one of the seminal sources articulating such a metaphysics when he quotes from the canonical *Book of Changes* to support his own views.

We began this chapter asking, How do we know when a genuine feeling is in fact genuine? When we comb through Li Zhi's writings, we discover a set of family resemblances where at any one time most if not all of the features characterize Li's conception of a genuine feeling. Li strives to awaken us to a particular sense of satisfaction we naturally feel, though many have lost touch with this innate sense, when we live life well. When we examine Li's references to classical texts such as the *Book of Changes* and the *Great Learning*, we find Li adopting and adapting a particular conception of the world thereby appealing to a natural and sustainable harmony among all things when each follows his heart's desires and finds his distinct niche in the world. In addition to these guides, in Li's writings we find at least one other criterion as well: the insights and powerful and genuine feelings nurtured through dialogue with true and like-minded soul-friends. In a letter Li Zhi writes of friendship:

As for those who are studying but have not yet found the Dao, friends are indispensable. For those who have found the Dao, it is even more vital not to dispense of friends. Why is this? To have friends is to have the essential (*you zhe you ye* 友者有也). Therefore, it is said that the Dao and virtue find their source in teachers and friends. And so we can see that friends are indispensable. In this world it is truly difficult to find genuine friends (*zhen you* 真友) and especially rare to meet a truly like-minded friend (*tong zhi* 同志). Those from antiquity believed that it was more important to have a like-minded friend than to have a brother. In one's corporal form one is like one's brother. But with a truly like-minded friend one can work together and give shape to one's inborn virtue. Why did Kongzi and Mengzi travel throughout all under heaven? There is no doubt that it was for no other reason than to search for a truly like-minded friend.⁸⁵

Throughout Li's writings he unambiguously and passionately prioritizes true friendship between like-minded others above any of the traditional Five Relations and in this letter, explicitly above the relation between flesh-and-blood brothers.⁸⁶ Of course, to have a relationship

that was fraternal and one of soul mates was even better; Li Zhi deeply admired the intimate emotional and spiritual relationship between the two brothers Geng Dingxiang and Geng Dingli.

These few loose and general criteria that aid us in identifying the general shape of a genuine feeling serve as powerful and normative guidelines pointing us in particular directions in our pursuit of the good life. At the same time, certainly they are insufficient for ruling out what in fact might be phony feelings, or for identifying all cases of truly genuine ones. While we can reasonably ask for productive, clear, and normative guidelines from almost any one thinker's prescriptions for living well—and Li Zhi provides such—perhaps it is too much to ask for, in addition to the clear and normative, also the specific and detailed. As the ethicist Bernard Williams eloquently writes, “The answer has to be discovered, or established, as the result of a process, personal and social, which essentially cannot formulate the answer in advance, except in an unspecific way. Philosophy can play a part in the process . . . but it cannot be a substitute for it.”⁸⁷

Li Zhi points out particular and distinct places for us to search in our individual process in living and shaping our own ethical adventures, but he does not and believes he cannot lay out for us detailed guidelines or unchanging principles—and especially not formulated in advance—for how to live life in all its particularity. Li fails in the latter; he fails in offering us a specific theory for living life well. But if we seek the former, which is what Li does provide, we discover he puts forth illuminating, compelling, rich, substantive, and imaginative insights into the workings of a fulfilling and ethical life. Li Zhi does not do less, and at the same time, he believes that to do much more would be to do harm to others. As he writes: “those who receive nothing are greedy in that they harass others, but then, the so-called ‘benevolent’ ones do harm.”⁸⁸

One might ask, even if we are satisfied with the tools Li offers in helping us identify a feeling as truly genuine, does Li believe one ought always then act upon these true desires? What role does one's own larger life narrative play in considering one's genuine desires? And how do the interests of others and especially those who are truly dependent—such as the elderly, children and, at least in Li Zhi's time, women in many cases—fit in when making such choices?⁸⁹ In sketching out an answer to these questions, much of what can aid us in the process is the feature of *sustainability*. Li Zhi repeatedly prescribes attentiveness to simple daily life necessities of sleeping, eating, and dressing as a way to find or get back to a satisfying and sustainable rhythm in life. One's life choices must provide for continued self-satisfaction and fulfillment of one's desires over the course of one's life, and as with most if not all

Confucian thinkers, Li Zhi cares deeply and passionately for nurturing and sustaining meaningful human relationships. A second tool that in part enables us to address these questions is the idea of “*self-satisfaction*.” While Li Zhi conceives of humans as markedly more diverse in their nature than does the early Confucian Mengzi, Li nevertheless speaks so insistently and repeatedly regarding a small cluster of desires that one could readily argue that he conceives of them as universal: the desire for sleeping, eating, drinking, and soul friendships. Some individuals may be better suited for scholarship, some for business, others for farming, yet common to all satisfying lives, for Li and for most if not all Confucian thinkers, is sustained and genuine human relationships.

In Li’s own life, in his late years he does sever his marital relationship and abandons his wife; at the same time, central reason he provides for his choice is his powerful desire for and commitment to deep human bonds and specifically soul friendships. Human relations matter for him, but his concern for relations is indeed primarily friendships rather than that of parent-child or husband-wife, and throughout his writings he rarely addresses the question of one’s obligations and duties to dependent beings who may be made deeply vulnerable and unfairly suffer due to others’ life choices. Li’s writings provide potentially rich resources—the idea of sustainability and self-satisfaction—for satisfyingly addressing such questions, but as is, Li’s lack of attention to the vulnerable in society may be one of the most unsatisfying aspects of what is in most other ways a vibrant, rich, viable, and deeply appealing ethics of genuine self-expression. At places he bemoans that he cannot stand by his wife and mourns deeply upon the death of his vulnerable children. When Li makes the difficult choice of following his desires to seek the Dao through scholarship and soul-friendship over his obligations to dependent others, we do find his writing uncharacteristically filled with anxiety and regret. Perhaps Li Zhi himself found his neglect of the more vulnerable members of society to be the troubling aspect of his own otherwise powerful ethical worldview.

In the following section, I turn from the task of defining *genuine* feelings to showing that the spontaneous expression of such genuine feelings is indeed nothing less than the necessary and sufficient condition for the life well lived. To pursue this subject I turn to Li’s descriptions of two individuals: the first is the great Han historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE), the second, Li Zhi himself.⁹⁰ In particular, we shall explore Li Zhi’s description of Sima Qian’s views on writing and the contrasts he draws between Sima’s views and his own. Through such a comparison, I shall show that Li insists on *spontaneous expression* as an *end* in itself; he presents Sima Qian as foil, someone who argues that writing is a *means* to the greater ends of fame and immortality.

VII. SIMA QIAN 司馬遷 AND LI ZHI 李贄

We have seen that among Li's skills as a writer is his ability to deftly quote from earlier philosophical, historical, and literary sources in the service of his arguments. In the first line of Li Zhi's famous preface to the great novel the *Water Margin*, we find a clear example of how he exercises such skill to support his vision of life well lived. The essay begins:

The Grand Historian said, “*The Difficulties of Persuasion* (*Shuo nan* 說難)⁹¹ and *The Sorrows of Standing Alone* (*Gu fen* 孤憤)⁹² are works that give vent to the deep indignation⁹³ of worthies (*Taishi gong yue Shuo nan Gu fen xian sheng fa fen zhi suo zuo ye* 太史公曰說難孤憤賢聖發憤之所作也).”

Li Zhi presents these lines *as if* they were a direct quotation of the Grand Historian, Sima Qian. What Sima *in fact* writes is subtly but importantly different. I quote from chapter 130 of his *Records of the Grand Historian*:⁹⁴

While Hanfeizi was held prisoner in Qin, he wrote *The Difficulties of Persuasion* and *The Sorrows of Standing Alone*. Most of the three hundred poems of the *Book of Poetry* were written when worthies gave vent to deep indignation (*Hanfei qiu Qin Shuo nan Gu fen Shi jing sanbai pian da di xian sheng fa fen zhi suo wei zuo ye* 韓非囚秦說難孤憤詩三百篇大抵賢聖發憤之所為作也).⁹⁵

As we can see by comparing the two passages, Li Zhi ably tailors Sima's words to suit the particular needs of his argument. In particular, he excises the references to the particular person—the pre-Qin legalist philosopher Hanfeizi—and the specific location—a prison in the state of Qin. By doing so, the focus is turned to the world of *feelings*; the heart of the carefully tailored quotation is the phrase “gave vent to deep indignation” (*fa fen* 發憤).

As would any literatus of his time, surely Li Zhi was well aware of earlier classical examples of this phrase, among them *Analects* 7.19.⁹⁶ In this passage Kongzi describes himself:

Why didn't you tell him [the lord of She] that he [Kongzi] is the kind of person who in *bursts of enthusiasm*⁹⁷ forgets to eat (*fa fen wang shi* 發憤忘食), in his delight forgets to worry (*le yi wang you* 樂以忘憂), and doesn't even realize that old age is coming on?⁹⁸

In this passage, *fa fen* is used to connote an expression of emotion or specifically, a “burst of enthusiasm.” In Li Zhi's own commentary on the

Analects, he laments that people in his time do not live life like Kongzi. Presumably they do not live with “enthusiasm” and “joy.” Li comments, “There is only Kongfuzi who was able to live as a human being. These days there are human beings everywhere. Why are they are not able to live as human beings?”⁹⁹

Li Zhi was a well-educated literatus, and we can reasonably assume that he was deeply familiar with the texts he quotes and the various uses of *fa fen* found in the classics. A second classical source of the term is found in the *Records of the Grand Historian* itself, chapter 130. As noted above, this is the chapter from which Li quotes in his famous “Preface to the *Water Margin*.” As we have seen, in this passage *fa fen* can helpfully be rendered as “to vent deep discontent.”¹⁰⁰ The phrase appears earlier in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, in chapter 61, which narrates the biography of the Shang loyalist Boyi 伯夷 who refuses to eat the grain of the conquering Zhou and dies of starvation.¹⁰¹ In this context, *fa fen* can be well rendered as “to arouse indignation.”¹⁰² In these three cases where *fa fen* occurs in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the phrase is used in a particular sense: to convey the general expression of feelings, whether the feeling be of “enthusiasm,” “discontent,” or “indignation.” In the following pages I will tentatively use the less specific translation “the expression of feeling” as this rendering accommodates all three uses of *fa fen* we have examined. With this brief discussion of *fa fen* in hand, let us turn back to Li’s quotation and use of chapter 130 of the *Records of the Grand Historian* in his preface to the *Water Margin*.

In the text surrounding the passage quoted by Li, Sima Qian reflects upon his castration and consoles himself by describing great, enduring literature—such as the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), Sunzi’s *Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法), Lü Buwei’s *Lüshi Chunqiu* (呂氏春秋), and the works of Hanfeizi—as born from frustration, suffering, and setback. Sima Qian concludes the paragraph, “All these men had a rankling in their hearts, for they were not able to accomplish what they wished. Therefore, they wrote about past affairs in order to *pass on their thought to future ages*.”¹⁰³ The idea is that a future, enduring readership and literary immortality compensate for the bitter struggles and sufferings of these and other great authors.

The desire for immortality through recognition by future generations finds a succinct and classical formulation in the canonical text the *Zuo zhuan*, or *Commentary of Zuo*:¹⁰⁴

When Mu Shu went to Jin, Fan Xuanzi met him, and asked the meaning of the saying of the ancients, “They died but suffered no decay (*si er bu xiu* 死而不朽). . . . I have heard that the highest meaning of this phrase is when virtue is established (*li de* 立德), second

when good work is established (*li gong* 立功), and third, when fine speech or writing is established (*li yan* 立言). When these examples are not forgotten despite the passing of time, this is what is meant by the saying, “They do not decay.”¹⁰⁵

In other words, one gains immortality through one’s virtue, deeds, or the art of speaking and writing. Of these three methods, Sima Qian himself sought immortality by “establishing fine writing” for the purpose of “preserving” himself (*bu xiu* 不朽). With such a view, good writing, defined by Sima Qian as the “expression of emotion” (*fa fen* 發憤), serves as a *means* to the greater end of attaining immortality.

In stark and self-conscious contrast, Li Zhi repeatedly insists that the “expression of emotion” through writing is an *end* in itself. For example, immediately following the opening line of his “Preface to the *Water Margin*,” Li movingly and vividly writes:

Seen from this perspective, we know that if ancient worthies did not *have deep feelings* they did not create (*bu fen ze bu zuo yi* 不憤則不作矣). If one is not moved by deep feelings but creates, it is like shaking though one is not cold, or groaning although one is not ill. Even though one creates something, why should anyone look at it?

One writes only when one possesses deep feelings that one *must* express. In his final conclusion Li writes approvingly, “[The *Water Margin*] simply expresses the fullest of feelings (*fa fen* 發憤).” Good writing defined as the full “expression of feelings” is an end in itself. The expression is the aim.

Throughout Li’s body of work, in turns with explicit references and in turns through more subtle allusions, he presents his desire for self-expression as an end in itself and as his sole motivation for writing, and contrasts this with the view of Sima Qian, who writes as a means to attain fame and immortality. In titling his historical commentary *A Book to Hide* (*Cang shu* 藏書), undoubtedly Li had in mind Sima Qian’s intentions for his *Records of the Grand Historian*. In a letter attributed to Sima Qian, written to his close friend Ren An and preserved in chapter 62, “Biography of Sima Qian,” of the *History of the Han Dynasty* (*Han shu* 漢書), Sima writes: “When I have completed the *Records of the Grand Historian*, I will hide it in the Famous Mountains (*cang zhi ming shan* 藏之名山).” He goes on to explain his reasons for hiding it away: “If [my book] may be *handed down to men* who will appreciate it, and *penetrate to the villages and great cities*, then though I should suffer a thousand mutilations, what regret would I have?”¹⁰⁶ Li clearly has Sima Qian’s remarks in mind when he puts forth a quite different reason for hiding *his* book. In the introduction to *A Book to Hide* Li writes:

This book is for my own pleasure. I have entitled it *A Book to Hide*. Why have I entitled it *A Book to Hide*? The title refers to the fact that it can only be read for my own pleasure and should not be shown to others. That is why I call it *A Book to Hide*.¹⁰⁷

Li's reason for writing the book is to elicit a certain feeling in his own heart. He aims at his own "pleasure" or "gratification" (*zi yi* 自怡).¹⁰⁸ Li finds satisfaction in knowing "where to rest" and does not rely on others—in his own or future ages—for his happiness or fulfillment.

At one point in his essay "Miscellaneous Matters," Li Zhi again refers to Sima Qian and again in a way that supports Li's own vision of true writing as undertaken for the sake of the expression of genuine feelings. But this time Li adopts a different stance and insists that a true writer simply cannot bear to hide his writings within a famous mountain.

He would rather cause his readers and listeners to gnash and grind their teeth, and desire to kill him and to slice him up. In the end he cannot bear to hide his writings in a famous mountain or to throw it in the waters or the fires.¹⁰⁹

Sima Qian wishes to hide his writings in a mountain awaiting a future worthy who will find and admire his work and ensure that they and his good name will endure throughout history. In marked contrast, Li's response is an expression of abundant, spontaneous, and uncensored feelings. His desire is to express himself for the sake of expression, and he pays little heed to the consequences, whether to himself or to others. However Li presents his case, without fail he believes that good writing and, more broadly, living the good life, is expression for its own sake. Li writes for his own pleasure; Sima Qian for immortality.

Thus far we have examined Li Zhi's presentation of himself and the contrast he draws between himself and Sima Qian. If, however, we examine Sima's own writings, we might come to believe that the dichotomy between Li Zhi and Sima Qian is much too starkly drawn. Surely Sima too was interested in self-expression. In his letter to Ren An, cited above, Sima speaks of deep feeling and writes, "I grieve that I have things in my heart that I have not been able to express fully." But then Sima continues, "I am shamed to think that after I am gone my writings will not be known to posterity."¹¹⁰ Even in the midst of noting more cathartic and self-interested reasons for writing, Sima still has his eyes on literary immortality. He yearns to be "praised" (*cheng* 稱) by later generations,¹¹¹ and "known to posterity" (*biao yu hou ye* 表於後也).¹¹² His fears are fears of his "name being forgotten" (*ming mo mie* 名摩滅).¹¹³ Rarely if ever does

Li Zhi speak of such desires and fears. Li's depiction of Sima Qian is in fact true to what Sima himself writes in texts such as the *Records of the Grand Historian* and his letter to Ren An. The marked contrast between Sima's and Li Zhi's aims in writing effectively reveals what is at the heart of Li's philosophy: consistently and adamantly Li insists writing, and life itself, at its best is genuine self-expression for the sake of itself.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Genuineness (真)

I. INTRODUCTION

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor writes, “I believe that in articulating the ideal [of authenticity] over the last two centuries, Western culture has identified one of the important potentialities of human life.”¹ While our study of Li Zhi has shown that we may wish to augment Taylor’s insights by including the contributions of late-Ming Chinese thinkers, what I wish to focus on in this concluding chapter is the central thesis Taylor so convincingly puts forward and defends: “authenticity,” or what I will here most often refer to as “genuineness,”² is indeed one of the most potent ideals we, as a society, have imagined for guiding us to a life well lived.

In the following pages I argue Li Zhi really ought to be studied by philosophers for, within Chinese philosophical discourse on the genuine, he is a significant thinker who insightfully explores and articulates what in our time are too often overlooked insights into the subject of genuineness; Li Zhi is a powerful resource for formulating an ethics of genuineness that seeks for middle, or more accurately, higher ground between important, fervent, and on-going philosophical debates, such as those between individualism and communitarianism, between freedom severed from any prior moral obligations and a stringent view of objective morality, and between an ethics founded on our spontaneous intuitions prior to language and one that conceives of our feelings and thoughts as wholly shaped by language and culture. It is this last debate to which I would like to turn, albeit briefly, in our concluding chapter. Taylor and Li are similar in that both articulate a productive way out of these dichotomies and a higher ground, and yet the two are different and complementary in their respective visions. Taylor addresses what

is underdeveloped in Li: an attention to the power of language and culture in shaping our authentic lives. Li's strength is what is at times neglected in Taylor's writings: a deep appreciation of the elements of our human nature that are in fact pure and untainted, existing fully, or at least largely, formed prior to our mastery of language. Li argues genuine feelings and thoughts are in many ways fully formed within our hearts and minds; our task is to attend to these sensibilities, to nourish and preserve what is given, to uncover these gems deep within ourselves as we spontaneously pour forth, "spew" and "spit" out the metaphorical jade and pearls fully formed within.³ Let us first review the analysis of Li's philosophy that I have presented in the course of this work.

II. REVIEW OF CHAPTERS

I have argued throughout my study of Li Zhi that the ideal of genuineness—an ethics of the expression of *genuine* feelings—centrally animates his writings. I began by placing Li and his works within the context of late-Ming China and specifically a particular exuberant and passionate discourse, the "cult of feelings" (*qing* 情), of which Li was one of the most celebrated voices. In this way I described his ties to significant interlocutors—such as the Yuan brothers, the Geng brothers and especially Geng Dingxiang, and Tang Xianzu—and his understanding and use of shared concepts—such as "genuineness" (*zhen* 真), "feelings" (*qing* 情), and "desire" (*yu* 欲). While I consistently have argued against *reductionist* accounts of Li's thought, which hold that Li can be thoroughly understood or was mired in the sentiments of his historical time and place, at the same time, underlying my study of Li is the firm belief that his writings are by far most illuminatingly read by situating them within his particular historical world. He is in no way merely a product of his age, but his historical context certainly is critical to understanding the powerful nuances of his writings and ideas.

In Chapter Two "Life Stories (傳)," I turned to a close study of a complex and widely studied essay of Li's "A Sketch of Zhuowu."⁴ The aim of the chapter was three-fold: one, to introduce Li's life and works; second, through a close textual study to give one example of just how deeply playful, adroit, and subtly complex his writings can be and often are; and third, to begin the work of arguing that genuineness is at the heart of Li's ethical vision. Li deploys numerous strategies to make his case for the central role and overriding importance of the genuine. While he believes there exists a wide range of diverse ways to live life well, at the same time, he thinks that certain ways of life are stifling, enervating, and to be avoided. One way to see Li as guiding his readers on the path of an ethics of genuine expression is by paying attention to

the ways he points out and deploys particular terms that represent ideals for living the good life: terms such as “genuineness,” “feeling,” and “desire.” Following these signposts keeps us on the path of the genuine. Each individual must live a life that is distinctive to him- or herself, and so Li cannot prescribe precise standards or specific rules for living well, but he is able to offer a general map and gesture in the directions of where to look—and what to avoid—in our own quest for living the good life. Another strategy Li adeptly employs, as we saw in our study of “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” is to reclaim and amend established genres, terms, and images, as well as specific historical and literary references in order to stake out and expand the territory in which we can truly and spontaneously express our genuine thoughts and feelings. While some thinkers who study ethics focus upon legal reform, institutional change, or technological innovation in order to achieve their goals, Li Zhi’s attention is drawn to the *literary world*, and his imagination leads him everywhere to forge, discover, or recover ways to *pour forth* genuine feelings and thoughts in this world of writing.

In one part, Chapter Two studied ways Li envisions and reforms traditional conceptions and expressions of a particular term that is central to the history of Confucian thought: the life story or “biography” (*zhuan* 傳). In the following chapter we turned to a study of Li’s conception of another important term: the “mind” or “heart-mind” (*xin* 心). I began by providing an intellectual-historical context for our discussion in the second part of the chapter where I described Li’s concept of the heart-mind by way of providing a reading or commentary on Li’s famous “On the Child-like Heart-Mind.”⁵ In my interpretation and throughout my book, I have endeavored to take as my starting point Li’s own writing and to ground my analysis by reading Li Zhi on *his* own terms, as a *writer* in general rather than more specifically as, for example, a philosopher, a literary theorist, or a social critic. I asked: What would it have meant to a writer in his time and place to manipulate the written world and express himself in the manner that he does?

In doing so, I self-consciously refrained from interpreting Li within any larger theoretical framework and, in particular, an *evolutionary* framework in which his works are considered valuable only or primarily for what they contribute to later or more “significant” intellectual and literary developments. Without doubt his ideas do contribute to later intellectual and literary movements. But my task throughout the book has been to loosen the ties to interpretive frameworks—for example, Marxist, liberal humanist, individualist, relativist, Buddhist, or even to a significant degree the category of *Ru* or Confucian—through which Li has been read by scholars and, instead, to try to understand Li through the particular details of his writing. Theoretical frameworks and categories

of analyses indeed can be helpful and even invaluable for understanding a given thinker's ideas or written works; however, such lenses can distort as well as reveal the true shape and dimensions of what is said. My view is that this often has been true in studies of Li Zhi; one of the animating motivations of my project has been to offer a corrective to a number of influential studies of Li and to arrive at one sound reading of his writings by beginning with and attending to the particular, the historical, and, most importantly, Li's own words.

In reading Li as a writer, I approached his work from a number of fronts: certainly through discursive analysis, but also and even more so by attending to the subtle historical and literary allusions and references so critical to his work and by studying the images and metaphors that arise everywhere throughout his writings and that in some ways constitute his thought. In Chapter Three, by exploring the metaphors in Li's works and especially the images of revealing and concealing and of health and illness, I argued that Li's conception of the mind is not only coherent but also philosophically interesting and viable. The image of the child-like heart-mind, so central to his writings, helps us better understand his idea of the mind as a tangible, flesh-and-blood disposition to satisfy diverse and ever-changing desires. Li Zhi argues that satisfying these desires well, the *genuine* ones—or honoring these genuine desires and striving to satisfy more rather than less of them—is necessary and sufficient to living a good life.

In Chapter Four “Virtue (德),” I turned to a question that is essential for understanding and appreciating Li's philosophy, What does he mean by *genuine* feelings? Li is in no way a relativist and indeed insists there are better and worse ways to live one's life. His biting criticisms of conventional society as nothing but phony play-acting should leave no doubt about his ability to make and insist upon normative standards. At the same time, he believes the good life is uncodifiable and particular to circumstance, and so he is unable to and does not provide a transparent formula or template for assessing feelings as genuine or phony. Nevertheless, by combing through his writings and approaching the question of genuine desires from multiple fronts, we find various ways that can aid us in distinguishing between the genuine and phony. For one, we identified a set of characteristics which serve as reliable markers or evidence for what Li would regard as genuine feelings. These include a sense of effortless involvement and of being motivated by a source of abundance within the self, which must occur within a form of life that is sustainable, distinctive to a given individual, and part of a world of diversity. Such a life is one of movement and ardent intensity and power. Our efforts to discover some general ways to recognize the genuine yielded not a fixed set of characteristics, but a family resemblance among cases.

We then turned to other ways in which Li sought to give substance to his conception of genuine feelings. A second notion we turned to is what Li refers to as a particular sense, that of “self-satisfaction” (*zi de* 自得). And finally, we examined Li’s particular metaphysics and showed how it forms a limit around his conception of the genuine.

Li has been read in a remarkably diverse variety of ways by numerous scholars down through the decades and centuries since he lived.⁶ I have ventured to show that if we read him with attention to the particular questions and concerns that animated *his* time and *his* place, we discover a coherent, rich, and powerfully imaginative description and defense of a way of life that is founded on the spontaneous expression of genuine feelings and thoughts, with its source in the child-like heart-mind. In the course of the preceding chapters I have tried to *describe* Li’s conception of the good life, but have done less in the way of defending his ideas, and little in the way of embellishing upon his insights, or showing the potential relevance and power of his vision for us in contemporary society. While that *analytical* and *constructive* work will have to remain for another book and another time, what I want to do in the final pages is to suggest and sketch out just how important and fruitful Li’s vision could be to our contemporary ethical discourse. And here, Charles Taylor’s work on authenticity will serve us well. In part, I choose to refer to Taylor’s work as it is one of the most widely read and well-received contemporary philosophical works devoted to the subject of the authentic or genuine.

III. MODERN MALAISE, LATE-MING MALAISE

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor argues for and defends the virtue of authenticity as a powerful moral ideal worth understanding and fighting for. He bemoans how conceptions of authenticity have decayed over the course of modernity and regards the current diminished forms that dominate western thought and culture as one of the “malaises of modernity.”⁷ Taylor identifies two common, basic perspectives that people take toward the ideal of authenticity; both of which he regards as debased. The first he refers to as “boosters,” the second “knockers.” Boosters have an exceedingly thin conception of what constitutes authenticity: rather than being grounded in some appeal to the realization or flourishing of human nature, for them authenticity concerns the choices of an atomistic self that is severed and isolated from the concerns and choices of others. On such a view, authenticity does serve as an ideal but consists of nothing more than individual choice. Those who choose from within this perspective engage in what Taylor sees as a solipsistic retreat into the inner self. They make choices without appeal to any standard or criteria.

What makes their choice “authentic” is simply the fact that *they* have made it. Taylor offers Derrida and Foucault as examples of boosters.⁸

Knockers, on the other hand, dismiss notions of authenticity as an ideal. They see those who are part of the culture of authenticity as living for nothing more than “little vulgar pleasures,” some form of “pitiable comfort.”⁹ They regard appeals to individual choice as self-indulgent, bourgeois, cowardly, and delusional and see those who hope to inject significance into their lives by appealing to such petty preoccupations as vainly attempting to turn away and defer the substantive depth and challenges of human life. Allan Bloom, notes Taylor, is one example of a knocker.¹⁰

While our contemporary landscape on the subject of authenticity does in general move between these two extremes, there surely are other possibilities. Taylor insistently defends nobler and finer forms of authenticity and writes, “The struggle ought not be *over* authenticity, for or against it.” Rather, the struggle ought to be “*about* it, defining its proper meaning.”¹¹ What is needed, he argues, is a rich and powerful understanding of who we are as we have come to be shaped and formed by our common history, traditions, social relations, and human biology. Taylor refers to this project of self-understanding as one of “retrieval” or seeking for our “horizons of significance.” He explains the necessity of such a project of retrieval as perhaps the most significant way to discover a meaningful and satisfying sense of ourselves. He writes:

Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial.¹²

Without this work of retrieval, one’s “authentic” or “genuine” identity will have no particular deep meaning; choice alone cannot confer meaningfulness or significance to any life. As Taylor puts it, a life lived on such an insubstantial foundation would be “trivial.”

Li Zhi is clearly neither what Taylor defines as a booster nor a knocker and instead, like Taylor, seeks higher and more noble ground. Li has a well-defined conception of the inter-relatedness of humanity and in no way sees humans in their ideal condition as living self-absorbed lives entirely within their own hearts. He believes all people are born with a child-like heart-mind, and only the preservation and cultivation of this shared endowment enables us to take our particular places and ably express our distinctive desires within the greater Dao or Way. On the other hand, Li is not a knocker. For example, in essays such as “On the Five Deaths,” he describes heroic forms of death to which

he aspires—among these are death for a noble cause—and contrasts these with forms of death which would bring him shame—for example, in old age, in bed, with wife and children.¹³ Li in no way imagines the good life as one of small, vulgar pleasures. As we discussed, especially in Chapter Four, Li struggles arduously and with much success to provide a rich and full description of “genuineness.” In his efforts to define this ideal, Li explores and appeals to both history and biology. He emends “traditional” Confucian metaphysics, at turns affirms and reinterprets classical texts such as the *Analects*, the *Mengzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Records of the Grand Historian*, and explores and articulates a particular conception of human nature founded on the idea of “self-satisfaction.” Clearly Li Zhi seeks to identify and then continuously reform what in Taylor’s language is a detailed and rich “pre-existing horizon of significance” against which we can understand a meaningful ethics of spontaneous expression of *genuine* feelings. While Li does engage in the project of retrieval, his reasons for doing so and methods for retrieval are distinctly and dramatically different from Taylor’s. Li’s interlocutors are not striving to loosen ties to conventional norms so as to create room for individuals to make their own choices and forge their own meanings in life. As Taylor describes the unsavory implications of his interlocutors’ views, “the dark side of individualism is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society.”¹⁴ This is one significant modern—not late-Ming—malaise.

Instead of opposing the turn to a preoccupation with the atomistic individual and seeking for a freedom that exists against a background of horizon of significance, Li responds to the hypocritical, the rigid, and the dogmatic: those who unreflectively and insistently adhere to unbending rules, conventions, traditions, and rituals. They are not “flat”; they are three-dimensional but filled with content that is inflexible, inert, and homogenized, hollowed out of any innate distinctive and spontaneous capacities. The example, described in Chapter Four, of the pedantic scholar in *The Peony Pavilion* mindlessly and mechanically reciting a commentary on one of the most beautiful love poems in the *Book of Poetry* offers a vivid illustration of what Li commonly and dismissively refers to as a “gentleman of the Way.” This is a person who has given up his genuine self and, instead, has adopted a set of conventional clichés. Li’s criticisms of tradition and convention do not, however, lead him to endorse the unencumbered individualism that serves as the ideal of Taylor’s boosters. As much as Li celebrates the diverse, the multiplicitous, a loosening of ties to particular canonical texts, traditional rituals, and specific prescribed ways of living, he too very much and almost wholly works utterly self-consciously within to reform and revitalize, rather

than to repudiate and overturn, a tradition of texts and teachings. He is deeply invested in a given written world—one he sees as inherited and requiring daily to be re-invigorated—and in imagining strategies for reclaiming, reforming, and amending this world.

IV. A LI ZHI-INFLECTED ETHICS OF GENUINENESS: THE ROLE OF WRITING

The late-Ming and the modern malaise are distinct, but Li and Taylor are similar in seeking for a higher ground between what Taylor refers to as the two extremes of boosters and knockers. Both seek to define an idea of genuineness, or authenticity, that indeed stands against a background of a horizon of significance. Both offer substantively similar prescriptions for living a good life that finds its source in the genuine: Li and Taylor conceive of an ethics of genuineness as anchored in our distinctive *intuitions* or *inclinations*, and the genuine self as discovered and created through the process of *historical recovery* of our ethical resources, and through *articulation* and especially the act of writing. Li's and Taylor's views on moral epistemology, ontology, and development warrant nuanced analysis and comparison. By way of conclusion, let me simply and briefly sketch out some points of similarities and differences between the two thinkers' views on the role of writing in our moral life.

Taylor views our moral life as finding its source in our natural inclinations. He situates his position against empirical accounts of an objective world, a view he attributes to those he refers to as "naturalists." Moral knowledge, he insists, is of a very different sort: "we should treat our deepest moral instincts . . . as our mode of access to the world in which ontological claims are discernible and can be rationally argued about and sifted."¹⁵ Moral knowledge cannot but find its source in our intuitions about right and wrong, and at the same time this knowledge, claims Taylor, is in no way relativistic, "pure fiction," or "illusion."¹⁶ It is not relativistic for it is not at all possible for creatures such as us to live in a relativistic world wholly free of any horizon of significance. As Taylor puts it: "The point of view from which we might constate that all orders are equally arbitrary, in particular that all moral views are equally so, is *just not available to us humans*."¹⁷ Even with only this much of Taylor's view before us, we already can see why he is understood as articulating a middle ground, between relativists on the one hand and "naturalists" who conceive of right and wrong in narrow terms and believe even the moral realm can be understood through empirical study of an objective order on the other.

In considering Li Zhi's views on moral intuition, we clearly see the great extent to which he borrows from Mengzi. Like the early 4th

century BCE Confucian thinker, Li too believes that our moral inclinations—rather than the external world of classical texts, teachers, or a system of laws—are our very best resource for living well. But rather than seeking epistemic justification for our moral inclinations, as Taylor does, Li Zhi seeks to justify them pragmatically: Li maintains that we suffer badly in that we feel nothing less than alienated from our true selves, ill at ease, and unsettled when we depart from our genuine inclinations. Li offers poignant descriptions of such individuals who are severed from their inner resources: “Now, if the heart-mind is comprised of the Principles of the Way which one hears and sees, then what is spoken are all words of the Principles of the Way. But they are not spontaneous words from the child-like heart-mind. Though these words may be artful, what do they have to do with oneself?”¹⁸ While he would agree with Taylor that our inclinations are the only reliable source for moral knowledge, Li does not argue this is where we must begin our search for the genuine. As we can see, he takes a different tack and insists that a life severed from our moral knowledge simply *feels* wrong, mechanical, alienated, perhaps even unbearable, and that is how we know it is misguided: “What does it have to do with oneself?” In such cases we feel far removed from any sense of “self-satisfaction.”

While Taylor is arguing against those bewitched by the idea that anything goes, on the one hand, and the objective analysis of a morally neutralized world, on the other, Li finds very different challenges and other conversation partners. He engages in historical retrieval and identifies a genealogy of the child-like heart-mind most clearly including conceptions as found in the writings of Mengzi. His most primary interlocutors are his former friend, the “hypocritical” Geng Dingxiang who Li conceives of as following along with the herd; the pedantic and stifling “gentleman of the Dao” identified with Zhu Xi and the School of Principle; and the generic, unimaginative scholar-bureaucrat. Whereas Taylor attends to both boosters and knockers, Li’s primary interlocutors are the knockers. Late-Ming China is not a culture where we find widespread advocacy of a way of life devoid of morals. Quite the contrary: it tended to be a rigidly moralistic and traditional culture. Li’s move is foremost against the pedantic, the stifled, the homogenized; those who look outward and all too unreflectively cling to traditional texts and norms.

Taylor’s and Li’s motivations for articulating a view on moral intuition are similar in important ways. Although Taylor seeks to put forth a moral epistemology in contrast to that of “modern science” and “scientific thought,”¹⁹ and Li argues for a particular way of knowing that returns to the thought of Mengzi and rejects the external world of classics and teachers as our ultimate source for moral truth, both jettison a way of life that finds its source and power in the external world and begin

with the subjective, the internal, what the former refers to as “intuition” and the latter as the direct products of the “child-like heart-mind.” In contrast, their views on the role of writing in moral development—the development of these intuitions—appears similar on the surface but are in fact substantively more different. Exploring this difference will lead us to see at least one of the contributions Li can make to our contemporary moral debates.

V. A LI ZHI-INFLECTED ETHICS OF GENUINENESS: THE CHILD-LIKE HEART-MIND

Taylor asserts that we humans are self-interpreting animals who are partly constituted by a certain language.²⁰ Our moral lives find their source in our emotions, or moral intuitions, and we cannot help but live our moral lives and give it meaning through the medium of language. Taylor writes, “Our emotion language is indispensable precisely because it is irreducible. It becomes an essential condition of articulacy . . . from which *there is no escape into objectified nature.*”²¹ And again, “Language would thus be essential to these emotions, *indeed constitutive of them.*”²² We both create and discover our moral life through “articulacy.” Without language we would not have access to and not even possess the moral resource of our emotional life, or at least it would exist only in an “inchoate”²³ and much more impoverished form. The more precise and richer our language, the more fulfilling and vibrant our emotional, and so our moral, life. Not only does language enable us to pick out our feelings, but it can and does also shape, grow, and even transform them. We are “language animals . . . stuck with language,”²⁴ and through language we create and discover our authentic self which possesses a transcendental character. What Taylor leaves open is whether or not the distinctive ways of living life authentically and well are necessarily commensurable: “There may be different kinds of human realization which are really incommensurable. . . . I think this is a real possibility, but I doubt if it is true.”²⁵ At another point he argues that we ought to begin by assuming, until shown otherwise, that our worldviews are indeed commensurable rather than nothing more than insular enclaves of distinct worldviews where the best we can do is to tolerate each other’s differences; to believe otherwise is to pre-shrink the world before putting forth efforts to see it in richer, and more complex and satisfying forms.

While Taylor puts ultimate stock in articulacy—he writes, “language is constitutive of feelings”—this articulation goes beyond simply the prose language of words and letters and, rather, is broadly construed by Taylor as including ritual, music, and visual symbols.²⁶ Still, there is something exclusive and elitist about his ethics of authenticity, and in

a way that goes against some of our strongly held intuitions. It seems right that the more precise and richer our language, the fuller, more complex, and fulfilling our moral lives; but language surely cannot be the only way for accessing, nurturing, and developing our genuine feelings. Li envisions the genuine heart-mind as existing fully formed at birth: “As for the child-like heart-mind, free of all falsehood and entirely genuine, it is the original heart-mind at the very beginning of the first thought.”²⁷ When Li Zhi writes of writing, he speaks of “spewing” (*pen* 噴), “spitting” (*tuō* 唾), and “pouring” (*sū* 訴) out one’s feelings.²⁸ These feelings exist within the metaphorical child-like heart-mind *prior* to language and culture. Young children who have but a weak grasp of language are just one obvious example of those who potentially enjoy a rich and powerful inner life of joy, spontaneity, and playfulness, and possibly more so than a great many fully articulate adults. When Li insists that we *preserve* our “genuine heart-mind,” it is this natural spontaneity and playfulness that he is pointing us to and urging us to *pour forth*, rather than *forging* our feelings with the tools of language. In Li’s ethics we find room for the very young to live vibrant and fully good lives, and not simply the very young, but anyone whose way of interacting with the world is more through intuition outside of language rather than through symbol, ritual, image, or word.

One might point out that Li is terribly naïve and susceptible to critique by thinkers such as Derrida or Foucault, or many other thinkers of our contemporary times, who believe, too simply put, that our feelings are wholly shaped and mediated by culture. But one cannot fairly critique Li Zhi in such terms, which strictly divide Nature from culture or as one scholar aptly phrases it, “conceive[s] of nature in contrast to all human culture.”²⁹ Li Zhi’s idea of a pure and transcendental source, the child-like heart-mind, for moral knowledge finds itself as one part of a long lineage within the Confucian tradition. Mengzi holds some version of such an idea (i.e., the “four sprouts” *si duan* 四端), as does Wang Yangming (i.e., “pure knowing” *liangzhi* 良知). Within this tradition, as within much of Chinese culture, we find a sophisticated and richly developed conception of culture as a natural development and continuation of Nature. For example, traditionally, Chinese characters were conceived of as direct reflections of features of the natural world, such as bird footprints or the patterns on tortoise shells: Nature is a “‘cultivated nature,’ a nature that is part of human culture.”³⁰ To different degrees Confucian thinkers such as Mengzi, Wang Yangming, and Li Zhi conceive of our feelings and thoughts as formed prior to, rather than wholly formed by, the influence of culture.

A Li Zhi-inflected ethics of genuineness or authenticity would give rightful place to what is all too often ignored and dismissed as too naïve

to have faith in within our modern ethical discourse: the truly natural and pure. In Li we find powerful resources for developing an ethics of genuineness that takes absolutely seriously the ideas of playfulness, spontaneity, a purity of love—or a raw sense of terror and horror at the grotesque—existing prior to language and culture. Considering Li's writings will lead us even more fruitfully to develop the fine complexities and nuances of a higher ground in our definition of genuineness: we may come to see that perhaps some feelings require language for us to fully develop, others come to us fully formed prior to any form of language. At the very least, Li Zhi's view raises the plausible possibility that a number of critically important feelings and sensibilities exist in much more fully developed forms—or are more universal in nature—than contemporary philosophy recognizes.³¹ This is an idea, I think, often true to our own experiences, and a fascinating one surely worthy of deep and sustained exploration and development.

VI. CONCLUSION

In concluding his *The Ethics of Authenticity* Taylor writes:

understanding our moral sources can count, and once again, the polarized debate between boosters and knockers threatens to deprive us of a crucial resource. That's why a work of retrieval is worthwhile. There is a battle for *hearts and minds* in which it has a role to play. . . . But it is also true that this battle of ideas is inextricably bound up, part source and part result, with political struggles about the modes of social organization. Given the importance of our *institutions* in generating and sustaining an atomist and instrumentalist stance, it could not be otherwise.³²

In light of these final remarks, one might wish that Li Zhi had a more developed interest in and understanding of the role social structures—such as institutions and modes of social organization, or even technology and science—play in dampening and fettering, or liberating and nurturing, our native sense for genuine self-expression. Li reflects little if at all on such subjects. There are other neo-Confucians who do. The early 20th century great social reformer and thinker Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), especially in his *One-World Philosophy* (*Datong shu* 大同書), offers one example of a thinker who is sensitive to the ways social structures can constrain or enhance our moral lives.³³

While Li overlooks the role social structures and institutions play in narrowing or facilitating our hopes for genuine self-expression, what he does attend to he does so with great complexity, subtlety, and acuity. Li's

genius lies in how he so adeptly, adroitly, and powerfully reforms and reshapes the world of *writing*, through writing. He does so by intensely scrutinizing and finely reworking the most minute and most subtle details of classical references and genres and in choosing, casting, and crafting particular words and phrases. Through writing and reading we *pour forth* and *retrieve* feelings that exist within a Nature that Li sees as part and parcel of our social world. By doing so, both ourselves and others can find significant interlocutors who also speak from the “child-like heart-mind,” and in this way we deepen our access to and further strengthen our natural and genuine intuitions.

In our on-going, local, and fragile efforts at shaping and re-shaping a vibrant conception of the genuine—our struggles daily to live the noble ideal “to thine own self be true”³⁴—the story, the essay, the poem matters, or *can* matter, profoundly. Li’s *A Book to Burn*, its publication story with which we began *this* book, is in large part a collection of his personal letters. In Li’s time, and perhaps even in our time and place, letters and other forgotten, or yet to be created, genres mattered and matter too. How we write and what we write, how we read and what we read—its sometimes seemingly inconsequential details—these indeed create one of the more potent and creative spaces within which we can ceaselessly re-imagine and forge our distinctive lives. My book has aimed at providing a sketch of the writer Li Zhi—or of Zhuowu—and his writings that describes and argues Li is most centrally concerned with an ethics of expression of genuine feelings; but what I too hope to have convinced some readers is that in Li Zhi—and I would suggest within the wider, fervent, and passionate discourse of 16th century, late-Ming China—we find a thinker who is a creative source for meaningful, important, and what in many ways in our time are relatively neglected insights concerning an ethics of genuineness, the virtue of desire, the proper meaning of what our modern culture has rightly identified as “one of the important potentialities of human life.”³⁵

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“A Sketch of Zhuowu: Written in Yunnan”

(*Zhuowu lunlüe: dianzhong zuo*
卓吾論略：滇中作)¹

Kong Ruogu² 孔若谷 said, “I am old enough to have met the Layman Zhuowu 卓吾居士 and I am able to provide some general comments about him. The Layman is known by many names. ‘Zhuowu’ is simply one of them. The character 卓³ is not pronounced in just one way. In everyday conversation the Layman pronounces it according to the standard reading (i.e., ‘zhuo’). When he is serving as an official, and his name is recorded in the official records, fellow officials pronounce it like the standard reading of the character 篤 (i.e., ‘du’).⁴ Even in his own natal home in the countryside,⁵ some say ‘Du’ and others say ‘Zhuo’ without coming to any final agreement.”

The Layman said, “In my local dialect, 卓 and 篤 are pronounced the same. Country folks cannot make the distinction and so refer to me using either pronunciation.”

I responded, “You can change this. Only it will cost you a fortune to have the block engraver down in Ironsmith Alley straighten it out.”

The Layman laughed and said, “You think so? You want me to exchange something useful for something that’s useless?⁶ But, now without a doubt I am Zhuo. And I am also Du. But if you address me as ‘Zhuo’ (‘outstanding’), right now I cannot measure up. And if you address me as ‘Du’ (‘genuine’), right now I don’t measure up to that either. How would I go about changing what I don’t measure up to for something else that I don’t measure up to?”

Li Zhi is still addressed as both “Zhuo” and “Du.” The Layman was born on the 30th day of the 10th lunar month of the Dinghai year in the Jiajing reign of the Glorious Ming.⁷ When he was young, his mother (*née* Xu), passed away and he was orphaned.⁸ Nobody knows who raised him. When he reached the age of seven *sui* he studied under his father, Bai Zhaigong 白齋公⁹ and learned to read books, chant poetry, and practice ritual ceremony. When he was 12 *sui* he wrote the essay “Discourse on the Old Farmer and the Old Gardener.”¹⁰

The Layman said, “At this time, I already understood the questions asked by Fan Chi¹¹ when he encountered the old man shouldering a pole with a basket hanging from it.¹² The superior person Qiu Yiji¹³ could not bear to hear such views and so he said, ‘What a petty man is Fan Xu.’ We know at least this about Kongzi.”

When he completed his essay, his fellow students praised the work. The multitudes exclaimed, “What a fine son Bai Zhaigong has!”

The Layman said, “Although I was quite young, I already had realized that my groundless opinions were not worthy of the compliments being paid to my father. Moreover these compliments were much too vulgar and had nothing to do with the truth of the matter. Those people said I was clever with words and when I grew up I would perhaps be skilled at writing prose and poetry. Through such writing I would snatch the wealth and honors of this world and save us from poverty and low estate. They did not know my father did not think this way and was not like this at all. What sort of person was my father? His height reached to seven feet, his eyes did not wander carelessly about. Although extremely poor, from time to time he would suddenly remove my mother, Madame Dong’s,¹⁴ earrings in order to help hasten along a friend’s nuptials. My Mother Dong never stopped him. My father being such a man, could one really offer him compliments in terms valued by the vulgar world?”

When Zhuowu was a bit older, he often found himself confused and unsettled. He studied the commentaries and annotations, but did not critically examine himself. He was unable to carve the teachings of the master Zhu Xi deeply upon his heart. He blamed himself, and wished to abandon his studies. But with a great deal of time on his hands and nothing for him to do to pass the days he sighed and said, “All of this is nothing but play-acting. My studies are no more than plagiarizing and superficial reading. Not even the examiners understand each and every detail of Kongzi’s teachings!”

And so he sought out the most popular and widely read eight-legged essays of his time and he recited several pieces each day. By the time of the examinations he had memorized nearly five hundred essays. When the examination topic was given, he merely copied, transcribed, and recorded what he had memorized. He received high middle honors.¹⁵

The Layman said, “This luck of mine could not be better. What’s more, my father is elderly, and each of my younger brothers and sisters has reached the age of marriage.”

And so he accepted an official position,¹⁶ welcomed and cared for his father, and completed arrangements for the marriages of each of his younger brothers and sisters.

The Layman said, “Upon first requesting an official position, I set my hopes on a convenient place like Jiangnan. I did not intend, instead, to travel 10,000 *li* to Gongcheng 共城,¹⁷ and leave my father and cause him to worry. Even so, Gongcheng was where the Song period official Li Zhicai¹⁸ spent his days, and the master Shao Yong¹⁹ considered the place the *Nest of Peace and Happiness*. Shao resided in Luoyang and traveled as far as 1000 *li* to study the Dao with Zhicai. If through me, my father and son can come to hear the Dao, even being separated by 10,000 *li* will be fine. I’ve also heard master Shao threw himself into his studies and late in life did attain understanding. It was not until he was 40 that he returned to Luoyang and began to arrange for his marriage. Had he not heard the Dao, he never would have married.

I am 29 years old and already have mourned the death of my eldest son,²⁰ grieving most deeply. I have not immersed myself in the Dao but instead, only have wallowed in feelings of grief. When I observe the ways of Shao Yong I am deeply ashamed!”

The *Nest of Peace and Happiness* is located up above Hundred Springs on Mount Sumen. The Layman was born in Quan,²¹ and it was an auspicious place for the Chan Buddhist Master of Wenling.

The Layman said, “I am a person of Wenling. I should adopt the style ‘The Layman of Wenling.’”

One day when wandering above Hundred Springs he said, “I was born in Quan and have served as an official in Quan. Quan and I are destined to be together!”

And so he refers to himself as “The Man of Hundred Springs “ and also styles himself “The Layman of Hundred Springs.” During his five years in Hundred Springs²² he languished and never did hear the Dao.²³ In the end he was appointed to the Academy in Nanjing and departed.²⁴

Several months later, he received news that his father Bai Zhaigong had died.²⁵ He observed the traditional rituals of mourning and traveled east returning to his natal home. At that time, the Wo Kou pirates²⁶ were plundering the coasts and the oceans were all in flames.²⁷ The Layman had to travel at night and hide during the day. It was more than six months before he arrived at his natal home.²⁸ Even so, because of the unrest he was still not able to devote himself to the business of a filial son. In his mourning garb he led his younger brothers and nephews. Day and night he climbed the parapets and sounded the watchman’s

rattle in order to prepare the guards. At the foot of the city wall it rained arrows and stones. No amount of money could purchase rice or corn.²⁹ The Layman's family members numbered about thirty, and they were barely able to survive. After the three-year mourning period was completed, he brought his entire family to the capital as he desired to avoid the difficulties in Quanzhou.³⁰

He lived in the official accommodations in the capital for over ten months but did not obtain any official position.³¹ His bags by then were emptied of provisions, but he was able to pay for his accommodations by taking in pupils. After more than ten months had passed, he finally did receive an official appointment.³² He was honored as an Erudite of the Imperial Academy, a position of the same rank he formally had held in Nanjing. Soon afterward, an announcement arrived notifying Li of the death of his paternal grandfather Zhuxuan.³³ On this same day, the Layman's second eldest son also fell ill and died in the official accommodations. I too heard this news.

With a sigh I said, "Alas! Is life not bitter? Whoever said to be appointed an official is a source of happiness? Doesn't an official like the Layman suffer even greater bitterness?" I grieved for his losses.

When I entered the house to offer my condolences, I found there was nothing unusual about the Layman's expression.

He said to me, "I have something to say. And I would like to talk with you about it. My great grandparents passed away more than fifty years ago. I did not bury them at that time because I was impoverished and had no means to obtain a burial plot. This is a great violation of custom. I fear that I will be picked out by heaven as one who is outrageously lacking in filial piety. A filial son or grandson must find his parents a final place of rest. I never have heard of anyone who was considered filial because he chose first to protect himself from wind and rain. I fear that heaven and the spirits above will never be willing to leave an auspicious burial plot for one as lacking in filial piety as I. Nothing can atone for my crime. This time, when I return to my natal home, I must find a resting place for all three generations. I would like to leave my family in Henei,³⁴ and divide the money I've set aside for the funeral expenses. I intend to use half this amount to purchase a field so that my family can till the land to grow food to eat. I will take the other half and return to my natal home. Then I can achieve what I must do. There is one thing, though. I am simply afraid my wife will not go along with my plans. If, when I walk in to talk with her, she does not go along with my wishes, I ask you to work at persuading her!"

The Layman then entered and, pacing back and forth, he spoke his mind.

Madame Huang³⁵ responded, "It's not that what you say is untrue, but my mother is elderly. She is widowed and lives for me. Now I am

willing to remain here, but she weeps for me day and night, to the point that she is blinded in both eyes. If she sees that I have not returned, she will certainly die.”

Before she had finished speaking, tears came down like rain, but the Layman remained unmoved. Madame knew that in the end she would not be able to change his mind.

She held back her tears, changed her expression, and admitting her faults said, “Alright. Alright. First, though, when you see my mother, tell her I am as fine as ever and in good health. There is nothing to worry about. She will see me another time. I will work hard and help out with matters. I will not return, and I dare not complain.”

He then packed up his bags, and asked a family member to arrange to buy land and plant seeds according to his wishes.

At this time, a powerful but corrupt official was in office. When money wasn’t coming into his hands, he would scare the wealthy families. Declaring the importance of the canal, he used up all the water from the springs to feed the canals and did not permit even half a drop to be diverted. The Layman went to meet with this individual. Although the Layman emotionally exhausted himself and repeatedly pleaded, his requests were not granted. But because the Layman himself had only a few *mu*, the official said he could have water diverted just to his fields.

The Layman replied, “Alas! Heavens! How could I bear to sit and see the entire city and 10,000 *qing*³⁶ of land dry up, and only my few *mu* of fields irrigated and flourishing! I cannot accept this at all. I beg you to heed my request!”

He then returned to his natal home.

That year’s harvest was extremely meager. The plot of land acquired by the Layman barely yielded a few pecks of weeds. His eldest daughter had long endured difficult times. She ate the weeds as if she were eating grain. His second and third daughters were unable to gulp down the weeds and consequently one and then the other, so young in life, fell ill and died.

An old woman came forward with an announcement, declaring, “The people are starving. The officials wish to distribute grain. I hear that the official who will be in charge is the judge Deng Shiyang 鄧石陽. He has known the Layman for a long time. You can ask him.”

Madame responded, “There are no affairs outside the home for a wife. I cannot ask him. And moreover, if he really is an old friend of my husband’s, why would he wait for me to ask him!”

The gentleman Deng indeed did send along a portion of his own salary as a vice commissioner. He also immediately wrote and had delivered a letter to a colleague seeking further assistance. In each of these two matters, he took great care and attended to every detail. Madame

took half of the money he sent and bought grain. With the other half she bought cotton thread and wove cloth. For three years there was no deficiency in food or clothing and this was due to the efforts of the gentleman Deng.

The Layman said, "My time for mourning had now passed. My family's burial matters were completed, thus bringing good fortune for three generations; I was free of any of the concerns of an official. I turned my head toward the horizon, and nothing was in my mind but thoughts of my wife and children who were 10,000 *li* away. I then returned to Gongcheng. When I walked through the doorway and saw my family, I was deeply joyful. I asked about my two younger daughters, and only then discovered that both had died a few months earlier even before I had begun my journey back to my natal home."

At this time, Madame Huang's tears were already at the tips of her eyelashes. When she saw the Layman's expression alter, she acted according to custom and asked about the burial matters and her mother's well-being.

The Layman replied, "That evening my wife and I sat across from each other the entire night; it was truly like a dream. I knew that my wife's memories were vivid and her feelings were genuine. And so I corralled my feelings and controlled them. Only now do I feel about that night like one of the teeth on the bottom of my platform clogs has broken off!"³⁷

Once he reached the capital, he took up an official position within the Ministry of Rites. A person remarked to the Layman, "The poverty endured by a government servant is even greater than the poverty endured within the Imperial Academy. Although you are able to bear it, are you the only one who has not heard the saying, 'Wherever can one go without coming upon poverty?'"

He felt ridiculed; the man did not know when to stop.

The Layman responded, "What I refer to as poverty is not the poverty of this world. As for poverty, there is nobody who is more impoverished than one who has not heard the Dao. As for joy, there is nobody who is as happy as one who knows where to rest. For more than ten years I have been hastily traveling from north to south all for the sake of family matters. I completely forgot the thoughts of peace and joy which I had set my heart on while in Wenling and Baiquan. I hear that those in the capital who are teachers are excellent. I shall find one and study under him."

The person responded, "Your nature is too narrow. You often examine your own faults, and also frequently examine the faults of others. If you hear the Dao, you will certainly become broader in your outlook."

The Layman responded, "That is so. I surely am too narrow in my nature."

Consequently, he began to refer to himself as “Father of Vastness” and “The-Layman-the-Father-of-Vastness.”

During the five springs the Layman served as an official,³⁸ he immersed his heart and mind in the mysteries of the Dao. He regretted he was not able to bring Bai Zhaigong back from the land of the dead and longed for him often and deeply. And so he referred to himself also as “The-Layman-Longing-for-Zhai.”³⁹

One day he told me, “You have known me for a long time. When I die could you please write an inscription for me? If I die in the hands of friends, then do as my friends instruct. If I die on the road, then definitely throw me in the waters or cremate me.⁴⁰ Under no circumstances should you leave my bones for others to take care of. There is no need to write an inscription in the second case. If you could write a short biography, that would be fine.”

I responded, “How can I claim to really understand the Layman? At another time, some Gu Hutou⁴¹ will come along and truly know him.”

Consequently I have written an essay offering a general sketch of his life. Afterwards, I traveled far and wide and did not see the Layman for a long time. And so from his time in Nanjing onward,⁴² I have not recorded anything at all. Some say the Layman died in Nanjing. Others say he is still in southern Yunnan and has not yet died.⁴³

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“On the Child-like Heart-Mind”

(*Tongxin shuo* 童心說)¹

In the concluding remarks to his preface for the *Western Chamber*² the Farmer of the Dragon Ravine stated: “Those who understand me shall not say I still possess the child-like heart-mind.”³

The child-like heart-mind is the genuine heart-mind. If one denies the child-like heart-mind, then he denies the genuine heart-mind. The child-like heart-mind is free of all falsehood and entirely genuine; it is the original mind⁴ at the very beginning of the first thought. To lose the child-like heart-mind is to lose the genuine heart-mind. To lose the genuine mind is to lose the genuine self. A person who is not genuine will never regain that with which he began.

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

The Principles of the Way that one hears and sees all come from extensive reading and acquaintance with moral principles, but did not the sages of antiquity read books? When they did not read books, their child-like heart-mind was secure and preserved; when they studied extensively, they protected their child-like heart-mind and kept themselves from losing it. They are unlike those students for whom the more they read and become acquainted with moral principles, the more they obstruct their child-like heart-mind. Now, if by extensively reading and acquainting oneself with moral principles students obstruct their child-like heart-mind, then why did the sages so often write books and establish teachings that obstruct what these students do? Since the child-like heart-mind is obstructed, then when one speaks, one's words will not come from one's heart-mind. When one manifests such words by carrying out governmental affairs, then his governing of affairs will have no foundation. When one employs such words in writing compositions, one's compositions will fail to express the truth. If the beauty does not come from within, if the brightness is not born from true sincerity,⁵ then in the end even the attempt to create one sentence of virtuous words⁶ will fail. What is the reason for this? Because when the child-like heart-mind is obstructed, the Principles of the Way that come from outside the self become one's heart-mind.

Now, if the heart-mind is comprised of the Principles of the Way, what one hears and sees, and what is spoken are all words of the Principles of the Way; they are not the spontaneous words from the child-like heart-mind. Though these words may be artful, what do they have to do with oneself? How could this lead to anything other than phony people speaking phony words, enacting phony actions, and producing phony writings? Once a person is a phony, then everything he does is phony. From this, we can see that if one speaks phony words with a phony person, then the phony person will be pleased. If one speaks of phony affairs with a phony person, then the phony person will be pleased. If one discusses phony literature with a phony person, then the phony person will be pleased. When everything is phony, then nowhere will there be anyone who is displeased. When the entire theater is filled with phonies, how can a short person standing in the middle of the audience discriminate between good and bad?⁷

Even the most exquisite writings in the world can be destroyed by phony people and then cannot be read by later generations. Is this so rare an occurrence? What is the reason for this? The most exquisite literature in the world all comes from the child-like heart-mind. As long as the child-like heart-mind is constantly preserved, then the Principles of the Way, which enter in through the eyes and the ears, will not come to dominate what is within oneself. Then no age will lack great literary

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

Why must verse necessarily be in the unregulated style of classical poetry like those in the *Selections of Refined Literature*?⁸ Why must prose necessarily be like that written in the pre-Qin period? Writing evolved through the ages and became the literature of the Six Dynasties, changed and became the new regulated verse of the Tang. These changed again and developed into fantastic tales,⁹ changed yet again and became play-scripts¹⁰ which developed into Yuan comedies, which in turn evolved into the *Western Chamber*¹¹ and the *Water Margin*,¹² and now has become the eight-legged essay¹³ of today. All the most exquisite literature from the past through the present cannot be discussed in terms of the tendencies of the ages that preceded or followed them. Therefore, I am drawn to the spontaneous writings of those with a child-like heart-mind. Why speak of the *Six Classics*! Why speak of the *Analects* and the *Mengzi*!

Now, the words one finds in the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi*, either express the excessive praise and reverence of official historians or the inordinate praise of loyal subjects. If they are neither of these, then they are what inexperienced followers and dim-witted disciples have written down of their teachers' sayings. In some cases, what they recorded had an introduction but lacked a conclusion. In other cases, we have a conclusion but are without the introduction. The disciples just wrote down what they happened to see, but scholars of later generations did not critically examine these writings. They declared these books came from the mouths of sages and established them as classics. Who knows whether or not these writings really are the words of the sages?

Even if these words did come from the sages, they were spoken to address a particular need, much like the case of prescribing a medication for a specific illness. The sages simply attended to specific situations and applied certain methods in order to save this dim-witted disciple or that inexperienced follower. While a particular medicine might cure one particular phony's illness, such prescriptions are difficult to administer to all patients. Given this, how could it be fitting to take these writings as the ultimate standard for thousands of generations? And so, the *Six Classics*, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi* have become nothing more than crib sheets for those belonging to the School of Principle, a fountainhead for the phonies. Certainly these texts cannot shed light on matters by speaking directly from the child-like heart-mind. Oh! Where can I find a genuine great sage who has not lost his child-like heart-mind and have a word with him about culture?¹⁴

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“Miscellaneous Matters”

(*Za shuo* 雜說)¹

*Moon Prayer Pavilion*² and the *Western Chamber*³ are from the “skills of Nature” (*hua gong* 化工). *The Lute (Pipa ji* 琵琶記)⁴ is created by the “skills of an artisan” (*hua gong* 畫工). As for those who use the “skills of an artisan,” they use these abilities to seize the art of the heavens and earth. But who among these people knows that heaven and earth are in fact “without skill” (*wu gong* 無工) or mere technique.

Now as for what the heavens give life to, what the earth nurtures, and the varieties of vegetation found everywhere, people see this and delight in it. When people search for evidence of the workmanship in these creations, no matter how they search they cannot find a trace. Could it be they cannot discern the workmanship because their wisdom is so lacking?

One should know: the Creator⁵ is without mere technique (*wu gong*). Even if a person embodies spirit-like sageliness,⁶ still, he will not be able to discern and know the whereabouts of the skills of true art. But then, is there anyone who is able to pick out the techniques? Having considered our topic at some length we can say: although artisanship may be clever, it has already sunk to the state of being second hand.⁷ As for our world of writing, it is surely something the human heart—ages past or our times—has and does grieve!⁸

And then too I have heard this said: As for feet that chase the winds and trail the thunder, they will surely not be found amidst the common herd.⁹ As for the sage whose sound echoes in the world and whose energy is sought after by others,¹⁰ he is surely not found among pedantic scholars who dwell on line and word.¹¹ As for writings that float over water,¹² they are surely not found amid ordinary tales. If the story line is tightly

written; the couplets are in perfect rhyme; the writing follows set principles and is in harmony with models and systems; beginning and ending echo each other; abstract and concrete are developed synchronously; all these various illusions¹³ are used to discuss literature. But all of these cannot be used to discuss the most exquisite literature under heaven.¹⁴

Northern style variety plays¹⁵ and the burlesque plays¹⁶ are first class in entertainment. And the *Western Chamber* and *Moon Prayer Pavilion*: what traces of skill and technique do they possess? Now as for skill, no skill can compare to that in *The Lute*. This Mr. Gao¹⁷ has certainly fully exerted his efforts in exhibiting his skillfulness and reached the very ends of his own talent. Moreover when the author displayed the depth of his cleverness and fully exploited his techniques, he exerted all his energy. Therefore, when the words end on the page, so too does the meaning. When the words come to an end, the flavor dissipates and vanishes. In the past I have picked up *The Lute* and plucked its tunes: one strum and I sighed, another strum and I was moved, a third strum and I found I now felt nothing. What is the reason for this? Could it be that it seems genuine but is not genuine, and so the tunes do not deeply impress upon one's heart? It may well be although Mr. Gao's cleverness is exquisite, the strength of his energy is only sufficient to penetrate to the place between the skin and bone marrow.¹⁸ Is it any wonder that his ability to move people is nothing more than this?

The *Western Chamber* and *Moon Prayer Pavilion* are simply not like this. I think that in this universe surely there are people who are so delightful, who, like these authors, approach things with the powers of an artist, and whose skill and cleverness is truly unfathomable.

Moreover, as for those in this world who truly are able to write, in comparison to Mr. Gao, in the beginning all possess no intention to create literature. Their bosoms are filled with such and such indescribable and wondrous events. In their throats are such and such things that they desire to spit out but do not dare to. On the tip of their tongue, time and time again, they have countless things they wish to say but for which there is no proper place to speak them. These accumulate to an unimaginable height and are stored for so long that in time the force of these thoughts cannot be extinguished.

Suddenly he sees a scene and his feelings are aroused. Something strikes his eye and his sighs multiply. He snatches another's wine glass and drowns his accumulated burdens. He pours out the grievances within his heart, and for thousands of years after, people are moved by his ill fortune. As he already has spewed out jade and spit out pearls, illuminated the Milky Way, and created the most heavenly writings, he then becomes self-satisfied, goes crazy, and howls loudly, sheds tears and cries with sorrow, and is unable to stop himself. He would rather cause

his readers and listeners to gnash and grind their teeth, and desire to kill him and to slice him up. In the end he cannot bear to hide his writings in a famous mountain¹⁹ or to throw it in the waters or the fires.

When I look at these jottings I can begin to imagine what sort of person he was. In his times, he must have had great aspirations that were frustrated by rulers, subjects, and friends; and so, this writer relied on the karmic relation between husband and wife to develop his views. Thereupon, in these writings one delights in the rarity of a great beauty,²⁰ envies Student Zhang's²¹ remarkable opportunities, compares the countless ways the clouds and rain drift toward and away,²² and then laments people of today are so mundane, nothing more than a pile of dirt. The funniest thing is this: he takes the gentlest blowing of the breeze, the most trifling of affairs, and makes them equal, even surpass, the great works of Zhang Xu,²³ Zhang Dian, Xi Zhi,²⁴ and Xianzhi.²⁵

Yao Fu 堯夫²⁶ said: "Yao and Shun bowed and offered three cups of wine; Tang 湯²⁷ and Wu 武²⁸ conquered with one match of chess." Now conquering and putting to death, or the ritual of bowing and giving way, these are lofty matters; but if one merely looks at the situation as a single cup of wine, or a single match of chess, then what one sees is extraordinarily minute!

Alas! As for the heroes from the past through the present, they generally are all of this sort. In the midst of what seems small they see the vast; amidst the vast they see the small. By lifting the tip of a feather one is able to establish a Buddhaland. By sitting within the smallest mote of dust one is able to turn the wheel of the great Dharma. This is from the highest principle and has nothing to do with discussion as mere play-acting. If you doubt this, sit in the midst of a courtyard under the moonlight, when in the stillness of autumn the leaves have all fallen, alone in one's study, by oneself with not a soul to rely upon; try out and pick up the *Lute Heart* (*Qin Xin* 琴心).²⁹ Pluck it once, then strum it. The inexhaustible treasures it contains are unimaginable; the author's skill and craft is everywhere apparent.

Ahh! As for that sort of writer, how ever can I meet him!

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Notes

CHAPTER ONE — INTRODUCTION

1. Following the Judeo-Christian calendar, Li Zhi was born November 23, 1527. See Rong 1957: 18. The Ming period dates from 1368 to 1644.

2. For further discussion on Yuan Zhongdao, see Chapter One, note 29.

3. For further discussion on Jiao's life and works, see Ch'ien 1986.

4. For discussion on Tang's writings, see Chapter One, note 45.

5. There exists a rich and growing body of scholarship on the subject in the fields of history and literature. See, for example, M. Huang 2001, especially pp. 23–56, Epstein 2001, Burnett 2000, and Ko 1994.

6. For a brief discussion on periodization of the Ming, see Brook 1998: 265, n. 16.

7. The Six Dynasties (3rd through 6th century CE) is also a period where we find intense interest in the eccentric, feelings, and spontaneity. For discussion on this period, see, for example, Mather 2002 and Y. Tang 2000. I would like to thank Matthew Wells for the latter reference.

8. For discussion on the late-Ming as a high point in Chinese history on the subject of the individual, see, for example, de Bary 1991: 203–270.

9. *A Book to Burn* was first published most likely in 1590, and then again as a slightly expanded version in 1600. For further discussion on this subject, see Chapter One, note 19. For extensive bibliographic information on *A Book to Burn* and *An Addendum to A Book to Burn*, as well as Li's larger body of work, see H. Chan 1980: 163–169. Also, see *Li Zhi yanjiu cankao ziliao*.

10. The term *xin* 心 is best literally translated as the “heart-mind.” However, when context allows, although also a dissatisfactory choice I opt for the less clumsy translations of “heart” or “mind.”

11. Throughout most of pre-modern China and certainly in Li Zhi's time, children were considered one year old, or one *sui*, at birth.

12. See “Author's Preface” (*Zixu* 自序), *FS*, p. 1.

13. See Brook 1998.

14. The “orthodox” Confucian school of principle (*lixue* 理學), the Cheng-Zhu (程朱) school, bears Zhu Xi’s name. The classics central to the Civil Service Examinations from the 13th through the 19th century are ones Zhu Xi canonized—these are the Four Books including the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), the *Mengzi* (孟子), the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸). For introduction, a translation, and Zhu Xi’s commentary on these books, see Gardner 2007. For studies on Zhu Xi, see W. Chan 1986, W. Chan 1989, Gardner 1990, H. Tillman 1992, and Ivanhoe 2000: 43–58.

15. Li Zhi relies extensively on the notion of the “genuine” (*zhen* 真) most often in regard to the “genuine mind” but also in many places to the “genuine person” (*zhen ren* 真人). I translate the term as “genuine,” rather than “true” or “authentic,” to capture Li’s emphasis that the *zhen* derives from the right source—the child-like heart-mind—and expresses sincerity.

16. See “On the Child-like Heart-mind” (*Tongxin shuo* 童心說), *FS*, p. 98.

17. For a socio-historical study of Macheng county in late imperial China and Li Zhi’s place within this history, see Rowe 2007.

18. The county stood in what is today Hubei province.

19. Traditional scholarship dates the publication of the first edition of *A Book to Burn* to 1590. I follow this dating. However, a number of scholars have disputed the publication date and argue the first edition was published in 1592. See L. Huang 2002 and Suzuki 1935. For further discussion on the publication history of *A Book to Burn*, see Handler-Spitz 2009: 16.

20. See H. Chan 1980: 163–164.

21. For a study of woodblock printing technology in the late-Ming, see Chow 2004, especially pages 19–56 for discussion on paper, woodblocks, and cost of publishing. Also, see Chia 2002, especially pp. 149–254.

22. His wife bears him four sons and three daughters, but only one daughter survives to adulthood.

23. For biographical entries on both brothers, see *Zhongguo renming da zidian*: 533, and Rowe 2007: 94–95. Both were members of the Taizhou 泰州 school of Confucianism. For discussion on the Taizhou school, see Chapter One, note 35.

24. For further description of the pavilions and temples, see Rowe 2007: 95.

25. See “The Three Teachings All Return to Confucianism” (*Sanjiao gui rushuo* 三教歸儒說), *XFS*, p. 75.

26. See “Letter to Zeng Jiquan” (*Yu Zeng Jiquan* 與曾繼泉), *FS*, p. 52, and *CTJ*, preface.

27. Or, Kongfuzi 孔夫子. Perhaps better known in the West under his Latinized name, “Confucius.”

28. See “Commenting on Kongzi’s Image While in the Cloister of the Flourishing Buddha” (*Ti Kongzi xiang yu Zhifo yuan* 題孔子像於芝佛院), *XFS*, p. 100.

29. See Rong 1957: 69. For discussion on the Yuan brothers and the Gongan school of literature, see Chou 1988. For brief biographies of the three Yuan brothers, see *DMB*: 1635–1638.

30. See Rong 1973: 27.

31. See Chou 1988: 21–22.

32. See Yuan Zhongdao 1976: 22b. Translation by Chou 1988: 75, adapted.

33. For a biographical sketch on Geng Dingxiang, see *DMB*: 718–721.

34. For an introduction to Wang Yangming's life, see Tu 1976. For a translation of select writings, see W. Chan 1963b, and Ivanhoe 2009.

35. The Taizhou school was a deeply influential movement in 16th-century China. Li was one of the more prominent members. There exists one other English language monograph devoted to a member of the Taizhou school. See Dimberg 1974. See *MRXA* for description of 25 thinkers in relation to the Taizhou school including thinkers such as Lin Jun 林俊, Luo Rufang 羅汝芳, Wang Bi 王襍, Geng Dingxiang, Geng Dingli, and Jiao Hong 焦竑. For English translation of selections from this text, see Ching 1987: 165–199. For further discussion on the Taizhou school, also see de Bary 1970a: 145–248, especially pp. 171–178, de Bary 1991: 155–202, Shimada 1949, Y. Cheng 1996, and Peng 2005.

36. For a brief biography of Wang Gen (*hao: Xinzhai* 心齋), see *DMB*: 1382–1385.

37. See *MRXA*, j. 32. Translation by de Bary 1970b: 174.

38. See Jiang 2001. She argues that Li Zhi's *A Book to Burn* and his persecution can be most illuminatingly understood within the context of local politics. I see Jiang's reading as what I have described as "historical." While I agree local politics helps us understand *A Book to Burn*, throughout the chapters I argue the book, and his other writings, present a compelling and powerful ethical vision. For a discussion on the relationship and discussions between Geng and Li, see also J. Xu 2006. For English translation of the article, see J. Xu 2008.

39. See "In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng" (*Da Geng Zhongcheng* 答耿中丞), *FS*, p. 16.

40. See D. Geng 1970: 6.53b, 698. Also, see Rong 1973: 27–28.

41. See Rong 1973: 28.

42. For further details of accusations against Li, see Chapter Two, pp. 39–40.

43. See *Ming Shenzong shilu* 1962: 369.11–12.

44. See Gu, j. 18, n. 2, p. 29b. Translation by Handler-Spitz 2009: 203, adapted.

45. For Tang's writings, see X. Tang 1973.

46. See Y. Lin 1986. Translation by Zeitlan 1994: 128.

47. We also have evidence that Tang was eager to read and sought out a copy of Li's *A Book to Burn*. See Tang's letter to his friend Shi Chuyang dated 1590 in X. Tang 1973: 2.1246.

48. For the relation between Luo and Tang, see Hsia 1970: 249–250. For further discussion on Luo's thought and influence on Li Zhi's views, see Chapter Three, pp. 56–58.

49. See Strassberg 1977.

50. See X. Tang 1965: 1. Translation by Birch 1980: ix. Also, see Owen 1996: 881–882. For studies of *The Peony Pavilion*, see W. Li 1993: 50–64, and Zeitlan 1994. Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–ca. 1646) rewrites *The Peony Pavilion*. See Feng's *The Dream of Love* (*Fengliu meng* 風流夢) in Feng 1996. Feng rounds out the hero, Liu Mengmei's, character in a way that arguably further accentuates the reciprocity of deep feeling between the hero and heroine. For discussion on this play, see W. Li 1993: 52–53, n. 14.

51. See *Mengzi* 2A6.

52. For a discussion on Feng Menglong's concept of *qing*, see Hanan 1981: 75–97, and M. Huang 2001: 36–40. For a brief biography of Feng and reference to his writings, see *DMB*: 450–453.

53. See Chow 2004: 134. For discussion on Li's commentary on the *Water Margin*, see Chapter One, note 66.

54. Coins in this period had holes in the middle.

55. See Feng 1993, vol. 37: 1–3. Translation by Mowry 1983: 12, adapted. The book was most likely published in the 1640s or 1650s, several decades after it was compiled. For discussion on Feng Menglong and *Qingshi* (also referred to as *Qingshi leilüe*), see Hanan 1981: 75–97. For discussion of *qing* in Feng's work, see Hsü 1994.

56. See A. Yu 1997: 109.

57. For a brief discussion of Mei Danran, see Rowe 2007: 98.

58. There are two book-length studies, one in French and the other in German. See Billeter 1979 and Spaar 1984. English language scholarship is limited to a handful of articles, book chapters, and an edited volume. See R. Huang 1981: 189–222, de Bary 1970a, de Bary 1991: 203–270, Jiang 2001, and Rowe 2007: 83–108. For an invaluable edited volume on Li, see H. Chan 1980. Martin Huang in his work on Ming-Qing literature has written extensively on Li Zhi. See, for example, M. Huang 2001. I have greatly benefited from his scholarship. There do exist a number of English language doctoral dissertations on Li Zhi. To the best of my knowledge, the most recent dissertation is Handler-Spitz 2009.

59. For three excellent studies, see Mizoguchi 1971: 39–193, and 1997, Zuo 1994. I have benefited immeasurably from both scholars' works. For the most recent book-length study, see J. Xu 2005.

60. Michael J. Puett convincingly argues that a majority of *historical* studies of Chinese thought employ “evolutionary” models. See Puett 2002. I borrow this insight and show in my work that such models have informed the study of particular *thinkers*, such as Li Zhi.

61. See the works of, for example, Hou Wailu, Shimada Kenji, Wm. Theodore de Bary, Zuo Dongling, and Xu Jianping for scholarship interpreting Li as a “proto-Marxist,” “proto-capitalist,” “proto-individualist,” and as laying the ground for later literary and intellectual developments, respectively.

62. See R. Huang 1981: 189–222.

63. See deBary 1970a: 236, n. 159.

64. See Chapter One, notes 58 and 59. For a relatively recent book on Li Zhi, also see Liu Jilun 1999.

65. Among the best selling authors were Li Zhi and his intimate friends Yuan Hongdao and Jiao Hong. For discussion on the popularity of Li Zhi's books, see Chow 2004: 134.

66. See Z. Li 2009b. For an annotated bibliography of editions of this commentary, see H. Chan 1980: 180–181. For further discussion on the “Li Zhi commentary” and references to important scholarship on the subject, see Rolston 1990: 356–363. For further discussion also see Chow 2004: 134–135.

67. For studies on the literary aspects of Li Zhi's writings, see, for example, Zuo 1994, Epstein 2001, and Handler-Spitz 2009.

68. See Lam 2005.

69. See W. Li 1995b.

70. See Campany 2003. Also, see Swidler 2001, to whom Campany credits the idea of “repertoires.”

71. In scrutinizing Li’s description of characters as an approach for illuminating his ethical vision, I take as inspiration Martha C. Nussbaum’s work and especially her chapter “‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’: Literature and the Moral Imagination” in Nussbaum 1990: 148–167, and *Ivanhoe* 2007: 30–48. Most self-consciously in Chapter Two I treat Li Zhi’s work as a literary text.

72. For analysis of metaphors in Chinese thought, see Munro 1988 and *Ivanhoe* 2000. At least two recent works in Chinese religions benefit in particular from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s study of metaphors. See Slingerland 2003b, especially pp. 21–42, and Campany 2003, especially pp. 288–289. Both Slingerland and Campany study the language of metaphors in a deep sense by examining how the metaphors we use shape the very way we think in Chinese thought or about the subject of religion. For further discussion on metaphor theory, see Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff and Johnson 1999, Lakoff 1987, and Johnson 1987. Also, see Fernandez 1986. For further discussion on my study of metaphors, see Chapter Three, note 25.

73. For Ludwig Wittgenstein’s seminal formulation of the concept, see his *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 65–71. For an English translation, see Wittgenstein 1958: 31–34. Wittgenstein contrasts the search for “family resemblances” to that of finding an “essence.” In much contemporary scholarship, Li Zhi has been interpreted by identifying some essential core or quality of his thought, whether it be “relativism,” “liberal humanism,” “sprouts of capitalism,” or “proto-Marxism.” In Chapter Four, I argue that the looser category of “family resemblances” enables us to more fully access the rigor and richness of his thought.

74. See Peterson 1998a: 746.

75. See Campany 2003: 291. Others in the field of Chinese religions have also noted such problems with what Campany helpfully refers to as “religion holism.” See, for example, Sivin 1978.

76. Here again, I follow the work of Michael Puett. I commit myself to understanding my object of study, the thought of Li Zhi, within its particular time and place and, at the same time, commit to the viability of comparative studies. See Puett 2002: 21–26.

77. See Patton and Ray 2000: 153. Scholars from various perspectives have questioned the viability of comparative religions. For some, the problem with such methods is an epistemological one: Can one ever truly understand the other when the other is so radically different? For others, the problem is a practical one concerned with a scholar’s ability to master quite different traditions and the languages needed to study such traditions. One common way of formulating the latter problem is as a debate between area or historical studies on the one hand, and comparativists on the other. For discussion on the subject, see P. Lee 2007: 100–106. For a thoughtful discussion arguing for a particular approach to the comparative study of religions, see Stalnaker 2006, especially pp. 1–18.

78. For scholarship both applying the method of comparative religions in the study of Chinese thought and examining viable methods for the comparative

study of religion see, for example, Berkson 2005, Campany 1992, Cho 1998, Carr and Ivanhoe 2010, Lewis 2005, Schofer 2005, Stalnaker 2005, Twiss and Gelle 1998, Unno 1999, and Yearley 1990.

79. The Ming period dates from 1368 to 1644; the Qing, from 1644 to 1911. The period from the 14th to 20th century has often been referred to by scholars as “late imperial,” and by others as “early modern” China. For discussion on these two terms, see Brook 1998: 264–265, n. 15.

80. Ling Hon Lam succinctly articulates the range of views in the late-Ming in regard to the specific idea of *qing*. Lam writes, “Given that *qing* in the late imperial discourse was conceived alternately as innate in the self or diffuse with no specific origin, its *entire spectrum* is hardly reducible to interiority.” See Lam 2005: 358, n. 1, italics mine.

81. The character “*ru* 儒,” traditionally translated as “Confucian,” is more aptly rendered as “scholar.” An increasing number of scholars argue that the translation “Confucian” quite misleads us in our understanding of the *Ru* tradition and have opted in their English scholarship to use the term *Ru*. Both translations have their merits and problems and for this book I interchangeably use both. For substantive argument for using the translation *Ru* rather than “Confucian,” see Mark Csikszentmihalyi 2004: 15–22.

82. Nussbaum 1990: 161.

83. See Taylor 1991.

84. See Shakespeare 1987.

CHAPTER TWO — LIFE STORIES (傳)

1. See *FS*, pp. 83–86. See Appendix A in this book for a full and annotated translation of the essay.

2. For illuminating scholarship studying the contributions of “A Sketch of Zhuowu” to the development of the autobiographical form in Chinese literature, see M. Huang 1995: 46, and Wu 1990, especially 19–24. Both argue Li pushes at conventional literary boundaries and transforms the traditional form of the “biography” (*zhuan* 傳) into an autobiographical one, which captures emotions and life within the domestic realm.

3. There exist many primary, and a handful of widely respected secondary, source biographies of Li Zhi. Of the primary sources, two essays are particularly significant. One is our “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” *FS*, pp. 83–86, which is commonly considered Li Zhi’s autobiography. The other is Yuan Zhongdao’s *Biography of Li Zhi* (*Li Wenling zhuan*) in his *Kexuezhai jin jiwen*, a collection of essays, poems, travelogues, and correspondence. See Yuan Zhongdao 1935. Soon after Li’s death, his *A Book to Burn* was published along with Yuan’s biography appended to the preface. The version of Yuan’s biography I cite is one appended to Li Zhi’s *A Book to Burn*, pp. 3–7. For further bibliographic information on Yuan’s *Biography of Li Zhi*, see *DMB*, p. 1638. A third noteworthy primary source biography on Li is a memorial epitaph by Wang Benke 汪本軻 (Wang Keshou 汪可守, *jinshi*, Wanli period). Both Yuan and Wang’s biographies can be found in Pan 1977. In addition to these three important primary sources, of interest are substantive references to Li’s life

by Ming and Qing literati such as Jiao Hong 焦竑, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, and Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), among others. For a collection of more than twenty Ming-Qing biographical accounts of Li Zhi, see *Li Zhi yanjiu cankao ziliao*. I have not seen this resource, but rely on the information found in H. Chan 1980: 38, n. 18. There are many 20th-century biographies on Li, and three in particular must be noted for both their quality and breadth of influence. See Rong 1957 and Rong 1973. Also, see Suzuki 1934. For a Chinese translation of Suzuki's essay, see W. Zhu 1935. All three of these 20th-century sources rely heavily on "A Sketch of Zhuowu" in their presentations of Li Zhi's life.

4. For an introduction to the *Records of the Grand Historian*, see Loewe 1993: 405–414. See Watson 1993, for an English translation.

5. For an interpretation of Kong as an historical figure, see, for example, Suzuki 1934. For a Chinese translation of the essay, see W. Zhu 1935.

6. For illuminating discussions on the name Kong Ruogu, see M. Huang 1995: 46 and Wu 1990: 21. Both read the essay as fictional in contrast to much scholarship that interprets the text as transparent and factual.

7. *Ruo gu* is not an uncommon compound, and if we search for the two characters in classical works, we find that they appear together numerous times in the approximately third century BCE Daoist classic the *Daodejing* 道德經. Any Chinese literatus would have been familiar with this text, and Li Zhi was intimately familiar with it; among his works includes a commentary on the classic. See *LZWJ*, vol. 7, pp. 1–28. One might speculate that in choosing the characters *ruo gu*, Li Zhi was in part playing to the *Daodejing* and the notion of *ruo gu* as vastness. In response to chapter 15 of the *Daodejing*, Li provides a gloss for the two characters and writes, "[The best and most accomplished scholars] are as vast as a valley (*ruo gu* 若谷), and yet themselves possess nothing." See *LZWJ*, vol. 7, p. 7.

8. See Wu 1990: 19 for a vivid description of how Li "subverted historiography from the inside and stood the narrative conventions of biography on their head."

9. See Nussbaum 1990, especially p. 6. For discussion on reading as a means to cultivate one's moral imagination, see especially Nussbaum 1990: 148–167. Also see Ivanhoe's discussion of reading as an "emotional regimen" and an "imaginative exercise" in Ivanhoe 2007.

10. See, for example, Nussbaum 1990: 37.

11. See "Sima Xiangru" (司馬相如), *CS*, pp. 624–626.

12. See "Qin shi huangdi" (秦始皇帝), *CS*, pp. 13–16.

13. For discussion on commentary as a way to show readers how to read, see Nussbaum 1990: 49.

14. See "Testimony" (*Yu yue* 豫約), *FS*, p. 189.

15. "To Zhuang Chunfu" (*Yu Zhuang Chunfu* 與莊純夫), *FS*, p. 45.

16. "Mourning Madame Huang" (*Ku Huang yiren* 哭黃宜人), *FS*, pp. 232–233.

17. "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women Cannot Understand the Dao Because They are Shortsighted" (*Da yi nuren xue dao wei jianjuan shu* 答以女人學道為見短書), *FS*, p. 59.

18. "A Letter in Response to the Claim that Women," *FS*, p. 59.

19. See Chapter Two, note 3 for bibliographic information on the preface. For discussion on the three Yuan brothers, see Chapter One, note 29.

20. *FS*, p. 3. Scholars generally agree Li Zhi's original name was Lin Zaizhi 林載贄. He changed his surname to Li after he achieved the *jurem* degree in 1552. In 1567, with the accession of the emperor Zhu Zaihou, Li dropped the middle character to avoid the taboo of using the emperor's name, and adopted the name Li Zhi. For further discussion of this subject, see *Qingyuan Lin Li zongpu*, which traces the history of the Lin-Li lineages to Qingyuan, Jinjiang county. I have not seen this genealogy but rely on the information from H. Chan 1980: 13–14.

21. Rong 1957: 1.

22. Rong 1973: 1.

23. Such a use of the term can be found in, for example, *Analects* 8.2.

24. See, for example, *Records of the Grand Historian*, chapter 79.

25. See “In Praise of Liu Xie” (*Zan Liu Xie* 贊劉諧), *FS*, p. 130.

26. I.e., Kongzi or Confucius.

27. Translation by Watson 2007: 89, adapted. In identifying passages from the *Analects*, I follow the chapter and verse numbering in *HY*. For a brief note on versions of the *Analects*, see Watson 2007: 13. Also, see Loewe 1993: 313–323.

28. There are no references to “the old man carrying a pole and a basket” in the *Mengzi*, the *Xunzi* 荀子 written by Xunzi (born ca. 312 BCE), or the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 primarily by the hand of Zhuangzi (ca. 369–ca. 286 BCE).

29. In *Analects* 14.41 an old man carrying a basket passes the gate of the house where Kongzi is staying and recites the following passage from the *Book of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經): “In deep water, let your robe get wet; in shallow, hike it up.” Kongzi responds, “Quite right—that would be the easy way out.” For English translation, see Watson 2007: 102.

30. See Watson 2007: 130.

31. “I had understood perfectly that the question posed by Fan Chi (to Kongzi) was an irreverent question.” See Billeter 1979: 52.

32. For discussion on reading philosophy as a form of spiritual exercise, see Hadot 1995, especially pp. 79–144. Also, see Stalnaker 2006 for use of the term “spiritual exercises” as a “bridge concept” for comparative analysis.

33. While in later texts in Chinese history, such as Li Zhi's, *qing* is most often used to mean “feelings,” in the time of the *Analects* the meaning most often attributed to *qing* was the “genuine.” I am grateful to Kwong-loi Shun for alerting me to this point. For discussion on the history of the term *qing*, see A. Yu 1997: 56–66. For discussion on *qing* in early Chinese thought, see Puett 2004.

34. Translation by Watson 2007: 89, adapted, italics mine.

35. In other pre-Qin texts such as the *Xunzi* and the *Zhuangzi*, we find countless references to the character. In the *Mengzi*, there are four: *Mengzi* 3A4, 4B18, 6A6, and 6A8.

36. Li's *Explaining Books* (*Shuoshu* 說書), within which is a commentary on the *Analects*, was likely published before 1567 and was one of Li's earliest collection of writings. Parts of it were later adapted into his *Evaluating the Four Books* (*Sishu ping* 四書評), which was likely written between 1591 and 1600. For bibliographic information on the *Shuoshu* and the *Sishu ping*, see H. Chan 1980: 170. We do not know the date when “A Sketch of Zhuowu” was written though likely it was composed sometime when Li was serving as prefect in Yunnan, from

1577 to 1580. The essay was first published in Li's *A Book to Burn*, which was first printed in 1590. For Li's commentary on the *Analects*, see *LZWJ*, vol. 5, "Evaluating the Four Books," pp. 19–103.

37. Li provides the following commentary to *Analects* 13.4: "How can the people be forgotten? And so those who would study sowing grain or growing vegetables truly are petty people." See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, "Evaluating the Four Books," p. 68. In a twist on the more straightforward interpretation of 13.4, Li believes that the pedant who would abandon the people in order to learn how to sow grain and grow vegetables is truly the petty person. Throughout Li's writings we find him sympathetic toward those who live close to the land. There are a number of passages in the *Analects* referring to followers of Shen Nong who are self-sufficient and able in the arts of farming. As we discussed earlier, in *Analects* 18.7 we come upon an old man who lauds the farmer and ridicules the scholarly Kongzi. In response to the passage Li Zhi scribbles in the margins, "This makes sense. Wonderful!" See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, "Evaluating the Four Books," p. 97. If we turn to Li's commentary on *Mengzi* 3A4, another well-known passage on followers of Shen Nong, again we find him enthusiastically and at great length applauding these agrarian utopians, although *Mengzi* himself criticizes such individuals. See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, "Evaluating the Four Books," pp. 130–131. For Li Zhi's commentary on the *Mengzi*, see *LZWJ*, vol. 5, pp. 104–192.

38. He Yan, *j.* 13, p. 2.

39. Zhu Xi, p. 193.

40. In the Civil Service Examinations students were asked to respond to questions using the eight-legged essay structure. For a study of the Civil Service Examinations, see Elman 2000.

41. "A Sketch of Zhuowu," *FS*, p. 83. Rong writes that Li Zhi earns his *jurem* degree in Jiajing 31, or 1552 according to western calculations, at the age of 26 *sui*. See Rong 1973: 2.

42. See "On Miscellaneous Matters," *FS*, p. 97.

43. Later we will examine further Li's championing of writing as a form of self-cultivation. For discussion of writing as self-cultivation within the Confucian tradition, see Ivanhoe 2007. For analysis of different methods of self-cultivation—such as through reading of the classics, attention to one's intuitions, or physical regimen and ritual practice—in the Confucian tradition, see Ivanhoe 2000.

44. See "On the Child-like Heart-Mind," *FS*, p. 99.

45. In 1556 he was appointed Director of Education in Gongcheng, which was located in the prefecture of Hui 輝, in the province of Henan. See Rong 1973: 2.

46. The Jiajing reign dates from 1522 to 1566.

47. Li Zhicai 李之才 (d. 1045); Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077).

48. In 1555. For more fully annotated translations of this passage and select essays of Li's, see the Appendices.

49. Quanzhou.

50. See "Testimony," *FS*, pp. 176–188. Li writes that while serving as the director he had quarrels with the prefect and the inspector of the schools.

51. He is appointed as an “Erudite of the Nanjing Academy” (*Nanjing guozi* 南京國子) in *Jiajing* 39, or 1560. See Rong 1957: 22–23.

52. He is appointed as an “Erudite of the Beijing Academy” (*Beijing guozi* 北京國子) in *Jiajing* 43, or 1564. See Rong 1957: 23–25.

53. None of the biographers we focus on in this chapter—Yuan, Rong, or Li himself—give dates for Ms. Huang’s birth or death, or for Li’s marriage to his wife. According to Li Zhi scholar Suzuki Torao, Li married Ms. Huang a few years before *Jiajing* 33 (1554). He infers this from the death of Li’s eldest son, who died in *Jiajing* 34. See Suzuki 1935.

54. See “To Zhuang Chunfu” (*Yu Zhuang Chunfu* 與莊純夫), *FS*, p. 45; “Remembering Madame Huang” (*Yi Huang Yiren* 憶黃宜人), *FS*, pp. 232–233; and “Mourning Madame Huang” (*Ku Huang Yiren* 哭黃宜人), *XFS*, p. 108. For English translations of these essays and poems, see the appendix of P. Lee 2002.

55. See H. Chan 1980: 81–82. Also, see S. Chen 1975. For English translation, see Chen in H. Chan 1980: 41–84.

56. See Cultural Relics Management Committee of Jinjiang County, Fujian Province 1976. For an English translation, see H. Chan 1980: 78–84. For information on her tombstone, see in particular H. Chan 1980: 79. For another source on Li Zhi’s wife, see S. Chen 1975 and H. Chan 1980: 16–17.

57. Before leaving for his natal home, in “A Sketch of Zhuowu” Li pleads with an official that water used for a nearby canal be diverted to the fields in his community. In response, Li Zhi was offered special treatment, but, presumably on principle, he refuses. Acting on a universal principle, rather than attending improvisatorially to the particular, we find Li making a choice that leads to disastrous ends: the death of his two daughters.

58. See Nussbaum 1990: 40.

59. Later in this chapter we will examine this allusion. See Chapter Two, pp. 42–43. The reference finds its source in the *Jinshu*, chapter 49, “Biography of Xie An” (*Xie An liezhuan* 謝安列傳). In this biography, the individual is so happy that he does not realize the platform of his shoe has fallen off. For an English translation of this story, see Wells 2004.

60. Wu 1990: 22–23.

61. *FS*, p. 83.

62. I would like to thank Steven B. Miles for alerting me to this point.

63. See *FS*, pp. 56–58.

64. For discussion of Li’s different stances on women, see P. Lee 2002: 63–93. At times Li argues that women are the same as men in all relevant respects. At other times, he sees women as morally superior. In “A Sketch of Zhuowu,” he appears to argue that women are not simply as good as men, but, at least with regard to his wife and mother, in some ways women are superior to men.

65. See Watson 2007: 62, adapted. For Li Zhi’s commentary on *Analects* 9.12, see *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” p. 51.

66. Watson 2007: 61–62, adapted, italics mine.

67. Chapter 19; *HY*, n. 22, p. 72, l. 47; Watson 1963: 97.

68. Taylor 1991: 35. See Chapter Five for discussion of Taylor’s views in comparison to Li Zhi’s on the subject of authenticity or genuineness.

69. See *LZWJ*, vol. 7, pp. 29–82.

70. See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” pp. 1–7.

71. See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” pp. 8–18.

72. See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” p. 51.

73. Translation by Slingerland 2003a: 79.

74. I base much of my translation on K.C. Hsiao’s work in *DMB*: 814. For the memorial presented to Emperor Shenzong by Zhang Wenda in 1602, see Gu: 18.28b–29a; Rong 1973: 50–51; and *Ming Shengzong shilu*: 369.11–12. For a discussion on the events leading up to Li Zhi’s imprisonment and detailed study of the letters between Geng Dingxiang and Li Zhi, see Jiang 2001.

75. *Qi* 氣 is commonly translated as “ether,” “energy,” or “psychophysical stuff.” The concept is as common to Chinese culture, and as difficult to render, as terms such as Dao, and here I leave it untranslated.

76. *FS*, p. 5. Rong relays the same story of Li’s death. See Rong 1973: 52. Much has been made of Li’s death narrative. Ray Huang argues that Li’s death reflects his deep frustration, and more broadly, the deep frustration of literati in late-Ming China. See R. Huang 1981: 220–221. K.C. Hsiao interprets Li as dying courageously for the cause of intellectual independence. See *DMB*: 814. Japanese patriot Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰 (1830–1859) writes of Li Zhuowu’s death as inspiring. See Yoshida 1935, vol. 9.

77. The Wanli reign dates from 1573 to 1620. Li Zhi’s writings, for the most part, are produced during this period.

78. See Rong 1957: 108–113. Rong dates Li’s death to the day and hour citing the evening of the 16th day at the *zi* hour. According to Yuan Zhongdao, Li’s friend Ma Jinglun 馬經綸 brought Li’s corpse to Tongzhou 通州, buried him, erected a tombstone, and nearby established a Buddhist shrine. Scholars generally agree that a tombstone found in the outskirts of Tongzhou inscribed with Li Zhuowu’s name is the one erected by Ma. See Rong 1957: 113. Also, see Rong 1973: 56.

79. “Testimony,” *FS*, p. 185. For the entire essay, see *FS*, pp. 176–188.

80. See R. Huang 1981: 221.

81. “On the Five Deaths,” *FS*, p. 163. For an English translation, see Li Zi, unpublished translation by Elstein.

82. For stories of Gu Kaizhi, see Y. Liu 1956. For English translation of *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shi shuo xinyu* 世說新語), see Mather 2002, especially pp. 393–396 and p. 575. See also “An Additional Discussion” (*You xu* 又叙), *CTJ*, pp. 2–3, for further reference to Gu Kaizhi.

83. For introduction to the text, see Mather 2002: xiii–xxxv. For bibliographical information, see Mather 2002: 692–694.

84. Mather 2002: xviii.

85. See Jiao, Wanli period. For further information on this text, see Ch’ien 1986: 280.

86. *CTJ*, p. 3.

87. See Chapter Two, note 59.

88. Historical figures are found throughout “A Sketch of Zhuowu.” Earlier in the essay, Li refers to the figures Li Zhicai 李之才 (d. 1045 CE) and Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077). Both are roughly from the same period as the famous School

of Principle Confucian Zhu Xi. In speaking of the period associated with Li Zhicai and Shao Yong, Li Zhi concludes, “I [Li Zhi] languished in a Hundred Springs for five years and never did hear the Dao.”

89. In 1560 Li served briefly as Erudite in the National Academy. From 1570 to 1577, Li takes on the position as a Vice Bureau Director in the Nanjing Board of Punishments.

90. From 1577 to 1580 Li serves as Prefect of Yaoan, Yunnan, a small prefecture populated at that time by many minority groups. Li also becomes interested in Buddhism during this time. In 1581, he returns to the prefecture Huang'an 黃安, Huguang 湖廣, where his daughter and son-in-law reside.

CHAPTER THREE — THE HEART-MIND (心)

1. Introduction and conclusion to “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” *FS*, pp. 98–99.

2. For translations of this essay, see Appendix B, note 1.

3. With less frequency, Li also refers to this source as the “Perfect All-Reflecting Buddha Wisdom” (*da yuan jingzhi* 大圓鏡智). See “To Ma Lishan” (*Yu Ma Lishan* 與馬歷山), *XFS*, pp. 3–4.

4. The *Commentary of Zuo* is one of the three main commentaries of a classic text the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), which chronicles the period from 722 to 481 BCE in the state of Lu. For a punctuated and annotated version of the text, see B. Yang 1981. For an introduction and list of translations and bibliographic information on the *Commentary of Zuo*, see Loewe 1993: 67–76.

5. In Chinese years.

6. *Academia Sinica text database*, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: 686. Translation by Legge 1960: 564, adapted.

7. The *Western Chamber*, a 13th century Yuan period drama by Wang Shifu 王實甫 (ca. 1250–1300), was commonly considered a subversive work and was banned during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing periods. For an English translation of this work, see West and Idema 1991. For a commentary on this work attributed to Li, see Z. Li 2009d.

8. By Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779–831 CE). See Zhen Yuan, undated. For an English translation, see Owen 1996: 540–549.

9. Italics mine. Translation by Cheang 1973: 273, adapted. For a reproduction of the preface, see Mizoguchi 1971: 189, n. 50. A copy of this 1582 edition of the *Western Chamber* can be found at the Naikaku Bunko library in Tokyo. I have not seen this edition myself but rely on the information found in Billeter 1979: 250.

10. *FS*, p. 99.

11. Chapter 26 of the *Zhuangzi*; *HY*, p. 75, l. 49. The Chinese text from Li Zhi is the following: *wu you an de zhen zheng da shengren tong xin wei ceng shi er yu zhi yi yan zai* 吾又安得真正大聖人童心未曾失而與之一言哉。

12. See the early *Ru* or Confucian text the *Mengzi* 孟子 (4th century BCE).

13. See the 8th-century Chan Buddhist classic, the *Platform Sutra* (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經).

14. See the writings of the neo-Confucian thinker Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529 CE).

15. See the writings of the Taizhou Confucian Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (*hao Luo Jinxi* 羅近谿, 1515–1588).

16. I have found most illuminating Mizoguchi 1971: 141–153 and Zuo 1994: 160–185. Zuo argues for what I will refer to as a “Mengzian” interpretation of Li. Mizoguchi, on the other hand, sees Li’s work as recording the on-going process of a person in search of enlightenment; in the end, we are left with the tracks, but no clear vision of a philosophy. I disagree with these interpretations of Li, but benefit greatly from both works.

17. See Mizoguchi 1971.

18. See Peterson 1998a and Hsiao 1938.

19. See Zuo 1994.

20. See Hou 1960.

21. See R. Huang 1981: 189–222.

22. See Mizoguchi 1971.

23. For Li’s influence on the Gongan school of literature, see Chou 1988. For a discussion on the Donglin movement—a conservative political Confucian reform movement challenging the authority of the corrupt late-Ming government—as in part a response against Li’s free-spirited thought, see Hucker 1957: 144–145, and Busch 1949–55: 73–96. For brief discussion arguing against a direct relationship between Li and the Donglin movement, see Rowe 2007: 107, and 115–119. For a general discussion on the Donglin movement, see Dardess 2002.

24. See, for example, Yearley 1983. For discussion on ethics and genres, see Yearley 1997.

25. In my present work, I engage in the limited task of using these images to track ideas regarding genuineness without making any claims about how language shapes thought. For my purposes, I examine the metaphor of health and illness within its *historical* context, rather than examining the *internal logic* of the metaphor. For studies analyzing metaphors in Chinese thought and work on metaphor theory, see Chapter One, note 72.

26. “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” *FS*, p. 98.

27. For discussion on the Four Books, see Chapter One, note 14. For a study of the Civil Service Examinations, see Chapter Two, note 40.

28. Translation by Van Norden 2008: 154, adapted.

29. Mengzi refers to the “heart-mind of the infant” (*chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心). See *Mengzi* 7A15. He also uses the term “pure knowing” (*liang zhi* 良知). See *Mengzi* 7A15. Neither is central to his work.

30. *Mengzi* 2A2; Translation by Lau 2003: 33, adapted.

31. *Mengzi* 2A6. The term I translate here as “sensibility” is literally “the heart-mind” (*xin* 心), but the idea is a “sense” or “sensibility.”

32. In using the categories of a “development,” “reformation,” and a “discovery” model of self-cultivation, I borrow from and am indebted to Ivanhoe’s

cataloguing of Confucian thinkers. See especially Ivanhoe 2000 where he identifies thinkers such as Mengzi as articulating a “development” model, and neo-Confucians such as Wang Yangming and Zhu Xi as envisioning a “discovery model.” In illuminating the thought of Li Zhi, I adopt the category of a “preservation model” and show that Li’s model of self-cultivation shares important characteristics with both the “development” and “discovery model,” but is markedly different from both.

33. Mengzi 3A5; translation by Lau 2003: 63.

34. For an argument that Li, like Mengzi, holds a narrow and particular vision of the good life, see Zuo 1994: 160–184, and especially 174. Zuo argues that Li is not as radical as some scholars have described. Li does praise merchants and farmers, for example, but he is not saying that merchants are as virtuous as scholars. Rather, merchants are living an acceptable form of the good life and certainly a life that is much superior to the hypocritical scholar. Li’s *bête noire* is hypocrisy and falseness. I interpret Li differently and later in the chapter, I discuss why I read Li as providing a much more varied conception of the good life than does Mengzi.

35. See *LZWJ*, vol. 7, pp. 1–28.

36. See Chapter One, note 66.

37. See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” pp. 104–92.

38. See *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” pp. 19–103.

39. For an introduction to the text and an English translation with commentary, see Conze 1958: 7–76.

40. For reference to Li Zhi chanting Buddhist sutras, see, for example, Rong 1973: 10, and Rong 1957: 44. For brief reference to the numerous editions of the classic available during the late-Ming, see Yampolsky 1967: 109. For Chinese editions of the text, see Yampolsky 1967: 191. For an introduction and English translation of the text, see Yampolsky 1967.

41. The term *zhen xin* is also well used among a number of contemporaries of Li’s. For example, see Tang Shu 唐樞 (1497–1574).

42. Translation by Yampolsky 1967: 136, adapted, which is based on the Dunhuang manuscript, section 14.

43. For an analysis of ease as an ideal in neo-Confucian thought, see Angle 2005.

44. *Xunzi*, section 23; *HY*, p. 87, l. 5; translation by Watson 1963: 157–158.

45. See especially Ivanhoe 2002b, and Ivanhoe 2000: 59–73.

46. For discussion on the Taizhou school see Chapter One, note 35.

47. See, for example, W. Chan 1963b: sections 21, 62, and 167 for the analogy of the mind to a mirror. For the analogy of the mind to the sun and desires as clouds, see sections 207, 237, 255, 289, and 290. These passages are from Wang’s *A Record for Practice* (*Chuanxi lu* 傳習錄). Also, see Ivanhoe 2000: 60.

48. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by W. Chan 1963b: section 21. For bibliographical information and historical notes on the text, see W. Chan 1963b: 311–316, and Ivanhoe 2002b: 143–161.

49. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by W. Chan 1963b: section 62, adapted.

50. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by W. Chan 1963b: section 207.

51. See *Mengzi* 7A15.
52. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by W. Chan 1963b: section 39.
53. Translation by W. Chan 1963c: 659–660, adapted. This quote forms part of Wang Yangming’s responses to questions on the *Great Learning*.
54. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by W. Chan 1963b: section 173, adapted.
55. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by W. Chan 1963b: section 167.
56. See *MRXA*, j. 34, in *SBY*, vol. 421 for an introduction to Luo’s life and selections of recorded dialogues with Luo. For Luo’s writings, see Luo 1618 and Luo 2007. For an introduction to Luo, including bibliographic information on Luo’s writings, see *DMB*: 975–978.
57. See *MRXA*, j. 34, p. 336, l. 19 where Huang records a response to Luo, “No matter what you speak of, you always return to the subject of the heart of the infant.” *Mengzi* too uses this term, though it is not central to his work. See *Mengzi* 4B12.
58. The terms “nature,” “natural,” “spontaneous,” and “oneness” are rich and highly contested terms. As one must assume certain categories of analysis in order to make any substantive headway in scrutinizing others, for our limited purposes, I choose to leave these terms relatively unexamined.
59. *MRXA*, p. 354, l. 22.
60. *MRXA*, p. 337, l. 5.
61. See Luo in Mizoguchi 1997: 178. Also, see Luo 2007: 153.
62. *MRXA*, p. 354, l. 18.
63. *MRXA*, p. 354, l. 16.
64. *MRXA*, p. 337, l. 4.
65. For the contrast between “rule-based” ethics and “uncodifiable” forms of virtue ethics, see McDowell 1998. For a comparison of Li Zhi’s form of ethics with virtue ethics as formulated by McDowell, R. Jay Wallace, and Jonathan Dancy, see P. Lee 2002: 44–62 where I argue Li is a particular sort of uncodifiable—*one who can give reasons for actions and is able to do so post facto*; he can and does justify one course of action over another. Dancy uses the term “particularist” to describe such a conception of ethics. For a revealing discussion of particularism and the early pre-Qin thinker Xunzi, see Hutton 2001, and especially pp. 13–98. I have benefited greatly from Hutton’s, and Ivanhoe’s work on this subject.
66. “In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng” (*Da Geng Zhongcheng* 答耿中丞), *FS*, p. 17.
67. “Miscellaneous Matters” (*Za shuo* 雜說), *FS*, p. 96.
68. “Sima Xiangru” (司馬相如), *CS*, p. 624.
69. “An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar Officials” (*Deye ruchen houlun* 德業儒臣後論), *Cangshu*, p. 544.
70. “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” *FS*, p. 99.
71. I would like to thank Yong Huang for helping me develop this point.
72. “In Praise of Liu Xie” (*Zan Liu Xie* 贊劉諧), *FS*, p. 130.
73. “To the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng,” *FS*, p. 17.
74. “To Ma Lishan,” *XFS*, p. 3. For an English translation of the essay, see P. Lee 2002: 233.

75. "Miscellaneous Matters," *FS*, p. 96.
76. *Ti Kongzi xiang yu Zhifo yuan* 題孔子像於芝佛院, *FS*, p. 100.
77. "On the Child-like Heart-Mind," *FS*, p. 98.
78. *Chuanxi lu* in Y. Wang 1572; translation by Ivanhoe 2009: 131. For additional references to illness in the writings of Wang Yangming, see, for example, Letter 44 in Ching 1973.
79. "Author's Preface" (*Zi xu* 自序), *FS*, p. 1.
80. "Miscellaneous Matters," *FS*, p. 97. *Chan ji* are delusional states caused by excessive or ineffective meditation.
81. "Commenting on Kongzi's Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha," *XFS*, p. 100.
82. "In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng," *FS*, p. 16.
83. "To Yang Dingjian" (*Yu Yang Dingjian* 與楊定見), *FS*, p. 19.
84. "On the Child-like Heart-Mind," *FS*, p. 99.
85. "In Response to Deng Shiyang" (*Da Deng Shiyang* 答鄧石陽), *FS*, p. 4.
86. "To Yang Dingjian," *FS*, p. 19.
87. "To Yang Dingjian," *FS*, p. 19.
88. "To Ma Lishan," *XFS*, p. 4.
89. "To Yang Dingjian," *FS*, p. 19.
90. I read Li as making a generic claim that *healthy* specimens of human beings are born with a fully developed child-like heart-mind from which springs genuine actions.
91. "An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar Officials," *CS*, p. 544.
92. "In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng," *FS*, p. 17.
93. Zuo helpfully describes Li as reacting against some of the implications of Wang Yangming's philosophy by arguing for a cosmos "without heavenly principle" (*wu tian li* 無天理) and instead, bases his ethics on "spontaneous human nature" (*ziran renxing* 自然人性). See Zuo 1994: 175.
94. See Ivanhoe 2000 and Ivanhoe 2002b.
95. It is not the case that Li never appeals to metaphysics in defending his ethical vision. "Discussion on Husband and Wife" (*Fufu lun* 夫婦論), *FS*, pp. 90–91 is one well-known example where he addresses the metaphysical underpinnings of his ethics. In this essay, Li argues that the origin of all things is found in the relation between two entities: *yin* and *yang* or husband and wife, rather than the powers of a single entity, such as "The Supreme Ultimate" (*Taiji* 太極). My argument is that metaphysics, in contrast to a conception of human nature, takes on a much less direct and explicit role in supporting Li's vision of the good life.
96. I borrow this line of questioning, examining sources for Li's use of *ben xin*, *zhen xin*, and *chizi zhi xin*, from Mizoguchi, but arrive at a different conclusion. Mizoguchi suggests that Li forgoes the term *zhen xin* and *chizi zhi xin* to avoid misunderstanding of his own concept of the mind. *Zhen xin* would be understood in many different ways depending on the reader as it was a well-used term in the late-Ming. *Chizi zhi xin* would instantly identify Li's ideas with Luo Rufang's rather than giving Li his own space to develop his ideas of the mind. See Mizoguchi 1997: 175.
97. The contrast I have drawn between an abstract, theoretical and a tangible, corporeal conception of the mind is too stark and the difference is more

one of degree than kind. Wang Yangming, for example, does use the language of the human body when speaking of the oneness of the universe. Nevertheless, the distinction, while one of degree, certainly exists and is substantive.

CHAPTER FOUR — VIRTUE (德)

1. “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” *FS*, p. 98.
2. For discussion on these terms, see Chapter Three, note 65.
3. See *Philosophical Investigations*, section 66; Wittgenstein 1958: 31.
4. In seeking out such categories, I benefit greatly from Aaron Stalnaker’s formulation of “bridge concepts” whereby one self-consciously and carefully selects terms of analysis that are less rather than more charged with meaning. Stalnaker formulates such an idea to aid in explicitly comparative studies. See Stalnaker 2005 and Stalnaker 2006. Also, see Company 2005, where he helpfully employs the categories of “emic” and “etic” terms and argues that there exist no truly “emic” interpretations when we interpret ancient texts from our 21st-century viewpoint.
5. See M. Huang 2001. Also, see Epstein 2001.
6. At least upon first glance, Li Zhi’s conception of genuine feeling—as excessive, subversive, and at the same time the best resource for society at large—bears a strong resemblance to Friedrich Nietzsche’s idea of “will to power,” as interpreted illuminatingly by Christine Swanton. See Swanton 2003, especially pp. 128–176.
7. Li Zhi borrows this term from the *Mengzi*, and it is a term often discussed among neo-Confucian thinkers. Most tended to interpret it as connected with the idea of gaining a personal understanding of the Dao or Way. Li Zhi refocuses its sense: for him it still connotes the highest personal realization of the Dao, but unlike many traditional commentators, Li understands this in terms of satisfying *one’s own* desires. For the *locus classicus*, see *Mengzi*, see 3A4 and 4B14. The term is also readily found in other classics, namely the *Doctrine of the Mean* chapter of the *Book of Rites*, and chapters 8, 11, 12, 14, 17, and 23 of the *Zhuangzi*.
8. Borrowing the language of Charles Taylor, Li Zhi provides a “horizon of significance” without which the concept of “authenticity” would be empty of any meaning. See Taylor 1991.
9. *FS*, p. 96–98. For full annotated translation see Appendix C. For translations of this essay, see Appendix C, note 1.
10. For discussion on these two terms of art, also see Zuo 1994: 228–237. Zuo analyzes Li Zhi’s use of the term “skills of Nature” (*hua gong* 化工) and places Li Zhi within the context of late-Ming literature. Zuo argues that Li perhaps lacks completeness in his theory on subjectivity and spontaneous expression, but Li’s work on these subjects significantly influences later *literary criticism*. See, for example, pp. 220, 235, 237. I analyze Li’s concepts of the “skills of Nature” and the “skills of an artisan” in order to illuminate and to some extent defend Li’s *ethics* and to place his ethics within the larger context of *Ru* or *Confucian thought*.
11. See “Miscellaneous Matters,” *FS*, p. 96.

12. "Miscellaneous Matters," *FS*, p. 96.
13. See P. Cheng 1980: 1 for a mourning poem written by Tang upon learning of Li's death. See Chapter One, note 45 for Tang's writings.
14. See Birch 1980: 44.
15. For a reference to the friendship between Li Zhi and Tang Xianzu, see Hsia 1970; and P. Cheng 1980. Cheng contrasts Li's and Tang's quests for authenticity identifying Li's form as "practicality as authenticity" and Tang's as "imagination as authenticity." For a brief reference to Li Zhi's influence on Tang Xianzu, see Jilun Liu 1999: 168.
16. For brief discussion on Li's poetics, see Lu 2005.
17. *Pen yu* 噴玉.
18. *Tu zhu* 唾珠.
19. "Miscellaneous Matters," *FS*, p. 97.
20. See *FS*, pp. 59–60.
21. Translation by Legge 1967: 471. The *Book of Rites* consists of 49 records written by scholars from the Zhou (1046–221 BCE), Qin (221–207 BCE), and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) periods, and was compiled in the first century BCE. In the Song period (960–1279 CE), two chapters in the *Book of Rites*, the "Great Learning" and the "Doctrine of the Mean," were canonized along with the *Analects* and the *Mengzi* as the Four Books. For an introduction and bibliographical information on the classic, see Loewe 1993: 293–297. Also, see the introduction by Chai and Chai in Legge 1967: 1.liii–lxxx.
22. *FS*, p. 59.
23. "To the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng," *FS*, p. 16–17.
24. For a brief characterization of Li Zhi's body of poetry, see Lu 2005. Also, see Zuo 1994: 221–222. Zuo describes many of Li's poems, especially those written while he resided in Longhu from 1588 to 1600, as full of feeling, vibrant, and to the point.
25. See *FS*, pp. 232–233.
26. "Mourning the Precious Son" (*Ku gui er* 哭貴兒), *XFS*, p. 108.
27. See "Recalling Madame Huang" (*Yi Huang yi ren* 憶黃宜人), *XFS*, p. 108. Jilun Liu examines the Buddhist aspects of Li Zhi's thought and for the most part, convincingly argues that Li Zhi is noteworthy as a *Ru* who, more so than most Confucians before him, envisions the "immanent" merged with the "transcendent." Liu argues that Li is invested in finding freedom in this world. See, for example, Jilun Liu: 1999: 57–86. However, as I suggest here, when we turn to Li's discussions of his wife he appears to envision the world differently; he distinguishes the "immanent" from the "transcendent."
28. See "Letter in Response to Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng," *FS*, pp. 16–17.
29. See *CTJ*, p. 1.
30. See *FS*, p. 1.
31. See "To Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng," *FS*, p. 17.
32. See *FS*, p. 97. Contemporary psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in studying the subject of happiness points out that happy people tend to describe certain parts of their lives as involving a number of qualities including "deep but effortless involvement that removes awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life." See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 49. He refers to this form

of being as “flow.” Such a concept in many ways is meaningfully similar to the idea of effortless involvement as found in Li’s work. There are clear differences too between “flow” and Li’s idea of “effortless involvement.” For one, actions of “effortless involvement” are virtuous, while in contrast “flow” activities may be ones of vice or virtue.

33. For discussion on how a viable ethics can only be discovered by each individual through the on-going process of reflective living rather than, for example, following systematic rules, see Williams 1985.

34. Li’s ethics does not dismiss the virtues of gentleness, care, and benevolence. His ethics is what can be helpfully compared to Friedrich Nietzsche’s, which does not see the “virtues of strength” as precluding the existence of “virtues of gentleness.” While both types of virtues may, perhaps even ideally do, exist in the same person, it is the case that gentleness is only a virtue in the presence of strength. Gentleness in itself and absent of strength is more often life-denying, stifling, and a vice. For such a reading of Nietzsche, see Swanton 2003, especially pp. 161–173. One could read Li’s depiction of his wife’s lived life, discussed earlier in this chapter, as one of gentleness in the absence of strength.

35. One might also ask if Li questions whether or not there exists *genuine* desires, or if what is considered genuine is in fact nothing more than a product of socialization along the lines of argument championed by such great thinkers as Jacques Derrida. Also, see Adorno 1973. This is not a line of questioning that Li considers. Rather, as with most if not all Confucian thinkers, Li assumes there is something truly genuine that guides us in a life well lived. Such a commitment to something true and to the notion that a good life is lived in the light of the genuine can be seen as intimately tied to the belief, also held by most Confucians, that we can clearly and transparently know the world as it is. Thomas Metzger refers to this latter idea as “epistemological optimism.” See Metzger 1986. For a contemporary work that vigilantly seeks for the authentic and navigates the difficult ground between deconstructing and unreflectively embracing the idea of authenticity, see Hartman 2002. Also see Taylor 1991, who too articulates a vision of authenticity that goes beyond the two extremes of what he refers to as “knockers” and “boosters” of authenticity. In Chapter Five we will discuss his work on authenticity in comparison with Li’s on genuineness.

36. See “To Ma Lishan,” *XFS*, pp. 3–4.

37. The classic is one chapter of the *Book of Rites*, compiled in the first century BCE. See Chapter Four, note 21 for discussion of the *Book of Rites*. For discussion on the *Great Learning*, also see Chapter One, note 14. For Li Zhi’s commentary on the entire text of the *Great Learning*, see *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” pp. 1–7. For an English translation of the *Great Learning*, see Gardner 2007: 3–8.

38. For Chinese text see *Academia Sinica text database*, *Li ji*: 983. Translation by Gardner 2007: 3.

39. For example, see “To Ma Lishan,” *XFS*, p. 3; “Letter in Response to Liu Fangbo” (*Da Liu Fangbo shu* 答劉方伯書), *FS*, p. 54.

40. See “In Response to Deng Shiyang” (*Da Deng Shiyang* 答鄧石陽), *FS*, pp. 4–5. For English translation, see P. Lee 2002: 186–187.

41. See “To Ma Lishan,” *XFS*, p. 4.
42. As is clear from what is said below, Li’s reference here to “extending knowledge” along with other terms shows clearly that he is explicating and expanding upon the *Great Learning*. This would have been clear to any literate person of his age.
43. See *Academia Sinica text database, Li ji*: 983.
44. See “To Ma Lishan,” *XFS*, p. 4.
45. See “Letter in Response to Deng Shiyang,” *FS*, p. 4.
46. See “Letter in Response to Liu Fangbo,” *FS*, p. 53.
47. See “To Yang Dingjian,” *FS*, p. 19.
48. See the poem “*Da ren wen dao*” in Y. Wang 1572, *j.* 20, p. 69. Translation by Ivanhoe 2009: 183.
49. See “Letter in Response to Liu Fangbo,” *FS*, p. 54.
50. See “Discussion on Soldiers and Food” (*Bingshi lun* 兵食論), *FS*, p. 95. Again, a strikingly similar conception of the good life is found in the writings of Nietzsche and here, in his conception of a “will to power.” Nietzsche too argues that the good life is one where one expresses one’s creative, life-sustaining powers. This individual expression is essential not only to one’s own health, but importantly too, to the health of society at large. For discussion on this subject, see Swanton 2003: 128–176.
51. Translation by Lau 2003: 9. For analysis of *Mengzi* 1A7, see Ivanhoe 2002a, Wong 1991, Van Norden 1991, and Shun 1989.
52. Translation by Lau 2003: 10. In *Mengzi* 5A7 and 5B1, he writes too of striking a chord in others and in these two passages, specifically of “awakening” (*jue* 覺) others.
53. As we discussed in Chapter Three, Li’s is a *preservation* model of self-cultivation, whereas Mengzi’s is a *developmental* one.
54. See “Sima Xiangru,” *CS*, p. 626.
55. See “Author’s Preface” (*Zixu* 自序), *FS*, p. 1; “Letter in Response to Deng Shiyang,” *FS*, p. 4.
56. See “Letter in Response to Deng Shiyang,” *FS*, p. 4.
57. This phrase comes from “Discussion on Husband and Wife,” *FS*, p. 91: *xing ming ge zheng zi wu you bu zheng zhe* 性命各正自無有不正者. The passage is an obvious play on section 1, chapter 1 of the classic the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經): *ge zheng xing ming bao he tai he* 各正性命保合太和. The primary text of the *Book of Changes*, also referred to as the *Zhou yi* 周易, attained its modern form by the latter part of the 9th century BCE. The seven commentaries, also referred to as the Ten Wings, all attained their modern form by the mid 3rd to early 2nd century BCE, with the exception of the 6th commentary which is dated to sometime during the 1st or 2nd century CE. For introduction and bibliographical information on the classic, see Loewe 1993: 216–228.
58. See “Miscellaneous Matters,” *FS*, p. 98.
59. See “Author’s Preface,” *FS*, p. 1.
60. See “To Yang Dingjian,” *FS*, p. 19.
61. Again, we find a striking similarity with that of Nietzsche’s philosophy. In Nietzsche’s language, the hostility of the phonies is an expression of resentment. Nietzsche specifically speaks of Christians who want to express themselves

in terms of aristocratic virtues but instead repress these feelings and valorize those of “humility” and “compassion.” This leads them to want to tear down and tread upon the noble souls who follow the earlier, pagan values.

62. See “An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar Officials,” *CS*, p. 545.

63. See “Letter in Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng,” *FS*, pp. 16–17.

64. See *Mengzi* 2A2; translation by Lau 2003: 34, adapted.

65. This passage plays on *Analects* 12.1, italics mine.

66. See *Analects* 14.24, italics mine.

67. See *Analects* 20.21, italics mine.

68. See “Letter in Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng,” *FS*, p. 16, italics mine.

69. Translation by Legge 2001: 357–358, adapted.

70. *FS*, pp. 90–91. For studies of this essay, see Q. Zhu 1956, Jilun Liu 1999: 70–71, and W. Chan 1983: 134.

71. See chapter 20, verse 8. Translation by Gardner 2007: 120, adapted.

72. Translation by Lau 2003: 60.

73. Li is not the only one in his time who challenges and thereby amends long-standing views of the father-son or ruler-minister relation as prior to all other relations. Such views are also articulated by Li’s good friend and conversation partner Luo Rufang. See Y. Cheng 2001: 103–107.

74. See, for example, Q. Zhu 1956: 41.

75. For a study of Li’s prioritizing of friendship over other social relations, see M. Huang 2006b.

76. See “Miscellaneous Matters,” *FS*, pp. 96–98.

77. “To Zhuang Chunfu” (*Yu Zhuang Chunfu* 與莊純夫), *FS*, p. 45.

78. “Sima Xiangru,” *CS*, p. 626, italics mine.

79. See the “Commentary on the Words of the Text” (*Wenyan* 文言) to the hexagram *Qian* 乾. *Qian* is the first hexagram in the *Book of Changes* and is traditionally associated with the male.

80. *CTJ*, p. 1.

81. “Discussion on Husband and Wife,” *FS*, p. 90.

82. “Discussion on Husband and Wife,” *FS*, p. 91.

83. See *Zhuangzi*, chapter 3; translation by Watson 1968: 51.

84. See Nussbaum 1995. Nussbaum argues that *all* ethics are based on a certain conception of human nature, some more and some less self-consciously so. In formulating an ethics, one’s task is to be aware of, rather than oblivious to, one’s assumptions on the subject. I see Nussbaum’s point as equally applicable to the subject of metaphysics as well as ethics.

85. “To Wu Dechang” (*Yu Wu Dechang* 與吳得常), *XFS*, p. 17. My translation benefits greatly from Martin Huang’s. See M. Huang 2006b.

86. For further discussion on Li Zhi’s prioritizing of friendship as the most invaluable of all human relations, see M. Huang 2006b. Charles Taylor discusses the centrality of discourse between friends in the successful pursuit of a genuine life and refers to such as “dialogue with significant others.” See Taylor 1991. I would like to thank James Peterman for discussion on this point.

87. Williams 1985: 200.

88. “In Response to the Vice Censor-in-Chief Geng,” *FS*, p. 17.

89. I am grateful to Aaron Stalnaker for pushing me on these questions.

90. For a comparison of Sima Qian and Li Zhi, also see Zuo 1994, pp. 193–195. In comparing these two figures, I engage in *philosophical* analysis and focus on the details of Li’s writings and the ways in which he quotes and misquotes the writings of Sima Qian. Zuo compares Li Zhi and Sima Qian and through such comparison, places Li Zhi within a larger *literary-historical* context.

91. This is the title of section 12 of the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子. Sima Qian makes reference to this chapter in the biography on Hanfeizi, *Records of the Grand Historian*, chapter 63. (Hereafter *Records*.)

92. This is the title of a section of the *Hanfeizi*. Sima Qian makes reference to this in *Records*, chapter 63.

93. One definition of *fa fen* is to be “deep with feeling” or “deep with enthusiasm.” See, for example, *Analects* 7.19. Also, see the biography on Kongzi in *Records*. A second definition is “to give vent to one’s indignation.” See, for example, Sima Qian’s autobiography in *Records*, chapter 130. For an English translation of this passage, see Hardy 1999: 162. For an English translation of the entirety of chapter 130, see Watson 1958: 42–57, and for our passage of interest, see 54–55.

94. For an introduction and bibliographic information on *Records*, see Loewe 1993: 405–414. For an English translation of a substantive portion of the classic, see Watson 1993.

95. Translation by Watson 1958: 54–55, adapted. For the Chinese text, see Sima 1959: 10.3300. For another English translation of this passage, see Hardy 1999: 162.

96. *Analects* 7.19 is cited in *Records*, chapter 47.

97. Slingerland translates *Analects* 7.19: “He is the type of person who is *so passionate* he forgets to eat.” See Slingerland 2003a: 70, italics mine. Lau translates: “Why did you not simply say something to this effect: he is the sort of man who forgets to eat when he tries to solve a problem *that has been driving him to distraction*.” See Lau 1979: 88, italics mine. Zhu Xi offers an interpretation more similar to Slingerland’s and Watson’s focus on the expression of “passion” or “enthusiasm.” I follow Zhu Xi’s interpretation.

98. Translation by Watson 2007: 50. Watson numbers the passage 7.18.

99. *LZWJ*, vol. 5, “Evaluating the Four Books,” p. 43.

100. *Hanyu da cidian* 1986: 8.572.

101. See “Biography of Boyi” (*Boyi liezhuan* 伯夷列傳) in Sima 1959.

102. *Hanyu da cidian* 1986: 8.572.

103. Translation by Watson 1958: 55.

104. For discussion on the classic, see Chapter Three, note 4.

105. See Duke Xiang, year 24, *Commentary of Zuo*. Translation by Legge 2000: 5.507, adapted.

106. *Academia Sinica text database, Hanshu*: 2735. Translation by Watson 1993: 1.236, adapted and italics mine. Also, see Owen 1996: 136–142. For a partial translation, see de Bary and Bloom 1999: 373–374.

107. “Introduction to the Table of Contents of the Historical Annals and Biographies in *A Book to Hide*” (*Cangshu shiji liezhuan zongmu qianlun* 藏書世紀列傳總目前論), CS, p. 7.

108. See *CS*, p. 7.
109. See “Miscellaneous Matters,” *FS*, p. 97.
110. Translation by Watson 1993: 1.235.
111. *Academia Sinica text database, Hanshu*: 2735.
112. *Academia Sinica text database, Hanshu*: 2733.
113. *Academia Sinica text database, Hanshu*: 2735.

CHAPTER FIVE — GENUINENESS (真)

1. Taylor 1991: 74. Taylor’s work is wide-ranging and extensive. For the purposes of our brief conclusion, I will rely primarily on Taylor 1989 and Taylor 1991. For insightful studies and reviews on both works, see Mulhall and Swift 1994: 101–126, Dallmayr 1994, and Schweiker 1992. There exists a wide-ranging body of contemporary literature on the subject of something akin to Li Zhi’s idea of “genuineness” or “authenticity.” See, for example, Trilling 1972, which Taylor sees as a central inspiration for his own work. For a more recent work, see Hartman 2002.

2. While Taylor uses the term “authenticity,” throughout this chapter, I will tend towards using the related term “genuineness” as it more aptly captures Li Zhi’s idea of *zhen* 真. Taylor’s conception of “authenticity” differs in significant ways from Li’s of “genuineness,” but for our limited purposes we can rely upon the general similarity between the two. For “genuineness” as a translation for *zhen*, see Chapter One, note 15.

3. “Miscellaneous Writings,” *FS*, p. 98.
4. *FS*, pp. 83–86.
5. *FS*, pp. 98–99.
6. See Peterson 1998a: 746 for discussion on these various interpretations.
7. Taylor 1991: 1.
8. Taylor 1991: 60.
9. Alexis de Toqueville and Nietzsche, respectively, in Taylor 1991: 4.
10. Taylor 1991: 13.
11. Taylor 1991: 73.
12. Taylor 1991: 40–41.
13. *FS*, p. 164.
14. Taylor 1991: 4.
15. Taylor 1989: 8.
16. Taylor 1989: 8 and 75.
17. Taylor 1989: 99, italics mine.
18. “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” *FS*, pp. 98–99.
19. Taylor 1985: 46.
20. Taylor 1989: 35.
21. Taylor 1985: 57, italics mine.
22. Taylor 1985: 68, italics mine.
23. Taylor 1985: 71.
24. Taylor 1985: 72.
25. Taylor 1989: 61.

26. Taylor 1989: 92.
27. “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” *FS*, p. 98.
28. “Miscellaneous Writings,” *FS*, p. 98.
29. For discussion on nature as a part of culture in Chinese thought, see LaFargue 2001. For the reference to the quotation, see LaFargue 2001: 53.
30. LaFargue 2001: 48.
31. Li Zhi argues our spontaneous feelings are our best resource for living well, and in considering language and questions that enable us to helpfully examine this subject, one rich body of scholarship is that on virtues. The predominant view in scholarship on virtue conceives of the development of virtues as requiring rational deliberation, and thus few thinkers in the western philosophical tradition have explored the idea that virtues exist prior to language. For thinkers who do explore the possibility of virtues related to or overlapping with the idea of pre-linguistic virtues, see Slote 1983, especially pages 46–52 who explores the idea of virtues as relative to age whereby, for example, prudence is a virtue in adults but an anti-virtue in young children; Driver 2001 who argues that certain virtues, “virtues of ignorance” such as modesty or blind charity, require lack of knowledge; and Arpaly 2003 who explores the idea of “inadvertent virtues” whereby following one’s instincts rather than rational deliberation may lead to the more virtuous action. I thank Eric L. Hutton for pointing me to these references and discussion on this subject. Scientists have also begun to examine, or re-examine, the possibility of morality, or aspects of it, as innate. See, for example, Hamlin, Wynn, and Bloom 2007, Warneken and Tomasello 2009, and Bloom 2010. For a work examining the contributions the sciences can make to humanistic studies, see Slingerland 2008.
32. Taylor 1991: 107–108, italics mine.
33. See Kang 1935. For English translation, see Thompson 1958.
34. Shakespeare 1987.
35. Taylor 1991: 74.

APPENDIX A — “A SKETCH OF ZHUOWU: WRITTEN IN YUNNAN”

1. *FS*, pp. 83–86. For a partial English translation, see Cheang 1973: 172–173 and 175–177. For an unpublished full English translation of the essay, see Li Zhi, unpublished translation by Ivanhoe. For a nearly full translation in French, see Billeter 1979: 51–65. I am most grateful to the participants in the Greater Saint Louis Ming-Qing Reading Group, Robert E. Hegel, and Philip J. Ivanhoe for generous and insightful corrections and comments that have been invaluable to my translation. Li’s essay was likely written in Yunnan around 1580 when Li was serving as the Prefect to the small prefecture of Yaoan 姚安 in Yunnan. See Billeter 1979: 59. Within Li’s body of work, there are two explicitly autobiographical essays. The other is “Testimony” (*Yu yue* 豫約), *FS*, pp. 177–192.
2. Literally the name means “Great-like-the-Valley” or “Aperture-like-a-Ravine.” The compound *ruo gu* is found throughout the *Daodejing*, a text to which Li Zhi provides a commentary. See *LZWJ*, vol. 7, pp. 1–28. Li explains the term *ruo gu* as “[the Dao] is as vast as a valley, and yet itself possesses nothing.”

See *LZWJ*, vol. 7, p. 7. For illuminating discussions of the name Kong Ruogu, see M. Huang 1995: 46 and Wu 1990: 21. Both read Li Zhi's essay as "fictional," in contrast to much scholarship that interprets the essay as transparent and factual. For the latter reading, see Billeter 1979, Rong 1973, Jilun Liu 1999, and especially Suzuki 1935. While Kong Ruogu is clearly a fictional character, Suzuki's work is one example where a scholar reads him as a historical figure and examines him in this light. For a Chinese translation of Suzuki's article, see W. Zhu 1935.

3. The character 卓 is defined in a number of ways, among which three are clearly relevant to reading our passage at hand: "outstanding," "far," and "to be upright."

4. The character 篤 has at least two meanings. One is genuineness. Such a use of the term can be found in, for example, the *Analects* 8.2. A second meaning of *du* is in description of a serious illness. See, for example, the *Records of the Grand Historian*, chapter 79.

5. Li Zhi was born in Quanzhou. His birth name was 載贄 Zaizhi and style was 卓吾 Zhouwu and 篤吾 Duwu. See Rong 1973. Rong's biography of Li Zhi is commonly considered a reliable classic on the subject. In describing the first half of Li's life, Rong most often uncritically relies on "A Sketch of Zhuowu" as a source material. Also, see Qian Qianyi's 錢謙益 (1582–1664) biography on Li: Qian 1643.

6. This line echoes one found in the *Zhuangzi* in a debate between the rigid logician Hui Shi and Zhuangzi: "It is obvious then . . . that the useless has its uses." See chapter 26; translation by Watson 1968: 299. The passage also appears to play with the story from *Mengzi* 1A7 where a king demands that a sheep be "exchanged" for an ox, as he cannot bear to see the ox quivering with fear on the way to being sacrificed for a ritual.

7. Li Zhi was born November 23, 1527. He was the eldest son in the family. His father's name was Li Baizhai 李白齋. See Rong 1973: 18. His mother was named Ms. Xu 徐.

8. The description of one with a father but without a mother as "orphaned" is unusual, at least in Li Zhi's time. Typically, one was considered "orphaned" when one's father had passed away even if one's mother was still alive. I would like to thank Steven B. Miles for alerting me to this point. In 1532 when Li was six *sui*, his stepmother passed away. See *XFS*, p. 20.

9. Or, the "Acolyte Bai."

10. See Rong 1957: 18–19 for dating of this essay.

11. See *Analects* 13.4. Fan Chi asks Kongzi a question about growing grain and vegetables. When Fan Chi leaves, Kongzi responds, "What a petty man, Fan Xu (Fan Chi)!" He then continues to discuss that if rulers love rightness, then the state will be populous and the people will be happy. There will be no need to talk about growing grain. For translation, see Watson 2007: 89.

12. See *Analects* 18.7. Zilu comes upon an "old man carrying a pole with a basket dangling from it." The old man, a recluse, scoffs at Zilu and says, "Don't know how to move your four limbs, can't tell the five grains apart?—who is your 'Master?'" Translation by Watson 2007: 130. See also *Analects* 14.41, in which an old man carrying a basket passes the gate of the house where Kongzi is staying

and recites the following passage from the *Book of Poetry*: “In deep water, let your robe get wet; in shallow, hike it up.” Kongzi responds, “Quite right—that would be the easy way out.” Translation by Watson 2007: 102.

13. Kongzi.
14. Li Zhi’s step-mother.
15. At 26 Li Zhi earned the title in Fujian of *juven*.
16. In 1556 he was appointed Director of Education in Gongcheng which was located in the prefecture of Hui 輝, in the province of Henan. See Rong 1957: 2.
17. In northern Henan.
18. Li Zhicai 李之才 (d. 1045). For Li Zhi’s biography on Li Zhicai, see “An Afterword on Virtuous Scholar Officials,” *CS*, pp. 528–529. Li Zhicai once studied under Mu Xiu 穆修 (979–1032). He was also deeply immersed in the *Book of Changes*.
19. Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077) was a reclusive philosopher of the Song period. Li Zhicai is commonly considered Shao Yong’s most important teacher. Both Li Zhicai and Shao Yong are from the same period as Zhu Xi. Shao was connected with a circle of thinkers that aimed to disprove any relation between Confucianism and schools such as Daoism and Buddhism. Included in this circle were thinkers such as the Cheng brothers, Zhang Zai, and Zhou Dunyi, though Shao differed in his views from the other members. For Li Zhi’s biography on Shao Yong, see *CS*, pp. 529–531. For discussion on Shao Yong, see Wyatt 1996.
20. In 1555.
21. Quanzhou prefecture 泉州府 is in Fujian Province. Jinjiang county is located in Quanzhou prefecture.
22. Li Zhi serves as director of education in Quanzhou from 1556 to 1560.
23. See “Testimony,” *FS*, pp. 177–192. Li writes that while serving as the director he had quarrels with the prefect and the inspector of the schools.
24. In 1560 he is appointed to the position of “Master” or “Erudite” in Nanjing.
25. Only a few months after serving as master of the Academy, his father passed away in 1563, and Li returned to Fujian to mourn.
26. Literally, the “Japanese foreigners.” They were most often local smugglers in the overseas trade.
27. The coast of Fujian was constantly being attacked at this time.
28. The journey Li traveled is about 800 kilometers.
29. In the year 1560 in Quanzhou, the place was not only plagued by pirate attacks, but also by a famine.
30. In 1563.
31. Beijing.
32. In 1564.
33. His paternal grandfather, Lin Zhuxuan 林竹軒, died in 1559.
34. Li leaves his wife and three daughters in the county of Hui 輝 located in the province of Henan 河南.
35. Her dates are 1533–1588. They married in 1547 when Li was 20.
36. One *qing* equals a hundred *mu*.

37. Xie An 謝安 (320–385 CE) is arguably the main character of *A New Account of Tales of the World*. It was not until he was past 40 that he accepted his first official post. For further discussion on Xie An, see Chapter Two, note 59.

38. Li accepts a position in the Board of Rites in 1566. It was at this time that he met Xu Yongjian 徐用檢 (1528–1611) and Li Fengyang 李逢陽, and through them was introduced to the writings of Wang Yangming and Wang Ji. See Xu Yongjian's discussion of the heart of the infant, in *MRXA*, vol. 3, pp. 38–40. During this period Li was also influenced in his intellectual and spiritual development by Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 (1508–1576) and Li Cai 李材 (1525–1599).

39. In 1567, the Longqing 隆慶 (1567–1572) emperor takes the throne.

40. See *Analects* 9.12: “rather than dying in the hands of retainers, isn't it better that I die in the hands of you, my disciples? And although I may not be entitled to a grand funeral, it's not as though I were dying by the roadside, is it?” Translation by Watson 2007: 62.

41. The renowned painter Gu Kaizhi, 341–402 CE. A free spirited painter, writer, calligrapher, poet, and buffoon. See Chapter Two, note 82 for discussion on Gu.

42. Li takes on the position as a Vice Bureau Director in the Nanjing Board of Punishments from 1570 to 1577. See Rong 1957: 30–31. In this period Li met and cultivated friendships with Jiao Hong and Geng Dingli, studied under Wang Bi, and in general was introduced to the circle of Taizhou thinkers.

43. From 1577 to 1580 Li serves as Prefect of Yaoan, Yunnan, a small prefecture populated at that time by many minority groups. Li is known to have successfully implemented a free and easy style of government. Li also becomes interested in Buddhism during this time. In 1581, he returned to the prefecture Huang'an 黃安, Huguang 湖廣 where his daughter and son-in-law resided. From the early 1580s to his death in 1602 he produced the majority of his published writings.

APPENDIX B — “ON THE CHILD-LIKE HEART-MIND”

1. *FS*: 98–99. The term child-like heart-mind finds its *locus classicus* in the *Commentary of Zuo*. In the section on the Duke of Xian, year 31 we find a negative use of this concept where the term carries the connotation of a mind that is infantile and undeveloped. See Billeter 1979: 250–258, for an annotated French translation of the essay. For an excellent annotated Japanese translation, see Mizoguchi's in Iriya 1971: 341–343. For English translations, see Owen 1996: 808–811; Ye Yang 1999: 26–28; Li Zhi, unpublished translation by Meyer-Fong. For a partial English translation, see de Bary and Bloom 1999: 865–873.

I am grateful to the Greater Saint Louis Ming-Qing Reading Group, Philip J. Ivanhoe, and Shao Dongfang for insightful comments which have greatly benefited my translation.

2. See Chapter Three, note 7 for discussion on this drama. The *Western Chamber* is a retelling of an earlier Tang period story entitled *Yingying's Story*. For discussion on the latter, see Chapter Three, note 8.

3. The Farmer of the Dragon Ravine is the anonymous commentator of a 1582 edition of the *Western Chamber*. The quotation is from the preface of this edition.

4. The *locus classicus* for the “original mind” (*benxin* 本心) is *Mengzi* 6A10.

5. See *Mengzi* 7B25: “To have it in oneself is what is meant by being ‘faithful.’” Translation by Van Norden 2008: 190.

6. See *Analects* 14.5: “Those who have virtue invariably have something to say, but those who have something to say do not invariably have virtue.” Translation by Watson 2007: 96.

7. The common Chinese saying “A short person watching the theater” (*airen guan chang* 矮人觀場) describes a short person standing in a theater who applauds or boos with the audience even though being too short, he cannot see the performance.

8. The *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選) by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531 CE) is one of the most influential literary anthologies in Chinese history. For an English translation, see Knechtges 1982.

9. “Fantastic tales” (*chuan qi* 傳奇) emerge in the late-Tang period.

10. “Play-scripts” (*yuan ben* 院本) emerge during the early-Yuan period.

11. The *Western Chamber* is comprised of five Yuan period comedies.

12. The *Water Margin* differs in form from the *Western Chamber* in that the former is a collection of chapters rather than of discrete plays.

13. The eight-legged essay is a highly structured essay prescribed as the standard form of examination answer from the mid-15th until the beginning of the 20th century. Essays had eight prescribed sections. Candidates for the Civil Service Examinations were given select phrases from classical texts and then asked to write three to four hundred character long commentaries using the eight-legged essay format.

14. See chapter 26 of the *Zhuangzi*: “Where can I find someone who has forgotten words so that I can have a word with him!” Translation by Watson 1968: 302.

APPENDIX C — “MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS”

1. *FS*, pp. 96–98. For partial English translation see Cheang 1973: 277–279. For full, unpublished English translation, see Li Zhi, unpublished translation by Meyer-Fong. I am grateful to Tobie Meyer-Fong for sharing her work with me, from which I have benefited greatly. For a French translation, see Billeter 1979: 258–262. For an excellent annotated Japanese translation, see Mizoguchi’s translation in Iriya 1971: 343–346. I have also benefited immensely from reading this essay with the on-going reading group of Ming-Qing scholars at Washington University in Saint Louis.

2. *Moon Prayer Pavilion* (*Bai yue ting* 拜月亭), better known as *Tales of the Mysterious Women’s Quarters* (*Yougui ji* 幽閨記), is a late-Yuan drama by Shi Hui 施惠 (fl. 1295). A commentary on it is attributed, most scholars believe falsely, to Li Zhi and is entitled “Mr. Li Zhuowu’s Critique of *Tales of the Mysterious Women’s Quarters*” (*Li Zhuowu xiansheng piping Yougui ji* 李卓吾先生批評幽閨記).

3. For discussion and reference to the *Western Chamber*, see Chapter Three, note 7.

4. *The Lute*, written by the Ming period dramatist Gao Ming 高明 (ca. 1305–1368), is widely considered to be one of the great achievements in Chinese drama. For an English translation, see Mulligan 1980. For a revised and edited version of Li Zhi’s commentary on this work, see Li Zhi 2009c.

5. For the term “Creator” (*zao hua* 造化), see *Zhuangzi*, chapter 6; *HY*, p. 17, l. 55, 59–60; Watson 1968: 85.

6. For the term “spirit-like sageliness” (*shen sheng* 神聖), see *Zhuangzi*, chapter 13; *HY*, p. 35, l. 56; Watson 1968: 150.

7. Once removed from what is genuine.

8. A paraphrase of the first line of Du Fu’s 杜甫 (712–770 CE) poem “On the Companion” (*Ou ti* 偶題). See Du Fu, in *HY*, vol. 2, p. 476, n. 44, l. 1: “The workings of literature from past through present/The human heart knows if it has attained or lost the essence.”

9. Literally, “the male and female of the black and yellow steeds.” Li quotes from the *Book of Poetry*, book two, part one. Also, see the *Liezi* 列子, chapter 8, “Explaining Conjunctions” (*Shuofu* 說符).

10. See the *Book of Changes*, the “Commentaries on Words and Texts” (*Wenyan* 文言) for the *Qian* 乾 hexagram.

11. Literally, “scholars who search the lines and measure the ink.”

12. See the *Book of Changes*, the *Huan* 渙 hexagram.

13. Literally, “meditation maladies” (*chan bing* 禪病), a Buddhist term meaning wandering thoughts and illusions that interfere with true insight.

14. Li uses the same phrasing in “On the Child-like Heart-Mind.” See *FS*, p. 99.

15. From the Northern Song period.

16. From the Yuan period.

17. Gao Ming.

18. Paraphrase of a legend about Bodhidharma’s last conversation with his disciples. For English translation, see Dumoulin 1988: 93.

19. This echoes a similar thought by Sima Qian, recorded in the *History of the Han Dynasty* (*Hanshu* 漢書), chapter 62.

20. Such as Yingying in the *Western Chamber*.

21. The main character in *Yingying’s Story* and the *Western Chamber*.

22. Allusions to romantic and sexual liaisons.

23. Zhang Xu 張旭 (8th century CE), commonly considered one of two great calligraphers of the Tang and most famous for his spontaneous style of calligraphy. Known as one of the Eight Immortals of the Winecup and as Zhang Dian 張顛, “Zhang the Madman,” for his eccentric behavior.

24. Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (309–365 CE) is considered one of if not the greatest calligrapher in China and is most famous for his free and spontaneous running script.

25. Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–388 CE), Wang Xizhi’s youngest son and also famous in his own right as one of China’s great calligraphers. Both Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi are characters in Liu Yiqing’s *A New Account of Tales of the World*. See Yiqing Liu 1956.

26. Yao Fu is the style name for Shao Yong (1011–1077). See Appendix A, note 19.

27. Founder of the Shang.

28. Founder of the Zhou.

29. Volume 2, act 5 of the *Western Chamber*. The term *qin xin* finds one of its earliest and most well known recordings in the “Biography of Sima Xiangru” in Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* where the widowed Zhuo Wenjun hears Sima Xiangru play the lute, and thereby is drawn to the stirrings of Sima Xiangru’s heart. Sun You 孫柚 is attributed with the authorship of the Ming period text *The Zither* (*Qinxin ji* 琴心記), about Sima Xiangru.

Selected Bibliography

The following abbreviations are used in the text, notes, and bibliography:

CTJ	<i>Chutan ji</i> 初潭集
DMB	<i>Dictionary of Ming Biography</i>
FS	<i>Fenshu</i> 焚書
HY	<i>Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series</i>
LZQJ	<i>Li Zhi quanji zhu</i> 李贄全集注
LZWJ	<i>Li Zhi wenji</i> 李贄文集
MRXA	<i>Ming ru xuean</i> 明儒學案
SBBY	<i>Sibu beiyao</i> 四部備要
XCS	<i>Xu cangshu</i> 續藏書
XFS	<i>Xu fenshu</i> 續焚書

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Li Zhi (1527–1602) was a bestselling author with a devoted readership. His biting, shrewd, and visionary writings with titles like *A Book to Hide* and *A Book to Burn* were both inspiring and inflammatory. Widely read from his own time to the present, Li Zhi has long been acknowledged as an important figure in Chinese cultural history. While he is esteemed as a stinging social critic and an impassioned writer, Li Zhi's ideas have been dismissed as lacking a deeper or constructive vision. Pauline C. Lee convincingly shows us otherwise. Situating Li Zhi within the highly charged world of the late-Ming culture of “feelings,” Lee presents his slippery and unruly yet clear and robust ethical vision. Li Zhi is a Confucian thinker whose consuming concern is a powerful interior world of abundance, distinctive to each individual: the realm of the emotions. Critical to his ideal of the good life is the ability to express one's feelings well. In the work's conclusion, Lee brings Li Zhi's insights into conversation with contemporary philosophical debates about the role of feelings, an ethics of authenticity, and the virtue of desire.

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