1999

Li Zhi (1527-1602) and his literary thought/

Qingliang Chen
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses

Chen, Qingliang, "Li Zhi (1527-1602) and his literary thought/" (1999). Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014. 1391.
Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/1391

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
LI ZHI (1527-1602) AND HIS LITERARY THOUGHT

A Thesis Presented

by

QINGLIANG CHEN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 1999

Chinese
LI ZHI (1527-1602) AND HIS LITERARY THOUGHT

A Thesis Presented

by

QINGLIANG CHEN

Approved as to style and content by:

Donna E. Gjertson, Chair

Alvin P. Cohen, Member

Zhongwei Shen, Member

Chisato Kitagawa, Department Chair
Department of Asian Languages and Literatures
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Donald E. Gjertson, Chair of my Thesis Committee, for his scholarly guidance and his continuing support through my graduate years. I am also deeply indebted to Prof. Alvin P. Cohen. He has carefully reviewed various drafts of my thesis, constantly offered me his critical insights, and provided me with much needed advice. His unfailing support and encouragement helped me through some very difficult times. My heartfelt appreciation goes also to Prof. Zhongwei Shen for his invaluable instruction and his critical comments. His profound knowledge of historical linguistics led me to explore Chinese intellectual history from a new perspective.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LI ZHI'S LIFE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Family Background and His Hometown</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Early Education with His Father</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. &quot;Current Literature&quot; and the Civil Service Examinations</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Official Career and Family Duties</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Spiritual and Intellectual Life</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. LI ZHI'S VIEW ON WRITERS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Mind of a Child</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Characteristics of a Writer</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. LI ZHI'S THOUGHT ON WRITING</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Writing in Plain Language</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Achievements in Writing</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Frustration and Literary Writing</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Writing for Eternity</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. LI ZHI'S ARGUMENTS ON READING</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Critical Approach towards Reading the Classics</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Reading Fiction as Serious Literature</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. <em>Shuihu zhuans</em> Commentary: Li Zhi's Reading of the Fictional World</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. EPILOGUE</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHARTER I
INTRODUCTION

The late Ming dynasty is generally considered to begin with the Wanli reign period (1573-1619) and to end with the fall of the dynasty itself in 1644 when the capital city was captured by the Manchu armies. It was an age of intellectual controversy and diversity in the history of Chinese thought.\(^1\) In the sometimes confusing world of what is known as Neo-Confucian thought, Wang Yangming 王陽明 (Wang Shouren 王守仁 1472-1529) represented an emphasis on the individual mind as opposed to social norms. Wang Yangming believed that each person has within himself "good innate knowledge" (liangzhi 良知), which is an inborn capacity to know and do the good and enables him to discern between right and wrong.\(^2\) This conception derived from Mencius, who held that man has the inborn ability to know the good.\(^3\) On the other hand, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) stressed the importance of learning about external 'principle' (li 理), and by the Ming dynasty his commentaries on the classics, while masterly in themselves, had come to represent a stultifying orthodoxy. Under the auspices of the Yongle 永樂 emperor (Zhu Di 朱棣 r.1403-1424) and in the prescription of the normative

\(^1\) Ji Wenfu 楊文甫, Wannming sixiangshi lun 晚明思想史論, p. 1.


classical commentaries by Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1032-1107), Neo-Confucian syntheses and anthologies, such as *Sishu daquan* 四書大全 and *Wujing daquan* 五經大全, were compiled and published. They served as the standard for the civil service examinations and for moral values and ethical behavior. According to the Zhu Xi school, judgments actually or allegedly once expressed by Confucius had to be the only valid criteria for all time. Zhu Xi's exposition of the Confucian doctrine remained unchallenged until Wang Yangming whose new idea of innate knowledge attracted attention from followers and opponents.

The Ming educated elite, enjoying special status by virtue of their education, understood that their role to serve the state and their claim on high status were predicted on a faithful conformity to the imperially sanctioned version of Neo-Confucianism. From early youth they were trained to read the classics of the Confucian tradition, educated in the dominant interpretation of these classics set down by Zhu Xi school, and instructed to manipulate the language and ideas of that tradition in their public life. When their education had reached a certain level, they participated in the civil service examination system. *Bagu wen* 八股文, a highly structured examination essay in eight parts based on classical exegesis, took on its precise formal requirements for the civil service examinations in 1480s. It came to symbolize, for better or worse, the Ming ladder of success. The clearest manifestation of attaining a high level of education and social status was to pass the

---


highest level of examinations in the imperially sponsored system. In many ways, the demand of the civil service examination shaped education, book publishing, language use, and the lives and thinking of literati. The examination essays were to "discourse for the Sage" (dai sheng liyan 代聖言), but some essayists went beyond this initial requirement to develop more personal mode of expressions and found bagu a medium to present current views. A few writers in the late Ming even went so far as to use the assigned topic to give vent to their pent-up feeling (jieti fahui 備題發揮) when writing the examination essays. At the same time, bagu wen also came to be accepted as an important genre of literary prose in its own right.6

The expansion of the printing industry during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries also contributed to the unlocking of the relationship between the imperial state, the gentry class, and the Cheng-Zhu7 Confucian orthodoxy. Commercial printing helped create an intellectual milieu that encouraged open and pluralistic interpretations of the Confucian canon in the civil service examination, which largely deviated from the Cheng-Zhu school. Writers, editors, publishers, book collectors,8 and readers were actively involved and participated in a discourse of expressions of self.

---

6 See Gu Yanwu, "San chang" 三場, in Ri zhi lu 日知錄, vol.2, 16:45-46. Qian Jibo 魏基石, in his Mingda wenxue 明代文學, pp. 105-123, discusses the literary value of the bagu essay in the Ming dynasty at some length.

7 So named after Zhu Xi and his predecessors the Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao 程颢 (1031-1085) and Cheng Yi (1032-1107).

8 In addition to the government libraries such as Wenyuan ge 文淵閣, there appeared some private book collectors. Among them, Jiao Hong, Chen Di 陳第 (1541-1587), and Xu Bo 徐勃 (1570-1645) were well known for the books they collected and the catalogues they compiled. Lai Xinxia quoted from Ye
The philosophical system developed by Zhu Xi in the Song dynasty drew a line between Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism. Yet, it was during the later half of the Ming dynasty that inventive intellectuals began to see Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism less as standing apart from, or in opposition to, each other, and more as sharing common ground. The renewed interest in Buddhism stimulated new currents of thought. By the early sixteenth century, Wang Yangming succeeded in shifting the center of Confucian philosophy away from the fixed principles of the Zhu Xi school toward a greater concern with the mind and the power it had to perceive, and dissolve, such principles. It was Wang Yangming's studies into "good innate knowledge" in the 1510s that decisively opened Neo-Confucianism to explicit Buddhist influence. He drew on Buddhist resources to find a way out of the grip of sterile orthodoxy that he felt stifled the Cheng-Zhu tradition and Neo-Confucianism. Wang Yangming's rethinking of the Neo-Confucian tradition owe much to the presence of Buddhism in Chinese life and stimulated its absorption into the world of thought.

The question of individualism became a lively, and indeed crucial, issue in the intellectual life of the Wanli reign period. An adherent of Wang Yangming's school, Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), was one of the most outstanding and controversial thinkers during that period. He saw himself as carrying on the essentials of Confucianism, but he was radical in his emphasis on individualism and iconoclastic

Changchis' 華昌熾 (1849-1717) Cangshu siji shi 藏書世紀詩 that Chen Di had more than 10,000 books and Xu Bo's collection exceeded 53,000 volumes. Lai Xinxia, p.270-271.
toward the relatively conservative Cheng-Zhu school. Being an individual with a sharp, critical mind, he had the courage to say openly what others wished to say but dared not. Intellectually honest, his writings shocked the educated class of his time. He rigorously attacked the increasingly rigid Confucian orthodoxy as "the deceptive learning of the Way" (jia dao xue 假道学) and emphasized the importance of vernacular literature because he believed that fiction and drama revealed the inner state of characters and unmasked hypocrisy and duplicity of the society. Because his point of view challenged Confucian conformity and conventional morality, he was seen as offensive and ultimately as dangerous. He was accused of publishing misleading books maligning Confucius. Held under arrest in a prison near Beijing, he cut his throat and died in 1602. His suicide ended his effort to voice unconventional views and to amend the accepted code of ethics. However, his literary thought inspired a whole generation of writers to proclaim their right to their own opinions and to be true to life even when they disagreed with the Confucian orthodoxy.

Li Zhi called for reliance on one's own intuitions and desires as opposed to external authority. This is essentially Mencius, via Wang Yangming, but the philosophical view led Li Zhi to find literary value in unusual places. He had a penchant for vernacular literature. Although the modern opposition between literary language (wenyan 文言) and vernacular (baihua 白话) fiction did not exist in the traditional discourse of fiction criticism, most authors and critics continued to use wenyan and claimed it as appropriate to serious literature. Li Zhi was one of the few

---

9 Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道, "Li Wenling zhuan" 李溫陵傳 in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, pp.4-5. "Geng Dingxiang" 聲定向, Mingshi 明史, 70:1694.10:5816-5817.
critics who favored the use of colloquial language -- "the daily colloquial speech of
the ordinary people" (*baixing riyong zhi eryan* 百姓日用之爾言). 10 His point of
view was crucial for the development of Ming-Qing vernacular literature and his
appeal seemed equally irresistible to twentieth-century readers. Leaders of modern
literary and cultural movements claimed him a forerunner and used his arguments to
support their positions. Their movements, in turn, produced numbers of well-known
novelists and playwrights who wrote in the vernacular.

In terms of literary style, the distinction was between "refined" (*ya* 雅)
 writings and a more "popular" (*su* 俗) style in Li Zhi's times. In the traditional
scheme, fiction and drama were barely tolerated as entertainment by the educated
elite. They certainly did not qualify as high art, on the same level with classical
poetry, essays, historical writings, and the like (*buneng deng daya zhi tang
不能登大雅之堂*). Li Zhi upheld his belief that the popular literature of fiction
and drama, written either in literary language or in the vernacular, must be seen as
serious literature as well. Many novelists and novel commentators, including Jin
Shengtan 金聖歎 (1608-1661), Chen Chen 陳忱, and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡
(1670-1698), followed Li Zhi in appealing to this theory to emphasize the
seriousness of their works or of the works on which they were commenting. With
the elevation of the status of vernacular literature and increasing literati input, by the
early Qing the opposition between *ya* and *su* had become less rigid. An ideal literary
work was something that appealed to both refined and common readers (*ya su gong

10 "Da Deng Mingfu" 岱郭明府. *Fenshu* in *Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 1:40-41.
Indeed, novel commentators like Jin Shengtan and others justified the existence of novels on the basic of their appeal to broad audience.

Li Zhi is also credited with championing the idea of writing commentaries on novels. In Europe, when medieval writers started writing in the vernacular instead of Latin, they tried to appropriate some of the power and prestige of the classical tradition by providing commentary for their own works. For example, the Italian poet Dante's (1265-1321) first major works, *Vita Nuova*, written in his native Italian, was accompanied by his own commentary. In China, the application of commentary to fiction and drama was also motivated by a desire to raise the prestige of vernacular literature. Although the authorship of the "Li Zhuowu" commentaries on *Xiyuji* 西游記 and *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 remains a vexed question, there is little doubt that Li Zhi worked on *Shui hu zhuan* 水浒傳. He wrote not only the preface to the novel, but also made commentaries on the text. Together with preface (xu 序) and colophon (ba 跋), the pingdian 評點 style of commentaries constituted the essence of late Ming and early Qing fiction criticism. Li Zhi provided later critics such as Ye Zhou 葉灝 (fl. 1595-1624), Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646), and Jin Shengtan with an almost larger-than-life image of a

---

11 Minis and Scott, pp. 373-376.

12 Many texts were published with the critical comments of a critic added in the upper margin of the page. These marginalia might range from simple expressions of admiration to more extended considerations on all conceivable aspects of the text. The critic of a text might also draw readers' attention to commendable phrases and passages by placing little circles or other marks besides the characters concerned, a practice known as pingdian.
practicing fiction commentator and left readers with a new method of reading fiction. His importance as a model lasted into the early twentieth century.

Li Zhi has been labeled a Confucian, a rebel against Confucianism, a pioneer of anti-feudal thought, Buddhist, Legalist, progressive, nihilist, individualist, and more. Despite the great deal that has been written about him, his motives are not much appreciated by some historians. This lack of understanding has been caused in part by the controversial response to his writings from the very beginning and in part by Li Zhi's own failure to produce a systematic treatise. However, his reasoning is not difficult to outline if we examine his writing comprehensively and critically. His original thought was recorded in his letters and poems and reiterated in essays and other critical writings in his major publications including Fenshu, Xu Fenshu, Cangshu, and Xu Cangshu. His biographical data, scant as it is, will also shed some light on his individual outlook. Examination of the sociohistorical context will also provide a background for what was transpiring in the culture that nourished Li Zhi and other thinkers in the late Ming.

Using Fenshu, Xu Fengsu, Cangshu, Xu Cangshu and his other works as major source materials, my thesis aims at exploring Li Zhi's literary thought,

---

13 "Li Zhi was reared as a Confucian and died one." See Ray Huang, p. 187.

14 See Wu Ze, pp.1-5.

15 Zhu Qianzhi, pp. 54-65.

16 Ray Huang, for example, while rightfully pointed out that "poverty played a significant role in shaping Li's life," concluded that Li Zhi did not want to return to his hometown after his resignation from office, because he "could detach himself from his mundane obligations to his kin." Huang, pp. 189-221. Li Zhi could not have given up his official career in Yao'an, if that were his major concern.
centering around his view on writers, writing, and reading. The term literary thought will be used as the broadest possible term to encompass Li Zhi's literary theory, his view on writers and audience, writing and publishing, interpretation and criticism that had resonance in other areas of intellectual and social life in the late Ming. I will also examine the extent to which his literary thought shaped and defined the intellectual trend in the late Ming and early Qing China that influenced the modern literary movement.

My thesis will be divided into five sections. In the first section, based on his autobiography "Zhuowu lunlue" 卓吾論略 included in Fenshu and other biographies by his contemporaries, I will present a brief account of Li Zhi's life with the highlights of his family background and his hometown Quanzhou. In the second, I will discuss his view on writers. I will relate my interpretation of the comments by Ming and Qing writers to the specific intellectual currents of the time. I will further argue that his literary thought was based on his philosophical view of life, which grew out of the social context of the late Ming. I will explore in detail his view of the role of a writer's mind, especially his most important essay "Tongxin shuo" 童心說 and how he describes characteristics of a writer. In the next section, I will discuss his theory about writing. Several important contrasts in his argument, such as ya 雅 (refined) vs. su 俗 (popular), zhen 真 (true) vs. jia 假 (false), qi 奇 (extraordinary) vs. chang 常 (ordinary), will be discussed here. I will review the

---

17 In 1578, when he was fifty-two (sui 歲, I will use the traditional Chinese count throughout my thesis), Li Zhi wrote the autobiography, recounting his life up to 1577. However, its title, format, narrative stance, and the opening and closing remarks that frame the narration appear to be something written by another person. For a detailed and incisive textual and stylistic analysis of the work, see Pei-yi Wu, The Confucian's Progress, pp. 19-24.
evidence of language used in Ming-Qing vernacular literature and attempt to show how Li Zhi's literary thought influenced the modern baihua movement by Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) and others. In section four, I will demonstrate his critical approach towards reading and interpreting the classics. I will also discuss his theory of reading Chinese fiction by using his "Shuihu zhuan xu" 水浒傳序 as an example. To support my argument that the application of commentary to fiction and drama was motivated by a desire to raise the prestige of vernacular literature, I will compare the development of Chinese popular literature with that of the European tradition. Finally, in section five, I will conclude my thesis with an epilogue outlining how Li Zhi's life and thought have been criticized and valued through the history and his contribution to the Chinese literary thought.
CHAPTER II
LI ZHI’S LIFE

Li Zhi’s life spanned the last three quarters of the sixteenth century into the very beginning of the seventeenth century. His life could be roughly divided into three periods. During the first, Li Zhi received his early classical education from his father, went to a Confucian school, and studied for the civil service examination. After he passed the provincial examination in 1552, he presented himself for appointments. The next period started from 1556 when he began an official career of holding low ranking posts. He went back to his hometown to mourn his father in 1560 and then, after returning to Beijing to take up an appointment in the Imperial Academy in 1564, again he returned to Quanzhou to mourn his grandfather. Back once again in the capital in 1566, Li Zhi served as a secretary in the Ministry of Rites. Finally, after a three-year term prefect in Yunnan, Li Zhi retired from office in 1580, which signaled the beginning of the last, but the most important period of his life. He spent his later years, mostly in a Buddhist temple, reading, writing, and publishing books. His articulation and publication of unconventional ideas led to his death in 1602 in a prison near Beijing.

In this chapter, I will begin my discussion with a review of his family background and his hometown. The problem of the discrepancy between the reconstruction of Li Zhi’s family history and Li Zhi’s own account of family background will be addressed here. Then I will briefly introduce the first period of his life: his early education and his study for the civil service examination. The second period of his life will be highlighted with his official career and his family
duties. Finally, I will present the last period of his life with other Ming thinkers who had influenced and touched his life.

A. Family Background and His Hometown

In Li Zhi's own writings, the only clue to his ancestry is in his letter to his friend Jiao Hong (1540-1620) where he indicated that his remote ancestors came from Guban 建班 County, Henan, to settle in Fujin, but he did not say anything about his immediate ancestors. There was no other information about his family history by his contemporaries. Modern studies of Li Zhi's family history was based on the family's genealogical records.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{19}\) See Hok-lam Chan for information about Li Zhi in modern historiography before 1978 and Lin Haiquan for the information before 1992. Modern studies of Li Zhi started with Wu Yu's 吳虞 publication of his critical biography in 1916. No full-length studies of Li Zhi's life had been published until Suzuki Torao 鈴木虎雄 wrote a biography of Li Zhi in 1934 and Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖 compiled another one in 1937, but they did not cover Li Zhi's family history. The same is true of the more sophisticated monographic studies of Li Zhi's life and philosophy by Zhu Weizi 朱維之, Wu Ze 吳澤, Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, and others. In 1958, Ye Guoqing 葉國慶 published a pioneering study of Li Zhi's ancestors based on newly discovered lineage records (*jiapu* 家譜) preserved by a Li branch of the Lin-Li clan in Fenchu 恩池, Jinjiang 晉江 county. In 1975, Chen Sidong 陳泗東 published a study of Li Zhi's ancestors in *Quanzhou Shi Wenwu, Wenyu* of Quanzhou Shi Wenwu Guanli 泉州市文物管理委員會 and Quanzhou Haiwai Jiaotong Shi Bowuguan 泉州海外交通史博物館) published "Li Zhi de jiashi, guju ji qi qi mubei--jieshao xin faxian de youguan Li Zhi de wenwu" 李贽的家世, 故居及其墓碑 -- 介紹新發現的有關李贽的文物 in *Wenwu* 文物. This journal article tried to reconstruct Li Zhi's family history based on a manuscript copy of *Qingyuan Lin-Li zongpu* 清源林李宗譜, *Linian biao* 歷年表, and other transcription from a different edition of the same genealogy in fragmentary form. The lineage, with Li Zhi as the eighth generation, was reconstructed as: Lin Lü 林祿 (1328-1384) -- Lin Nu 林臯 (1347-1392) -- Lin Xianbao 林仙保 (ca. 1374-1424) -- Lin Gonghui 林公慧 (1391-1466) -- Lin Chen 林琛 -- Lin Yifang 林義方 (d. 1559) -- Lin Zhongxu 林鍾秀 (d. 1564) -- Lin Zaizhi 林載贊 (Li Zhi, 1527-1602). See Chen Sidong, *Wenwu*, 1:39-40, January 1975; Hok-lam Chen, pp.43-48. The most recent study of Li Zhi's life and family history is Lin Haiquan's *Li Zhi nianpu kaomue* published in 1992. Reviewing other Lin-Li genealogies, he offered another account of Li Zhi's family line. According to him, the family line of Li Zhi came down from Lin Lü as: Lin Nu -- Li Yuncheng 李允誠 -- Lin Qianxue 林乾學 -- Li Duanyang 李端陽 -- Li Zhongjie 李仲楫.
Quanzhou since Marco Polo's (1254?-1325?) time had been an important port for international trade. When we examine the genealogies of the Lin-Li clan, in which Li Zhi is listed as the eighth generation, there is an impressive long line of merchants active in domestic as well as foreign trade. Li Zhi's founding ancestor, Lin Lü 林魯 (1328-1384), inherited the family wealth and was a merchant in foreign trade at Quanzhou in late Yuan and early Ming. When Lin Lü's son, Li Nu 林怒, set sail for Ormuz on a business trip in 1384, Quanzhou was one the busiest seaports in China. In early fifteenth century, it was the last stop in China before the fleet of Zheng He 鄭和 (1371-1433), accompanied by Fujian merchants, left for the Persian Gulf and the coast of Africa. Lin Nu married a Western Asian woman, adopted the Islamic religion, and received his rites at the Qingjing Mosque 清淨.

林宗潔 -- Li Zhongxiu 李鍾秀 -- Lin Zaizhi (Li Zhi). The second-generation ancestors were divided into two branches, one carried the surname Lin, and the other adopted Li as their surname. From the third generation on, they kept the two surnames. However, the family of Li Zhi's branch changed surnames between Lin and Li every other generation. The reason why they kept changing surname still remains unknown. According to Lin Haiquan, it is possible that because Li Yuncheng's oldest brother Lin Xin 林信 did not have a son. In order to carry on their founding father's surname, Li Yuncheng changed his own son's surname back to Lin (Qianxue). Thus, this branch of the family used two surnames back and forth. Lin Haiquan's reconstruction distinguished Li Zhi's family branch from his wealthier distant relatives. Although it may help explain why Li Zhi's family was poor, more sources are needed to support this argument. In Li Zhi's writings, he mentioned no other richer relatives of Lin-Li families. Even ranking the lowest in the civil service, he had to support an extended family of thirty or so. See " Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84. See also Huang, pp. 189-222.

20 Lin Lü was originally from Henan. In late Yuan, he moved to Fujian, got married, and started the Lin family there. For more information about when and why Lin Lü moved to Fujian, see Zhang Jianye, Li Zhi pingzhuan, p. 20.

21 "Rongshan Li shi zupu" 融山李氏族譜 (excerpt), rpt. in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.179.

where Zheng He prayed before his fleet left the harbor. Lin Nu's grandson Lin Gonghui 林公惠 (1391-1466) and great-grandson Lin Chen 林琛 were merchants traveling between Liuqiu 琉球 (Okinawa) and Quanzhou and had served as interpreters for the tributary missions from Liuqiu to the Ming court.

Based on this information, some interpretations of Li Zhi concluded that "Li Zhi's direct ancestors of the previous generations were all big merchants in maritime trade" and that he "was raised in the environment of such a family of successive generations of merchants." Some writers asserted that he was never integrated with the ethos of officials because of his family background involving commerce and Islam. They are enthusiastic in associating his intellectual growth with a minority religious community and a non-Chinese value system, as well as with the commercial background of Quanzhou and his ancestors. They reasoned that since Li Zhi was unconventional in his thinking, he should have been raised in an unusual atmosphere and exposed to different thoughts since his early youth.

23 "Fengchi Lin Li zongpu" (excerpt). Rpt. in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.181. See also Rongshan Li shi zupu (excerpt). Rpt. in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.178.

24 "Stone Record of the Reconstruction of the Clear and Pure Temple" ("Chongli Qingjing si beiji" 重立清淨寺碑記) and "Stone Record of the Graves in Ch'uan-chou, by Chiang Ch'ang-kui" (Quanzhou shengmu Jiang Changgui beiji 泉州圣墓江長貴碑記), trans. by Eduard B. Vermeer, in Chinese Local History: Stone Inscriptions from Fukien in the Sung to Ch'ing Period, pp.121-126, 131-134. The Chinese versions are included in pp. 128-130, 135-136. See also He Qiaoyuan, Minshu, vol.1, 7:166-167.


27 Jean-François Billeter, p.269.

28 Hou Wailu, p. 1043; Chan, Hok-lam, p.14, 55.
However, there is a discrepancy between Li Zhi's own account and the later reconstruction of his hometown and his family history. When Li Zhi was born in Quanzhou, the capital of Quanzhou Prefecture, on November 23, 1527, he was not blessed with wealth and fortune. He described his family as impoverished rather than affluent and his hometown distressed rather than prosperous. On special occasions, he wrote, his father had to pawn his mother's hairpins and earrings. When Li Zhi was grown up, he had to go out to make a living and help support the family.

Early fifteenth-century Ming China sought to extend its influence over the states and the South Seas, in the Indian Ocean, and in lands farther east. Six spectacular maritime expeditions had been launched and Quanzhou had been China's prosperous seaport. Whatever promise that might have held, it all passed from the scene by the sixteenth century. From the beginning of the sixteenth century, Chinese coastal provinces suffered devastating raids by Japanese pirates. Sometimes the wako, assisted by collaborators on shore, took over entire Chinese villages, harassing and robbing the inhabitants. The collaborators were often comprised of common Chinese people who had been pressed into a life of outlawry for various reasons and who had no plans or aspirations of their own. When they could make a

---

29 See He Qiaoyuan, "Quanzhou cheng" in Minshu vol. 2, 33:814; Mingshi. 45:1128-1129. In Ming dynasty, Quanzhou was the capital of Quanzhou Prefecture, which governed seven counties.

30 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:83. See also Lin Haiquan, p. 2.

31 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.

32 From the pejorative Chinese term, wokou, meaning "dwarf pirates," and referring to Japanese pirates.

profit through trade, they engaged in trade or acted as brokers for other merchants and pirates; when they could not trade, they pillaged; and often they both traded and pillaged. To curtail this outlawry, the court repeatedly promulgated bans against oversea trade. But such bans were not easy to enforce, for local civil and military authorities were themselves involved in the illicit trade. The emperor subsequently ordered local authorities to destroy all oceangoing ships and to arrest the merchants who sail them. By 1551, at the height of wako piracy on the southeast coast,\(^\text{34}\) it was a crime to go to sea in a multimasted ship, even for purposes of trade. Consequently, Quanzhou's position as a major seaport declined. By the time of Li Zhi's great-grandfather, if not earlier, the cosmopolitan outlook within the family had withdrawn to the background.

Local merchants and civilians made some effort to protect themselves, but for the most part, the wako came and went as they pleased. As He Qiaoyuan (何喬達 1557-1631), a Ming historian, observed, "it has plunged people into great misery and suffering" (shengling tutan yiji 生靈涂炭已及).\(^\text{35}\) When Li Zhi went back home from Nanjing in 1560, he witnessed the disaster and joined in the fighting:

"It was a time when wako raided all along the coast; everywhere fighting was going on. I traveled at night and took a break during the day. It took me six months to get to my hometown. Soon after I was home, I was obliged to lead my brothers and nephews to defend the walled city and fight the wako."\(^\text{36}\)

\(^{34}\)Ming shilu 明實錄, 458:7743-7744.

\(^{35}\)He Qiaoyuan, "Dao yi zhi" 道夷志, Minshu, vol. 5, 146:4352-4359.

\(^{36}\)"Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.
From the Jiajing reign (1552-1566) to early Wanli, Quanzhou Prefecture also suffered numerous natural disasters. Flood, drought, and earthquakes came one after another.37

From Li Zhi's own writings and other historical records, we can hardly see any sign of a prosperous metropolis in sixteenth-century Quanzhou. It is also hard to see if Islamic religion had some direct influence on Li Zhi's thought, for in his copious writings he made no mention of Islam. Nevertheless, in his autobiography, Li Zhi wrote about a Chan Buddhist in Quanzhou and explained why he adopted a pen name after the Chan master. Writing in the third person, he explained:

The gentleman (Li Zhi) was born in Quanzhou. It was a good place where the Chan master Wenling stayed. The gentleman said, "I am a native of Wenling and should be called the Gentleman of Wenling (Wenling jushi 温陵居士)."

Buddhism remained a popular religion among Chinese residents in the area, in spite of the development of other contending beliefs such as Muslim. The Kaiyuan Temple 開元寺, one of the largest temples in South Fujian, had been rebuilt and repaired many times since it was built in 686 A.D.38 The Twin Pagodas (Dongxi ta 東西塔), the symbol of Quanzhou, have stood inside the temple for centuries.

Wenling (Jiehuan 戒環) was one of the well-known Chan masters in the Kaiyuan Temple during the Song dynasty. He Qiaoyuan described him as a Chan master who "had a profound learning of the wonder of the Way" (shenzao daomiao 深造道

37 He Qiaoyuan, "Xiang yi zhi" 祥異志, Minshu, vol. 5, 146:4392-4394.

It could not have been coincident that Li Zhi would name himself after this Chan master when he started his official career and this pen name would become one of his frequently used names. Many of his published books, and biographies about him bear this name: Li Wenlingji 李温陵集, Li Wenling zhuan 李温陵傳, to name just a few. It would be safe to say that Buddhism was part of his hometown culture in which he was raised and educated.

B. Early Education with His Father

Among the family members, Li Zhi's father had the most direct influence on Li Zhi. When he was only six (or seven years) old, his mother died. He was primarily raised by his father and grandfather and mostly stayed with them until he left home for Gongcheng 共城 (Huixian in modern Henan) in 1555 when he was twenty-nine. It is clear that Li Zhi was not born into a family with a long history of distinction in letters and scholarship. Li Zhi's direct ancestors neither

---

39 He Qiaoyuan, "Fang Waizhi" 方外志 in Minshu, vol.5, 137:4076. See also Lin Haiquan, p.33, (where Jiehuan was misprinted as Jiehuai 尷僋).

40 Li Zhi has dozens of haos or pen names, which include Zhuowu 卓吾, Wenling Jushi 温陵居士, Baiquan Jushi 百泉居士. He is best known by his hao Zhuowu 卓吾. Because there is no marked difference between 卓 (toh) and 篤 (tok) in Min dialect, he is also known as 篤吾 in Fujian. See "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:83.

41 Twenty juan, edited by Gu Dashao 高大韶 and published in the Ming dynasty. The original Ming edition is kept by Beijing Library. See Lin Haiquan, p. 481.

42 By Yuan Zhongdao. See Fenshu Xu Fenshu, pp. 3-7.

43 Ibid., 3:83; "Yu Geng Kenian" 与耿克念. Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:20.

44 "Da Di Sikou" 燕秋司寇. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:37.
earned degree titles nor held any official positions. It was not until his grandfather Lin Yifang 林義方 (d. 1564) or his father Lin Baizhai 林白齋 (d. 1559) that the family began to engage in scholarship.

Accounts of Li Zhi's early years, including his own biography, stress his precocious interest in the Chinese classics. When he was seven, he began to study Confucian classics, history and literature with his father, who was a well-known teacher. Unlike other boys from a scholar-official family who had to continue their family honor and position, Li Zhi did not have to study under this kind of pressure. However, raised primarily by his father and grandfather, Li Zhi was expected to become a man of learning. To the delight of his family, he took an early interest in the classics and was deeply imbued with traditional Chinese culture. Making rapid progress in his studies, he took up in succession the Book of Changes (Zhou yi 周易), Books of Rites (San li 三禮), and finally, when he was fourteen (in 1540), the Book of History (Shangshu 尚書). He gained distinction in his hometown as a diligent and adept student. At the age of twelve he wrote an essay "Laonong laopu lun" 老農老圃論 (On Old Farmers and Old Gardeners). It expounds upon a paragraph in the Analects, which reads:

Fan Ch’ih (Fan Chi 樊邃) asked the Master (Confucius) to teach him about farming. The Master said, you had much better consult some old farmer. He asked to be taught about

---

45 See, Fengchi Lin Li zongpu (excerpt), in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.182; Wu Yu 吳虞, "Ming Li Zhuowu biezhuán" 明李卓吾別傳, in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p. 38; Qianlong Quanzhou fu zhi 乾隆泉州府志 (vol. 54, excerpt), in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.34.

46 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:83.

47 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:83.
gardening. The Master said, you had much better go to some old vegetable gardener. When Fan Ch'ih had gone out, the Master said, Fan is not a gentleman! In his essay young Li Zhi contended that it makes sense for Fan Chi's to make critical inquiry into basic knowledge of farming. Fan Chi's interrogations, he said, reminds people of a wise old man who once criticized Confucius and his disciples as men "who do not toil with his hands and feet and who cannot differentiate the five grains" (siti buqin, wugu bufen 四体不勤，五谷不分). Li Zhi believed that Fan Chi was suggesting the Master's ignorance of manual labor and inadequacy in practical knowledge of daily life. It is a logical conclusion, Li Zhi continued, that the Master would say that "Fan is not a gentleman" because he could no longer stand for such a remark.

It was not uncommon to study the classics of the Confucian tradition from early youth in Ming China, but it was unusual for a twelve-year-old boy to question the greatest sage. In later years Li Zhi was exceedingly outspoken in expressing unconventional ideas. In spite of the classical training he received, as he said later, from his youth he was skeptical about everything and everyone -- Confucian, Buddhist, or Taoist. He once mentioned that he was lucky to have been endowed with two "heavenly fortunes" (tianxing 天幸): his acumen (xinyan 心眼) and his courage (dadan 大膽). With these two "heavenly fortunes," he was never intimidated by authority but dare to challenge it. 

49 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:83.
50 "Dushu le" 諸書樂. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 6:226.
Li Zhi's essay was highly regarded by his classmates and people congratulated his father on having a bright son. But his father admonished Li Zhi not to seek wealth and position by showing off his learning. He taught young Li Zhi honesty, generosity of spirit, and concern for others and encouraged the boy to stand up for what was right.\textsuperscript{51} His father's teaching must have exerted substantial influence on Li Zhi's thinking. About forty years later, he recalled that "my father always stood up for what was right. Even though we were extremely poor, he would pawn my mother's hairpins and earrings to help friends get married. How could those narrow-minded people really understand my father and know what he wanted me to be?"\textsuperscript{52}

C. "Current Literature" and the Civil Service Examinations

During the Ming, it was possible that any intelligent male pupil who really applied himself stood a fair chance of winning an academic degree and entering the officialdom. In the second half of the sixteenth century, Quanzhou emerged as a prominent degree-winning region: of all 612 Fujian \textit{jinshi} \textit{進士} winners, Quanzhou produced 237.\textsuperscript{53} How did this environment shape Li Zhi's views on the classics, commentaries on the classics, examination essays, and official careers?

Li Zhi was taught not to seek wealth and position by showing off his learning, but at the same time, he was expected to become a man of learning and

\textsuperscript{51} "Zhuowu lunkue." \textit{Fenshu} in \textit{Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, 3:83-84.

\textsuperscript{52} "Zhuowu lunkue." \textit{Fenshu} in \textit{Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, 3:84

\textsuperscript{53} He Qiaoyuan, "Ying jiu zhi" 英舊志 in \textit{Minshu}, vol. 3, 83:2498-2503. See also Rawski, p.89.
succeed in the civil service examination. He had studied the classics with his father before he went to study at a prefectural school (fuxue 府 學) in 1542. In preparing for the examinations, he had to study Zhu Xi's commentaries on the classics, the imperially sanctioned interpretation and an obligatory reading for every examination candidate. He often disagreed with the interpretations in the commentaries and felt extremely uneasy at conforming himself to the standardized way of searching for "truth" as well as of passing the examinations. As a result, Li Zhi considered abandoning his pursuit of an official career, because the commentaries were the official interpretation and their mastery was essential to the examination. He did not subsequently abandon his studies but he continued to resist the interpretations in the commentaries. No longer pondering Zhu Xi's exegeses and the "truth" conveyed in them, Li Zhi instead began to memorize numerous essays of "current literature" (shiwen 時 文). When he took the provincial examination in 1552, he relied on the essays he had memorized and succeeded in passing the examination.

What kind of "current literature" did Li Zhi study for the examination? In fact, what Li Zhi did for the examination was not uncommon among the examination candidates. Of the three sections of examinations, the first section on the Four Books was the most important. The weight given to the Four Books created great demand

---

54 Li Zhi still used his original name Lin Zhaizhi to register at school. See "Rongshan Li shi zupu" 荣山李氏族譜 (excerpt). Rpt. in Li Zhi yanyu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.180. Later he changed his name to Zhi, because of the taboo on the character Zai, part of the personal name of the newly enthroned emperor Zhu Zaihou 朱載垕 (r.1567-1573). For information about the prefectual school, see He Qiaoyuan, "Quanzhou fuxue 泉州府 學", in Minshu, vol.1, 33:821-824.

55 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.

for commercially produced examination preparation guides. There appeared two
kinds of preparation guides, commentaries on the Four Books (jizhu 集注) and
selected works of bagu wen (xuanben 選本)\footnote{Such as Wenheng 文衡, Wensui 文髓, Zhuyi 主意, and Jiangzhang 讲章.}. They were written and published
primarily to help candidates prepare for the examinations. It can be assumed that
with perhaps few exceptions, all candidates would read this particular type of
examination preparation guides.\footnote{Gu Yanwu, "Shiba fang" 十八房, in Ri zhi lu, vol.2, 16:41-42.} Furthermore, since these writings were primarily
concerned for success, they must keep current with intellectual trends that influenced
the examiners. Unorthodox interpretation of the classics in examination essays
appeared to be growing during the Zhengde (1506-1521) and Jiajing (1522-1566)
reigns. In the first year of the Jiajing reign, the Board of Rites already denounced the
doctrinal deviation from the imperially sanctioned version of Neo-Confucianism.
Some candidates followed the trend of advancing "new exposition" (xinshuo 新説),
"current interpretation" (shiyi 時義)\footnote{As opposed to the original meaning (guyi 古義). See Qian Jibo, Mingda wenxue, pp. 120-123.}, and even used Buddhist and Daoist texts in
their answers.\footnote{"Xuanju" 選舉, Mingshi 明史, p. 1689. See also Ma Zonghuo, p. 135.} To meet the needs of the examination takers, professional writers
and publishers began to play a much greater role in shaping the examinations by
publishing all kinds of examination preparation materials. The proliferation of new
commentaries obviously had great impact on the candidates and the examinations.
As Fujian was one of the major printing centers in the sixteenth century,\footnote{See Lai Xinxia 來新夏, Zhongguo gudai tushu shiye shi 中國古代圖書事業史, p. 288. The core
of the industry turning out mass-produced books was centered in Fujian in specialized printing towns like}
new commentaries were readily available to candidates there. Through the study of these "current literature" and "current interpretation" of the classics, to some extend, Li Zhi's had already been exposed to new intellectual trends. This helps explain why he adopted a pluralist approach to the reading of the classics, as we shall note in the course of this thesis.

Indeed, poverty deprived Li Zhi the opportunity to take the examination at a younger age. After he married née Huang when he was twenty-one he had to go out to make a living. Nevertheless, he did manage pass the provincial examination (xiangshi 鄉試) and gained the degree of Provincial Graduate (juren 舉人) in 1552.

**D. Official Career and Family Duties**

With the juren degree, Li Zhi was eligible to participate in the triennial metropolitan examinations at the capital. If he succeeded in the all-important metropolitan examinations he would earn the degree of jinshi 進士. The jinshi degree, which literally meant the rank of "a scholar presented [to the court]," marked its holder unambiguously with high status. Although Quanzhou produced far more

---

Jianyang 建陽. There were about sixty printing houses in Jianyang alone and book markets were open every five days. The key factor in this region was its proximity to a source of the abundant raw material, bamboo, from which inexpensive paper was made. See also Liu Guojun, p.78.


63 Literally "a man recommended [to the court]." He was eligible to participate in the triennial examinations at the capital.
jinshi degree winners than any other prefectures of the province, Li Zhi himself did not plan to move higher up the social ladder.\textsuperscript{64} He chose to accept a low official position rather than trying for a higher degree, partly because of financial circumstances and partly because of personal aversion to the pervasive quests for wealth, rank, and fame in the examination system. He mockingly remarked "I passed the examination by chance. How can I take a second chance?"\textsuperscript{65} What motivated him to pass the examination and enter the officialdom was that he needed the salary to support his family. However, his juren degree subjected him to long years of low ranking appointments, for no one could expect this status alone lead to an eminent career.

Li Zhi was the oldest son of the family and had seven brothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{66} He was a filial son. He said, "To a son, father is heaven. If a son shows no respect to his father, where is the heavenly principle?"\textsuperscript{67} He wished to get a position somewhere in the south so that he could better take care of his father and grandfather, but he was first assigned to serve as an instructor at the state-sponsored Confucian School (jiaoyu 教谕)\textsuperscript{68} in Gongcheng 共城 in 1555.\textsuperscript{69} To shoulder the

\textsuperscript{64} See Shen Jianshi, p. 149; Jin Zheng, pp. 171-176.

\textsuperscript{65} "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.

\textsuperscript{66} "Fu Deng Shiyang" 夏頤石陽. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:10.

\textsuperscript{67} "Aji zhuan" 阿寄傳, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 5:222. Some of his contemporary writers also described him as a filial son. See Yuan Zhongdao, "Li Wenling zhuan" 李文陵傳, in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, p.3; Liu Tong 劉侗, "Li Zhuowo mu" 李卓吾墓, in Jingdi jingwu lue 京帝景物略, vol. 8. Rpt. in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, pp. 76-78. Liu Tong said, "Li Zhi became a prefect in Yuan'an because he was considered as a filial son and an honest official."

\textsuperscript{68} A teaching position unranked in Ming power structure. There was a Confucian school in each prefecture (fu 府), subprefecture (zhou 州), and county (xian 縣). In each school there was one instructor
responsibilities of an oldest brother in the traditional Chinese family, he supported his father and helped his bothers and sisters, soon after he held the position in the government. In 1559, "because of his excellent writings," he was promoted to be an erudite at the Imperial Academy in Nanjing (guozi jian boshi 国子监博士). After only a few months in Nanjing, his father died and he immediately returned home to observe the traditional mourning rites.

In autumn, 1562 he took his wife and children to Beijing. While he was waiting for an assignment, he was short of money and had to take students and give private lessons. He waited for almost two years before he was assigned to the same position (guozi jian boshi) in the northern Imperial Academy in Beijing. The news of his grandfather's death reached him two years later, on the same day that his (jiaoshou 教授) in the prefecture, (xuezheng 学正) in the subprefecture, and (jiaoyu 教谕) in the county. See "Xuanju," in Mingshi, vol. 3, 69:1675-1676. See also Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty" in Studies of Governmental Institutions in Chinese History, p.45.

60 "Da Di Sikou" 答狄司寇. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:37.

70 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.

71 Shen Tie, "Li Zhuowu zhuan" in He Qiaoyuan, Minshu, vol.5, 152-4505; "Qianlong Quanzhou fuzhi" 乾隆泉州府志 (excerpt) in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.35. This suggests his mastery in the classics. Shen Tefu 沈德符 (1578-1642) asserted that 'Li Zhis' intelligence overwhelmed his generation." Wanli ye huo bian 万曆野獲編 (1619) excerpt rpt. in Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao, vol. 1, p.67.

72 An erudite was one of the five authorized staff members at the academy. The Imperial Academy was run by the central government to train scholar-officials for the civil service. See "Xuanju," in Mingshi, vol. 3, 69:1675-1676. See also Shen Jianshi 沈兼士, p.156.

73 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.

74 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84.

75 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:85.
second son died. He went home again to observe the mourning rites. On the way south he stopped at Gongcheng, bought a small farm and left his wife and three daughters there to support themselves, for he planned to use the major part of his savings to arrange for the formal burial of his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. This arrangement should be understood in the context of the social practice of the Ming time and in the light of Li Zhi's own view on filial piety. Li Zhi regards filial piety as a starting point of all moral practice. A decent burial of one's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents is an important part of that practice.

However, he was unable to take care of his immediate family at the same time. In 1566 when the mourning period was over, he went back to Gongcheng only to find that both of his two younger daughters died of privation as a result of a local famine. Years later in his autobiography Zhuowu lunlue, he recalled:

After I buried my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents and discharged my duties to them, I no longer had any interest in an official career. Looking back, I so much missed my wife and children, who were thousands of li away. I then returned to Gongcheng. Arriving at home, I was very happy to see my wife, but when I asked about our two daughters, I found out that they both died just a few months after I left.

---

76 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:84. His first son died when Li Zhi started his official career in 1555, see 3:84.

77 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:85.

78 "Du Ruowu mu ji shu" 读若无母寄书. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 4:140.

79 For detailed information about this tradition, see "Xiaoyi" 孝義, in Mingshi, vol.13, 296:7576. See also Gu Yanwu, "Houzang" 厚葬 and "Bensang shouzhi" 奔丧守制, in Ru zhi lu, vol 1. 15:6-9; 15: 27-29.

80 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:85.
Writing in the third person, he describes what happened to his daughters:

There was a bad drought. The land he had bought yielded only a few bushes of millet. The oldest daughter, long used to hardship, ate millet as if it were grain. The two young daughters, who could hardly swallow what was given them, fell sick and died.81

In the late autumn, he took his wife and the only surviving child to Beijing for the second time, where he received appointment as an office manager in the Ministry of Rites (libu siwu 禮部司務).82 He was told that he could never get rich by working in this low-ranking position. He replied that "what I mean by impoverishment is not the worldly impoverishment. The most impoverished are those who live without the knowledge of the Way." It was during his five years in the Ministry of Rites, that he became acquainted with Buddhism83 as well as the teachings of Wang Yangming and Wang Ji 王畿 (1498-1582). He "set his mind on comprehending the essence of the Way"(qian xin dao miao 潛心道妙).84 Though a somewhat frustrating life, marked by frequent conflict with his superiors,85 it was not without considerable leisure in which he could pursue his own studies. He read extensively and his intellectual proclivities strengthened. In 1570, he was assigned to serve as a secretary in the Ministry of Justice (xibu yuanwailang 刑部員外郎) in Nanjing. While he

---

81 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:85.

82 "Zhuowu lunlue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:86. Siwu was the lowest rank (xiaxia  下下) official position in the Ming hierarchy.

83 Huang Zhongxi, Mingru xue'an, 3:36.

84 "Zhuowu lunlue," Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, p.86.

85 "Yuyue"  揚約, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 4:187.
was in the southern capital he formed close associations with others who shared his serious interests. He met, among others, the two brothers, Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524-1596) and Geng Dingli 耿定理 (1541-1584), and also Jiao Hong (1540-1620) 焦竑 and Wang Ji, men who were to exert much influence on his thinking.

He took up the post of prefect (zhifu 知府) of Yao'an 姚安 in Yunan in 1577. In this border region, he continued his study of Buddhism. He visited Mount Jizu 雞足山, a famous Buddhist establishment near Dali 大理 and read Buddhist strictures over there for months. What he found in Buddhism concerning the power of the mind to penetrate the unreality of the phenomenal world helped him find a focus for his dissatisfaction with the heavy layering of conventional truths in the Confucian tradition. He struggled with the Buddhist challenge to Confucian conventions. The intellectual outcome was to reject the anti-Buddhism strain in Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism. In August 1580, finally, after a three-year term, Li Zhi retired from office. This was the end of his official career spanning more than twenty years.

86 Geng Dingxiang, Geng Dingli, and Jiao Hong were second generation Wang Yangming disciples in the Taizhou branch as Huang Zongxi would later refer to the intellectually most ambitious lineage of Wang Yangming’s followers. See Huang Zongxi, Mingru xue’an, vol. 1, 32:67.

87 "Geng Chukong Xiansheng zhuan 耿楚倥先生傳.” Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:142.

88 "Fu Deng Shiyang" 复鄭石陽. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:12.
E. Spiritual and Intellectual Life

Li Zhi spent his later years, lecturing, writing and publishing books, articulating unconventional ideas, which made him famous, even notorious. He declared, "In my youth I honored Confucius, but I knew not why he deserved honoring...Thus before fifty I was like a dog barking as other dogs barked." Now in his fifties, he began to devote himself completely to intellectual pursuits -- discoursing with friends, expounding his views to all who came to listen, and putting his thoughts in writing. It was during these years that he gave his intellectual position its final definition and became the most outspoken critics of neo-Confucianism.

In 1581 instead of returning to Fujian he took his family from Yao'an to the home of Geng Dingxiang and his brother Geng Dingli in Huang'an 黃安, where he lived and taught their sons. He was particularly close to Geng Dingli and so when the latter died on August 28, 1584, he was profoundly saddened. Meanwhile a strain developed in his intellectual and personal relations with Geng Dingxing partly owing to Li Zhi's belief that Geng Dingxiang had not done all he could to save He Xinyin 何心隱 (aka Liang Ruyuan 梁汝元; 1517-1579), who was lauded by Li Zhi as a "scholar to the whole world, a scholar for all ages." He Xinyin was one of the most active thinkers and social reformers in mid-sixteen century. As a perceptive observer of Ming society and a social activist, he

89 "Shengjiao xiaoyin" 聖教小引. Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 2:66.

90 "Wei Huang'an er shangren sanshou" 為黃安二上人三首. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 2:80: "He Xinyin lun" 何心隱論. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:88.
pursued his goals with unrelenting passion. He offended authorities and was arrested and subsequently died at hands of jailers in Wuchang 武昌. As one of He Xinyin's most ardent admirers, Li Zhi condemned some of He Xinyin's former associates as hypocrites for failing to act to save him. Most harshly criticized by Li Zhi was Geng Dingxiang, He Xinyin's former friend. Geng Dingxiang was an influential official at the time of He Xinyin's death. He was then serving as vice censor-in-chief in the Ministry of Justice (zuofu duyushi 左副都御史). Geng Dingxiang played a prominent role as one of He Xinyin's patrons during the years when He Xinyin was free to roam the countryside and lecture in the academies, but he remained silent during the final, trouble years of He Xinyin's life.

As Li Zhi was a "live-in" teacher at Geng family, Geng Dingxiang was concerned about Li Zhi's "bad" influence on his sons and nephews. He worried that his son and nephews would imitate Li Zhi's detachment to his own family and official career and ruin Geng family's future. Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1624) observed that Geng Dingxiang's concern was an important reason why the debate between Geng Dingxiang and Li Zhi initiated and why Li Zhi left his host in 1583. Yuan Zhongdao was right. Besides Geng Dingxiang's failure to save He Xinyin's life, the

---

91 He Xinyin and Li Zhi are not even given biographies in Huang Zongxi's Mingru xue'an. Apparently Huang Zongxi considers them to be too extreme. For an account of He Xinyin's life and thought, see Hou Wailou, vol. 4, pp. 1003-1018. See also Dictionary of Ming Biography, pp. 513-515; and Ronald Dimberg, The Sage and Society: The Life and Thought of Ho Hsin-yin.

92 "Da Geng Sikou" 叱耿司寇. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:33; See also Huang Zhongxi, Mingru xue'an, vol.2, 7:35.

93 Yuan Zhongdao, "Li Wenling zhujuan," in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, p.3. Geng Dingli never entered the officialdom, but his two brothers Geng Dingxiang and Geng Dingli 叔定力 were influential government officials.
argument over how to teach Geng family's sons was also responsible for their open debate. In a letter Li Zhi wrote in the same year when he left Geng family, he mentioned that Geng Dingxiang repeatedly reminded him to teach his students morality, filial piety, civil service, and loyalty. Li Zhi did not generally oppose to all these principles, but he insisted that one must follow them sincerely and out of his own heart (zixin chengran 自心誠然), not just copy people of the past generations.

In defend of his students and himself, he said that even one failed to enter the officialdom, he still could be an outstanding person, as long as he did not slavishly follow other's footstep.94

His disputes with Geng Dingxiang led him to leave Geng family, but he did not return to his hometown. He sent his wife back to Fujian and moved himself to Maeheng 麻城, a neighboring district southeast of Huang'an. He found shelter in a Buddhist temple, Weimo'an 维摩庵, and stayed there for three years.95 In 1588 he shaved his head, which, he explained, was a way of letting his family know that he would never return home to rejoin them. Though so determined as he appeared to be, it was not an easy decision both for him and his wife. His wife died in the same year he shaved his head. Li Zhi was not an unfeeling man. He was indeed capable of strong attachment to good friends and though he did not directly show affection for his wife, she was much on his mind. Upon learning of her death, he composed

---


95 "Yu Yue" 楤月. Fengshu in Fengshu Xu Fengshu, 4:182; "Da Zhou Liutang" 衡周柳塘. Fengshu in Fengshu Xu Fengshu, 1:262.
an eulogy to express sorrow over her death. In a letter to their son-in-law Zhuang Chunfu 竺純夫, he disclosed that ever since he had heard of her death he had not spent a single night without dreaming of her. He also admonished those who had families to be thoughtful when making a decision to become a monk.

Li Zhi's self imposed exile to Buddhism was intended as a public challenge to Confucian orthodoxy rather than as an abandonment of Confucianism. The guise allowed him greater freedom to explore the limits of intellectual conventions. As he said in a preface to his Chu tan ji 初談集 (1558), "There was good reason for me to have my head shaved, and though I am tonsured like a monk, I am still a Confucian in substance." In fact, he did not take religious vows nor did he follow religious discipline. Instead he pursued even more intensively his scholar interests and continued to be known by his lay mane. Two years after he "became a monk" in 1590, the first edition of Fenshu was published in Macheng. It includes some letters he wrote to attack Geng Dingxiang's pharisaical conduct. Probably as a result of Geng Dingxiang's retaliation, Li Zhi left Macheng about this time. He went up the Yangtze, visiting Wuchang 武昌 and other places. At Gongan 公安 he met the Yuan brothers and so impressed them that one of them, Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1570-1623), kept a record of the conversation in his "Zhalin jitan" 枝林記談.

96 "Ku Huang Yiren" 呂黃宜人. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 6:232.
97 "Da Zhuang Chunfu" 答竺純夫. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:45.
98 "Yu Yue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 4:185.
99 Chu tan ji, p.1
100 Yuan Zongdao, "Zhalin jitan," rpt. in Li Zhi yanjin caikao ziliao, vol. 2, pp.7-19.
After his return to Longtan in 1593, the three brothers visited him. The admiration was mutual, as the poems exchanged between host and guests show.

Another person who touched and influenced Li Zhi's intellectual and spiritual life was Deng Huoqu 鄧豁渠 (1498-1570?). In his essays Li Zhi repeatedly referred to Deng Huoqu and discussed his only extant book, Nanxun lu 南詢錄. His preoccupation with Deng Huoqu is readily understandable in the light of the many parallels between his and Deng Huoqu's lives. In their first exposure to Neo-Confucianism both were inspired, at first grudgingly, by Zhao Zhenji 趙貞吉 (1508-1576), a grand secretary who was later sent in official disgrace to a remote post for his outspokenness. Both Deng Huoqu and Li Zhi were afflicted with an irrepressible wanderlust: in their extensive roaming they neither showed much attachment to their families or their hometowns. Although separated by a generation, Li Zhi must have often felt that he was literally following Deng Huoqu's footsteps. Each spent several years in Yunnan, a distant border region seldom visited by others. In Mount Jizu Deng Huoqu in 1548 was accepted into a monastic order and "awakened to the fact that there is an ineffable truth outside the vicissitude of the human situations." It was to the same place that Li Zhi went in 1580 when he decided to give up once and for all his official career. He remained there and read Buddhist scriptures until his resignation from office was accepted. In

---

101 Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, p. 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 63, 80, 81, 106, 142, 268; Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, p. 29, 44, 64.

102 Huang Zongxi, Mingru xue'an, vol. 1, 32:64-65.

103 "Ji Jiao Ruohou." Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:9.
their protracted and tortuous involvement with Buddhism there are also striking similarities. Both Li Zhi and Deng Huoqu had themselves tonsured in their later years—a step no other Ming Neo-Confucian took before 1644. Yet neither of them took on a Buddhist name, accepted the vegetarian diet without great struggle, or continued to wear Buddhist habit and bare his head for very long: Teng Huoqu did so for five years, and Li Zhi only three. In the summer of 1587, just a year before he had himself tonsured, Li Zhi read Deng Huoqu's Nanxu lu and wrote for it a particularly laudatory preface and introduced it to his students:

As I said, I had no doubt that the master in the end would reach the Way. Now the Nanxu lu is here and students may read it for themselves. They will see how he traveled ten thousand li, enduring all hardship in order to seek what he must seek. As steadfast as rock, as unbending as iron, he persevered for thirty years. He was not surpassed even by Confucius, who was so determined in his pursuit that he forgot about food, that he did not realize that he was getting older. I am ashamed that I do not have even one ten-thousandth of his resolution. Therefore I have copied out this book and decided to write this preface in order to warn myself as well as my fellow students.  

From the evidence of his writing, when Li Zhi contemplated his later life his thought turned to the example of Deng Huoqu.  

Like Deng Huoqu and He Xinyin, Li Zhi earned much notoriety among the scholar-officials for his iconoclastic and eccentric behavior, for his indifference to the established social etiquette and customs, but above all, for his castigation of moral rigorists and his vitriolic attacks on the doctrines of Confucian orthodoxy. His

---


trenchant criticisms and self-righteous attitudes subsequently provoked the conservative scholar-official Geng Dingxiang and his associates. The similarities between the life of Deng Huoqu and that of Li Zhi were so striking that Geng Dingxiang would use Deng Huoqu to implicitly criticize Li Zhi at the beginning of their debates when Li Zhi was residing in Huang'an in 1584. Later when the debates became more explicit, Geng Dingxiang launched his attacks on Li Zhi, accusing him of propagating deviant philosophies. His denunciation forced Li Zhi to leave Huang'an.

The debate between Li Zhi and Geng Dingxiang continued by their correspondence. It centered on the established principles of Confucian orthodoxy and the mind that perceives such principles. It first caused serious distrusting then turned into angry condemnation between two formal friends. When their disciples joined in the debate, it escalated and reached its climate in 1586 when Li Zhi wrote a long letter to criticize Geng Dingxiang's "the deceptive learning of the Way" (jia daoxue). Li Zhi angrily condemned "false people" (jiaren 假人) who talked and wrote "false words" (jiayan 假言). Geng Dingxiang gave weight to the importance of Confucian moral teachings and believed that everyone should follow closely the fixed principles. Li Zhi argued that an independent mind was what Confucius taught
his followers to develop. Believing that Li Zhi's thinking seriously undermined the Confucian moral norm, Geng Dingxiang wrote:

The unchangeable principle has lasted for thousands of years. It is derived from the inmost mind of the ancient people. It is the heavenly principle; it is the criterion of mind. This is the principle one has to follow, the principle one cannot but follow, the principle one cannot afford not to follow.109

Li Zhi argued that if what Geng Dingxiang said was true, then what about those people who lived before Confucius -- "were they human beings?"110 Relating to his failure to save He Xinying, Li Zhi thought that Geng Dingxiang, as an influential official, had not used his power to save a friend, but instead he was trying to abuse it and intimate him in their debate. To Li Zhi, it was hypocritical for Geng Dingxiang to preach morality. No believing that Geng Dingxiang was morally or intellectually superior to others, Li Zhi wrote back:

Except you are a high official, there is nothing different between you and me. Does one's knowledge increase when he goes up to a higher position? If so, Confucius and Mencius would have nothing to say.111

Geng Dingxiang and his associates condemned him as a heretical rebel against the orthodox ideology. They even insulted him by calling him an animal and spreading rumors about his sexual misconduct.112 However, Li Zhi refused to yield, continue to


110 "Da Geng Zhongcheng" 答耿中丞, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 16.

111 "Da Geng Sikou," Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 33.

voice opposition in speeches and writings. Li Zhi articulated his ideas concerning the relationship between the established Confucian orthodoxy and intellectual investigation. He believed that the search of truth should not be limited within Zhu Xi's interpretation of the classics. He argued that Zhu Xi failed catch the essence of the philosophy (jing yi zhi xue 精一之學) the ancient sages preached.  

Finally his carping criticisms and arrogant attitudes offended the chief supervising secretary in the Ministry of Rites, Zhang Wenda 張問達 (jinshi 1583, d. 1625). In 1602 Zhang Wenda submitted an indictment to Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1573-1620), impeaching Li Zhi for his immoral conduct, deviant behavior, relentless attacks on the Confucian orthodoxy, and attempt to misguide the people with his heretical philosophy. He stated in his impeachment memorial that Li Zhi "knows nothing about respecting the doctrines of Confucius handed down from generation to generation and instead become infatuated with Chan teachings and Buddhist monks." Thereupon, Li Zhi was incarcerated by the authorities at Tongzhou 通州, near Beijing, to be sent back to his native place for trial as a heretical traitor, and all his writing were proscribed as heterodox and dangerous. A month later, however, he committed suicide in prison while waiting to be extradited.

---

113 "You da Shiyang Taishou" 又答石鄕太守. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 5.

114 Zhang Wenda's memorial, including an account of an indictment against Li Zhi, presented to the emperor in 1602, was recorded in Ming shilu, 112: 6917-6919.
ending his life at the age of seventy-six as a man faithful to his independent character and intellectual conviction.
CHAPTER III
LI ZHI'S VIEW ON WRITERS

Li Zhi's literary thought centered on writers, men who write literature. His discussion of a writer started from the writer's mind. The very essence that makes a good writer is in his original mind -- the "mind of a child." Associated with this genuine, spontaneous, unbiased" mind of a child," is a writer's upright character that possesses firm strength in a writer. With his firm strength, a writer frees himself from bondage of book learning, social experience, and even the rules set by the great sage. He has the courage to be totally independent from the past masters and authorities. Even if he goes to extremes to voice his true opinion in an unrestraint manner, he will be considered to be a good writer or even a sage. For Li Zhi, there are three terms--talent (cai 才), courage (dan 膽), and insight (shi 識) -- these are adequate to encompass the quality of individual mind of a good writer.

In this chapter, Li Zhi's concept of the "mind of child" will be studied in terms of his view on writers. This chapter will also examine how he defines the role of a writer's mind and its relationship with book learning and social experience. Further discussion will be followed on how he describes characteristics that make a great writer.

A. Mind of a Child

Li Zhi's view of literature hinges on his concept of the "mind of a child," which became a philosophical theme repeated throughout his writings. Li Zhi's philosophy was basically derived from the notion of "innate knowledge" (liangzhi)
advocated by Wang Yangming. Based on Mencius' doctrine of the goodness of human nature, Wang Yangming's "innate knowledge" laid emphasis upon the individual mind as opposed to the external forms of social rules and authority: knowledge of the good is inborn in the mind of the individual and one should follow it spontaneously wherever it leads. Wang Yangming maintained that the original mind in every man manifested itself through innate knowledge, and that one's mental activity represented the universal moral law evident in an individual's sense of right and wrong. An individual's innate nature would lead to personal understanding and realizations, rather than this personal understanding would be accomplished through prolonged period of study. Naturally, once this philosophical theory was applied to literature, spontaneity came to be highly valued. As a reaction against superficial imitation of the past masters of prose and poetry, Li Zhi exhibited an unprecedented enthusiasm for vernacular literature because it could, in light of Wang Yangming's theory, be considered the most spontaneous, emotional expression of the ordinary people. Li Zhi called the pure mind thoroughly imbued with the spirit of true innocence in the "mind of a child," and developed its implications in his well-known essay "Tongxin shuo" 童心說.

The "mind of a child," as he described, is the "beginning of the mind," but is not solely the property of children. It represents the state of mind that is genuine, spontaneous, unbiased, and unobstructed by experience and ideas through contacts with others or through book learning. The mind of a child "contains nothing phony

---

and is purely authentic." He admonished one of his students to keep his mind pure and "not to fill his mind with the stuff of the deceptive learning of the Way (jia dao xue 假道学)." The real significance of the "mind of a child" lies in its innocence and creativeness, without which the world would be filled with "phony men speaking phony words, doing phony things, writing phony books."

Li Zhi encouraged people to forsake the pursuits of learned knowledge (xuewen 学问), ethical principles (daoli 道理), and good name (meiming 美名) in order to recover the "unmistakably pure and true" original mind one had as a child. Knowledge, principles, and reputation were all important characteristics of the Confucian "perfection of adulthood"; they indicated an individual's readiness to take up the responsibilities society expected of him. To Li Zhi, however, they might deprave a person or obstruct him from self-cultivation.

Although Mencius and Wang Yangming had each in turn discussed the importance of the childlike mind for great men, Li Zhi was the first to apply the concept to creators of literary forms. He asserted that as long as this natural state of mind could be preserved, everyone has the potential to become a great poet, essayist, dramatist, or even a writer of eight-legged essays (bagu wen 八股文). The unbridled mind of a child, or pure self, would produce the best literature in any age, any place; and that literature could be the writings in any form, style, or language. He further argued that the growth of falseness was because of the loss of the mind of

---


a child. Thus the concept of "mind of a child" contains ideals of originality, genuineness, and an absolute authenticity. Literature must reflect the true feelings and unspoiled thought of man. In Li Zhi's opinion, all great literary works share this pristine quality of mind.\textsuperscript{118}

To us, Li Zhi's recognition of some bagu essays as the crowning achievement of Ming literature seemed contradicted with his literary thoughts. We have heard much about the criticism of the highly restricted form of bagu that limited free expressions, of the slavish imitation of the past masters, and of the mechanical learning required to enter an official career. However, Li Zhi's criterion of judgment was unbiased: if a writer writes out of the mind of a child, he will produce good literature, regardless of whether he wrote a bagu essay, a poem, or a play. In fact, Li Zhi and his contemporaries did read great bagu essays. Some essay masters like Gui Youguang 馥有光 (1507-1571) simply used the archaic style to write "current literature" (yi guwen wei shiwen 以古文為時文) and found bagu a medium to present their original ideas and current intellectual views. As early as the Hongwu reign period (1368-1398), the Buddhist monk Yao Guangxiao 姚廣孝 (1334-1418), explicated Wang Yangming's philosophy of "investigating things" (gewu 格物) to "gain knowledge" (zhizhi 致知) in his bagu examination essay. The highly restricted form and the fact that the essays were presented to the government officials and even the emperor did not appear to have limited some essayists to speak their own minds. At the very beginning of the Qing dynasty, Qiu Yi 邱義 was unwilling

to serve the new Manchu government, but was forced by his father to take the examination. He began his essay by pouring out his anger: "Since the world is something to be angry with, there will be angry men." His essay was rejected by the examiners, but it became the "best seller" at that time. Li Zhi did not live to read Qiu Yi's essay, but it was likely that he would have read Yao Guangxiao's when he was studying for the examination or teaching in the Confucian school and the academies. In both cases, their essays fall within Li Zhi's category of good literature: they speak for themselves, not for the emperor or for the sage.\(^{119}\) His personal aversion to the pervasive quests for wealth, rank, and fame in the examination system did not prevent him from recognizing the value of some bugu essays.

Just like his attitude toward baguwen, arguing for a more spontaneous literature does not necessarily mean that Li Zhi was against book learning and scholarship. Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章(1428-1500), who is generally regarded as the predecessor of Wang Yangming, suggested that books be burnt again, because experience and book learning could obstruct our minds from close observation and sharp thinking.\(^{120}\) A frequent charge against the Taizhou school and the so-called Wild Chan movement was that they neglected book learning and scholarship. However, even when he stayed in the temple, Li Zhi devoted himself to scholarship, not Chan's training. Moreover, what made his attitude unorthodox or "wild" as Chan Buddhism is his positive endorsement of the literature of emotions, of a heroic and

---


\(^{120}\) "Wu bo ke zhi sui xin, duo wen bi fang jinsi" 驚博可致塞心, 多聞必妨近思. See Qian Zhongshu, *Guan zhi bian*, 4: 1554-1555.
passionate approach to life. Thus for him the *Shuihu zhuan* and similar works of vernacular fiction were justified, not merely as harmless diversions but as exemplifications of heroic virtue in the common man, and indeed, as serious works of importance.\textsuperscript{121}

Li Zhi was not generally objecting to social contacts and book learning, though to him, experience and book learning could make it difficult to maintain the "mind of a child" in educated maturity. The "ancient sages," he wrote, "read many books, but they did so to protect their childlike mind, and to keep it from being lost."\textsuperscript{122} In this respect book learning could be helpful to the "mind of a child." What Li Zhi considered harmful was not the book learning or scholarship itself, but what book learning or scholarship could do to the "mind of a child." In other words, if book learning or scholarship could function as a complement to the "mind of a child", then it would do good; however, if book learning and scholarship were to overshadow or even contaminate the "mind of a child," then it would do more harm than good. The greatest harm results when moral doctrines are imposed upon the mind, and it loses its capacity to judge for itself.

Although Li Zhi's theory sounded shockingly anti-social, his main point was not that people should not be socialized. His main point was that people should not allow socialization to sophisticate and infect their originally simple and innocent minds. This concept was closer to Daoism than to Mencius philosophy even though

\textsuperscript{121} "Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan xu." *Fenshu* in *Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 3:109.

\textsuperscript{122} "Tongxin shuo." *Fenshu* in *Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 3:98.
Mencius also talked about the "mind of an infant" (chizi zhi xin 赤子之心). Laozi and Zhuangzi were more serious about rejecting social and cultural sophistication. However, by the late Ming the distinction between Daoism and Confucianism had become blurred, as the Union of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) became popular among common people as well as intellectuals. Earlier, Wang Yangming had taught that the original unitary Way had been separated into three, and that Daoist and Buddhist teachings still contained some of the original, particularly with regard to the concepts of human nature (xing 性) and destiny (ming 命). Extending his master's position, Li Zhi did not have to betray Confucianism in order to advocate his "mind of a child," as he emphasized that the Three Teachings were originally one, as they were all embodiments of the Way. In fact, even when he was taking his trial in the Ming court, he still believed what he had written was only beneficial to Confucian teachings.

Li Zhi called for a return to the untainted "mind of a child." He advocated that the individual rely on his own inner intuition as opposed to external authority. One should follow his natural instincts, which are most perfectly embodied in the "mind of a child." He believed that literary creation was primarily an emotional rather than an intellectual activity. As far as the process of writing is concerned, Li Zhi believed that a writer should not write unless he feels an uncontrollable, compelling force in his mind that is driving him to write. In his opinion, writing

---

124 "San jiao gui Ru shuo" 三教歸儒說. Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 2:75.
125 Yuan Zhongdao, "Li Wenling zhuan," in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, pp.4-5.
should not be a result of contemplation or premeditation; rather, it should be a sudden and violent display of one's true or genuine emotion. This drive can be so strong that a "true" writer would have to write even at the expense of his own life. Only in this kind of situation could a true great work be written. This idea is further elaborated in Li Zhi's definition of a "writer." "What we call a writer," Li Zhi wrote, "is one who is aroused by his feeling, whose mind cannot stop acting, or one, whose emotions having been stimulated, cannot restrain himself from revealing these emotions in words."\(^{126}\)

Since the process of writing should be so spontaneous, the writer will be totally overwhelmed by his feelings, and writing simply served as a release for an emotional outburst. Under such circumstances, Li Zhi held that any aesthetic achievement gained at the expense of spontaneity had to be considered a loss. He called those who were restrained by metrical rules "slaves to poetry" (shinu 詩奴). By drawing on his theory of the "mind of a child," Li Zhi was able to enlarge the scope of what might be considered serious literature. Fiction and drama should no longer be excluded from the literary realm. In fact Li Zhi was the first scholar who was broadly learned in classics and history, yet openly praised drama and novels. He made connections in his discussion of the tongxin concept with Shuihu zhuan. In his Fenshu, he cited Shuihu zhuan as a prime example of his notion of the free expression of the "mind of a child."\(^{127}\) Li Zhi 's concept of "mind of a child," his

\(^{126}\) “Sima Tan Sima Qian” 司馬談司馬遷, in Cangshu, 40:692.

\(^{127}\) “Tongxin shuo." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:98. I will discuss his commentary on Shuihu zhuan in Chapter V.
appreciation of fiction and drama, and his historical approach to literature fostered the emergence of more individualistic and expressive styles in literary writing, and, in a way, also justified book learning and scholarship.

Echoing Li Zhi's "mind of a child," the three Yuan brothers advocated a literary theory of spontaneity and launched a conscious literary movement against orthodox archaism. They believed that the essence of literature lies in "emotional genuineness and sincerity." Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610), the most famous of the three brothers, placed special emphasis upon emotion and one's "innate consciousness" (xinling 心靈). He believed that great literature is created by true people (zhenren 真人) who "are neither influenced by the manners of the Han and Wei masters nor do they follow the footsteps of the Tang poets. Their words reflect their nature and express their joy, anger, sadness, pleasure, and desires." With its emphasis on spontaneity and on being true to one's own feelings, the literary theory of spontaneity advocated by Li Zhi and other late Ming figures had great impact on later writers of vernacular literature.

---

128 A particular coterie of writers and poets from Gong'an, Hubei, who became preeminent poets and literary thinkers of the early seventeenth century. The leaders of this circle were Yuan Hongdao (1568-1610) and his brothers Yuan Zongdao (1560-1600) and Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1624). For the sake of simplicity, this group is called the Gong'an School (Gong'an pai 公安派), though it included intellectuals from different areas of China.

129 "Xu Xiaoxiu shi" 序小修詩 in Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan, Guo Shaoyu, comp., 4 vols. 3:211.
B. Characteristics of a Writer

Wang Yangming was not happy with the conventional literary critics. For him, literary critics produced not literary criticism or literary studies, but theory and rules. They talked not about literary works or artistic products, but about writing skills, semiotics, and the play of codes and conventions. He held that a writer who knows only writings skills is far distant from the Way. Li Zhi explicated Wang Yangming's literary thought, stressing the importance of a writer's temperament and character. He believed that writers have certain characteristics which lead to more or less successful writing. Here two terms are of central importance to understanding Li Zhi's thought about writers. The first, *guqi* 骨气, is a quality that could or should be found in literature as well as in writers. "Bone" (gu 骨) is a structural unity of argument in a text, but it is also an unalterable character that possesses firm strength in a writer. "The vital breath" (qi 氣) of a writer imparts energy and gives direction in his writing. The second term is *kuangfang* 狂放. The "impetuosity" and "openness" are emancipating spirits, which free a writer from the bondage of conventions and dependence on others.

The term *kuang* or *kuangfang* should be understood in historical context and in light of Li Zhi's own personality. Zhu Guozhen 朱國禛 (1557-1632) in his *Yongzhuang xiaoping* 涌幢小品 recorded that Jiao Hong firmly believed in the teaching of Li Zhi. He maintained that Li Zhi, though not necessarily a sage, at least

---

be considered as impetuosity (kuang 倜) and deserved a seat next to the sage.\footnote{Zhu Guozhen, *Yongzhuang xiaoping*, in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan*, vol. 16. The source is used by Huang Zhongxi in his *Mingru xue’an*, 35:361.} As the case of Jiao Hong indicates, there is ample justification for labeling Li Zhi as *kuang*. The word *kuang* was used during the Ming by both adherents and opponents of the Taizhou School to characterize its peculiarities. In describing Li Zhi as *kuang*, Jiao Hong placed Li Zhi in one of the two personality categories which Confucius, in the absence of men who could act according to the Mean (*zhongxing 中行*), preferred to have as transmitters of his teaching.\footnote{Analects 13:21. The Song and Ming scholars have frequently made reference to these characterizations.} Here Jiao Hong makes use of Confucius' characterization of disciples as being either "impetuous" for the truth or "prudent" (*juan 莠*) and therefore reacting slowly. The perfect man is the man of the Mean, whose behavior is not inclined to these extremes. But such is seldom to be found, and the sage himself states his satisfaction with both men of "impetuosity" and of "prudence." Therefore when Jiao Hong spoke of Li Zhi as person who, being *kuang*, "might sit next to a sage," his point was not to deprecate Li for falling short of the ideal of sagehood but to distinguish Li Zhi's passionate and untrammeled personality from the banality of the conventional Confucians and to affirm Li Zhi's worth as a transmitter of the Confucian Way. Li Zhi himself believed that it is hard to find a man of the Mean. He would rather be a man of impetuosity or a self-cultivated man of prudence.\footnote{"Yu Jiao Ruohou taishi“ 与焦弱候太史, *Xu Fenshu* in *Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 1:16.} He said, "a man of impetuosity looks down on the
ancient sages and looks up to himself. The ancients sages were great, but they all passed, why we do have to follow in their footsteps?"  

Li Zhi’s thought was centered on writers’ true selves, their characters and personalities. Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) was one of Li Zhi's favorite writers. When talking about him, Li Zhi said, "If people knew who Su Shi was, they would not be wondering why his writings were so thrilling ... Nobody can ever write something that will last forever without standing up for what is right." He copied out four volumes of Su Shi’s writings and reread them from time to time, feeling as if "he were talking to the writer." He edited and commented on a "Collection of Su Shi's Works" (Poxian ji 坡仙集, prefaced by Jiao Hong, 1600). In order to let readers directly see more the writer as a man, he includes many of Su Shi’s letters and "miscellaneous talks" (zashuo 雜説) in the book, as he did in his Fenshu and Xu Fenshu. When discussing with Jiao Hong about publishing his edited book, he said, "I may include too many (of his letters and "miscellaneous talks"), but we can't fairly get the whole picture of the master's life without them. I like the man so much that I would like a book that will enable me to talk to him whenever I read it." Li Zhi’s admiration for Su Shi’s character and his penchant for self-expression in Su Shi’s writings were shared with other writers. In a sense, he was leading an intellectual trend. Yuan Hongdao believes that Li Zhi’s selection is appropriate.  

---

134 “Yu youren shu” 与友人書, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1:75.
136 “Yu Jiao Ruohou.” Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 34.
137 Yuan Hongdao, Yuan Hongdao ji qianjiao 袁宏道集箋校, 21:734.
hand, civil examination candidates were benefiting from Su Shi's great masterpieces;\(^{138}\) on the other, many late Ming literati found Su Shi's "miscellaneous writings" an ideal medium for the presentation of personal experience and perspectives, which is very close to what was then called xiaopin wen 小品文 (small literary pieces). It was not coincident that the term xiaopin would appear in book titles of some selections of Su Shi's writings such as Su Changgong xiaopin 蘇長公小品\(^{139}\) and Su Huang xiaopin 蘇黃小品.\(^{140}\) It is precisely that xiaopin wen would present its readers with a more detailed picture of the writer's life -- if we failed to see the writer's personal character, we would never truly understand his great "masterpieces." As an editor, Li Zhi valued the writer's personality and character more than his style and composition.

When discussing the outstanding, versatile, and prolific writer Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), Li Zhi used the same expressions he had for Su Shi: "The man had such a noble character, such high moral values, and such an extraordinary ability. He had nowhere to try his talent but to express himself in writing. Therefore he stood out as a versatile major poet. Unfortunately, even his students did not praise his character, not to mention people in later generation." Li Zhi admired Yang Shen so much that he kept studying the poet's life and felt they were discussing poems together.\(^{141}\) Li Zhi chose the writings of Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1529) as one

---


\(^{139}\) Edited by Wang Najian 王啓謙 (Jinshi, 1607) in the late Ming. See Chen Wanli 陳万里, *Wan Ming xiaopinwen yu Mingji wenren shenhuo* 晚明小品文與明季文人生活, p. 9.

\(^{140}\) Edited by Huang Jiahui 黃嘉惠 in the late Ming. See Chen Wanli, p. 9.

\(^{141}\) "Yang Sheng'an ji." *Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 5: 207.
of the five greatest works in the world.\footnote{Zhou Hui, \textit{Jinling suoji}. rpt. in \textit{Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao}, vol. 3, p. 168. His other choices are \textit{Shiji}, \textit{Shuihu zhuang}, and the poetry of Du Fu and Su Shi. Although Li Zhi did not put the five writers together in his own writings, he had very a high opinion of them as individual writers. See \textit{Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, p. 98 for his comment on \textit{Shuihu zhuang} and p. 267 for his opinion of Li Mengyang.} What struck Li Zhi most was Li Mengyang's highly independent character. Li Zhi did not often have a high opinion of others, but he wrote a laudatory biography of Li Mengyang and included it in his \textit{Xu Cangshu}. He described Li Mengyang as "talented, determined, unyielding." With admiration he wrote, "Li Mengyang detested the corrupted world and its ways. Because of his 'impetuosity,' he suffered a lot in his life."\footnote{"Li Mengyang zhuang" 李夢陽傳. \textit{Xu Cangshu}, 26:505-506.}

"Guqi" is the very essence of a good writer, but it does not necessarily make a good writer. Li Zhi once described his father as a "tall, stern, straight-backed" man who always stood up for what was right. But his father was not a writer. From anatomy of a writer's character, Li Zhi turns to an anatomy of consciousness, the preconditions of mind that make good writings possible. In addition to a "mind of a child", there are three terms--talent (cai), courage (dan), and insight (shi) -- these are adequate to encompass the quality of individual mind of a good writer. He discusses the role of a writer's mind in his essay "Ershi fen shi" 二十 分 識. Li Zhi requires that a writer judge earlier writings and the world from his own perspective. For a writer, \textit{cai} refers to a writer's talent in regard to its capacity for accomplishment in a person's writings. Courage describes how present writers challenge past masters and the convention. While stressing the importance of a writer's insight, Li Zhi holds that
talent, insight, and courage support one another: if one of the three is lacking, a person cannot achieve the status of a major writer.\textsuperscript{144}

The terms cai (talent), courage (dan), and insight (shi) also help us understand Li Zhi as a critic and as a creative writer. As Yuan Zhongdao says, "Li Zhi is the most courageous man in our times. His talent and flair are not so strong as his courage, but nothing can surpass his courage and insight." His talent and flair as a creative writer cannot be compared with those of Su Shi, but his courage and insights made him a sharp social and literary critic.

\textsuperscript{144} "Ershi fen shi" 輒識, 	extit{Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, 4: 155.
CHAPTER IV
LI ZHI'S THOUGHT ON WRITING

As a writer, Li Zhi had much to say about writing. He discussed the language that both conceals and reveals a writer's mind. He was concerned with deceptive appearances of writings and the possibility of misjudgment by readers, most powerfully threatened by deception and lies, and the concern for deception and lies is inseparable from a concern with language. However, if we look closely, we can also read into the writer's mind. The language does not necessarily "represent" the writer's mind; rather the expression involuntarily discloses the feeling, and the disclosure of the feeling implicates a writer's original mind. What is manifest is not an idea or a thing but a situation, a human disposition, and an active relation of the two. Only those with the "mind of a child" are able to perceive the truth and speak or write genuinely and that true self is best expressed by plain language. When judging a good piece of writing, genuineness is the key. Those who write with the genuine "mind of a child" are able to reach a divine realm of creativity, leaving no trace of human efforts.

In this chapter, we will first discuss the language use in writing. In order to understand what it is central to Li Zhi's literary thought, we will further explore his philosophical thinking about the human language -- how it conceals and reveals the inner world of a writer. We will also discuss his views on the motivation and functions of writing.
A. Writing in Plain Language

Li Zhi called for reliance on one's own intuitions and desires to write literature. His view of literature led him to find literary value in unusual places. He was one of the few writers of his time who had the audacity to compare fiction and drama in the vernacular with the acknowledged masterpieces of the classical style. It was beneath the dignity of those who had painfully mastered the intricacies of composition in classical language to admit that true literature could also be created in ordinary speech. His appointment as an erudite at the Imperial Academy in Beijing suggests that his command of the classical language was more than acceptable to his superiors and peers, but he favored the use of plain language.

The modern opposition between the literary language (wenyan 文言) and the written vernacular (baihua 白話) did not exist in the traditional discourse of literary criticism. Most authors and critics in Li Zhi's time made a conscious attempt to intimate classical models and claimed wenyan as appropriate to serious literature. However, there was another current, in which a more relax attitude was taken toward the classical standard. In spite of his training and masterly in the literary language, the most prestigious variety of Chinese, Li Zhi said that he "enjoyed observing plain language" (hao cha er yan 好察爾言). By plain language, he meant "the daily colloquial speech of the ordinary people" (baixing riyong zhi er yan 百姓日用之爾言):

The language that is used in making a living and communicating to one other, that is understood, spoken, and enjoyed by people is truly plain speech.  

---

145 “Da Deng Mingfu” 答鄭明府, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 40.
He argued that scholars' refined but insincere words were not as attractive to him as those of ordinary people because the later talked only about what they did and what they knew. One should not say or write anything one did not truly know or believe in. Li Zhi considered the plain language spoken by farmers or businessmen as "words of virtue" (you de zhi yan 有德之言). Even the plain eryan merit our attention. Unfortunately, those words have usually been ignored. He asked, "how does one know that plain words are not to be heard?" Shun 朩 was a great ruler because he was willing to listen to the plain words of ordinary people. He described himself as unrestraint in nature and unrefined in words. While masterly in the classical language himself, he sometimes wrote in the plain language. For example:

爾等但說出家便是佛了, 便過在家人了, 今吾亦出家, 宁有過人者? ... 只以不愿受人管一節, 既棄官又不肯回家, 乃其本心實意。147

(You said that when a man becomes a monk, he becomes a Buddha and is better than a lay man. Now I have become a monk, am I any better than others? ... Because, for one thing, I don't like to be controlled by others, I gave up my official career and did not want to return home. That was the real intention.)

When commenting on a drama, for another example, he wrote:

此記, 關目好, 說得好, 曲亦好, 真元人手筆也。148

146 "Da Deng Mingfu." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 39.

147 "Yu Yue." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 4: 185.

148 "Bai Yue" 拜月. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 4: 194.
(The theme of this drama is good. The dialogue and the songs are good. It is an authentic Yuan drama.)

His examples and point of view were crucial for the development of Ming and Qing vernacular literature. In fact, the vernacular novels continued to adopt the colloquial language, with certain modifications, as its basic medium of narration. Some dialectical expressions also found their way into fictional narratives. This was not only a deliberate literary choice directed toward specific aesthetic effects, but also related to the social level of intended audience.149

However, while the civil service examination system remained in force, vernacular literature could never be viewed by average scholars as serious literature. After the system was abolished in 1905, literary studies as traditionally conceived -- that is, as a preparation for office-holding -- seemed to have lost their meaning. Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), Chen Duxiu (1880-1942) 陈独秀, and other young intellectuals came to reject the traditional cultural forms associated with Confucianism and to challenge the archaic literary language that stifled all creative writing. Wu Yu 吴虞 (1872-1949), a radical anti-Confucian scholar, felt a close intellectual affinity with Li Zhi's arguments which he used to buttress his own iconoclastic position. In 1916, he published a critical biography of Li Zhi, in which he enthusiastically hailed Li Zhi's courageous fight against the decaying Confucian orthodoxy, and believed that Li Zhi's criticism of the archaic cultural customs and

---

149 Cf. Chen Qingyuan 陈庆元 and Chen Qingliang 陈庆良, "Qingdai liangbu Minren shuo Minshi de xiaoshuo." *Ming-Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu*, 1996.1:153-164. For a brief discussion about dialectical variations in Ming-Qing Chinese novels, see "Anonymous Note," Kong Lingjing, 179. Geographical and temporal differentiation may account for dialectical variations in these novels in addition to those related to the social level and intended audience.
literary traditions set an important precedent for the Chinese intellectuals of modern cultural movements. During the May Fourth New Literary Movement of 1919, while the masterpieces of Ming and Qing fiction acquired entirely new significance, the modern baihua movement gained its momentum. The leaders of the movement ascribed to old fiction the genius of China's laboring millions, assuming that the story materials shared by written fiction with the traditional oral and dramatic forms, implied that popular literature was separated from the classical poetry and essays of the old Confucian ruling class. In recognition of the broad audiences for popular fiction, they were to find there the linguistic medium, a written vernacular language, that could attract the attention of China's masses; they proclaimed it the best means for instilling in the Chinese people the most democratic value of a new age. They led the battle to do away with the old literary language in favor of a new vernacular literary standard based on the language of such traditional baihua literary classics as Shuihu zhuan and the Honglou meng.

Hu Shi emphasized that even in traditional China, baihua literature had existed side by side with the classical genres, and that baihua literature had been the source of important renovations in wenyen literature. He cited specifically the examples of Wang Yangming and Yuan Hongdao's poetry as baihua poems. He said that just as the authentic Ming literature was written by Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701-1754), Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715?-1764), and others, the real Ming poems were

---

150 Wu Yu, "Ming Li Zhuowu bie zhuang" 明李卓吾別傳, rpt. in Li Zhi yanjia caikao ziliao, vol. 1, pp.38-53. See also Wu Ze, pp.2-5; Howard L. Boorman et al., eds. Biographical Dictionary of Republican China, pp. 462-465; Hok-Lam Chan, pp. 35-36, 188; Lin Haiquan, p.449.
represented by such poets as Tang Bohu 唐伯虎 (Tang Yin 唐寅, 1470-1524) and Wang Yangming.\footnote{Hu Shi, "Wang Yangming zhi baihua shi" 王陽明之白話詩 (1916), \textit{Hu Shi gudian wenxue yanjiu lunji} 胡適古典文學研究論集, pp. 432-434. One of Wang Yangming’s poems reads: 餓來吃飯倦來眠，只此修行玄更玄。說与世人浑不信，却从身外见神仙。} In his "\textit{Wenxue gailiang chuyi} 文學改良芻議",\footnote{Hu Shi, "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" 文學改良芻議, in \textit{Hu Shi wencun} 胡適文存, vol. 1, pp.7-24.} Hu Shi picked up Li Zhi’s idea that literature changes with time and used it as a powerful argument for the recognition of literature written in the vernacular. Hu Shi arrived at the conclusion that Chinese people could no longer afford to be fettered by a style long since outmoded, but must employ a living language if they hoped to create a living literature. Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1968) and Yu Dafu (1896-1945) 郁達夫 identified the new literary movement with that of the late Ming and promoted the circulation of the works by late Ming thinkers.\footnote{Ren Fangqiu 任訪秋, pp. 109-113.} Leaders of the movement were quick to recognize the Ming and Qing masterpieces as the linguistic and stylistic inspiration for some of the most vigorous contemporary writing. Ming and Qing vernacular literature first promoted by Li Zhi, Jin Shengtan and others still provide admirable models for the twentieth-century novelists and playwrights.

B. Achievements in Writing

In Li Zhi’s works, there were constant philosophical and aesthetic discussions on literary achievement. For him, fiction or drama also lends itself to philosophical and aesthetic scrutiny. He illustrated how fiction and drama bring the extraordinary
(qi 奇) out of the ordinary (chang 常). He suggests that writers should open up their vision of things, because "there is absolutely no ordinariness that is not also extraordinary, and there is also no extraordinariness that is not ordinary." 154 The extraordinary nature of fiction and drama is self-evident by the use of the name chuanqi 傳奇, for both the Tang tale and southern-style drama. The term qi was constantly used in fiction criticism and by book publishers in late Ming and early Qing. The four most famous novels were called the si da qishu 四大奇書 (the four great extraordinary books). Book publishers regularly advertised the four novels as qishu. However, at that time there was an excessive fondness for qi at the expense of ordinary. Li Zhi's idea is that the extraordinary can be found in the real, ordinary world. For him, qi and chang are complementary, but if chang simply means the conventional or fixed formula, it should be avoided. A writer should be true to his own time and surroundings, and above all to his own "mind."

Li Zhi's definition of truthfulness (zhen 真) and hypocrisy (jia 假) came from his observation of the literati culture of his time. In his eyes, Wang Yangming was an "true Confucian scholar" (zhen fuzi 真夫子) but Zhu Xi was "not a real Confucian scholar" (fei fuzi 非夫子). 155 He angrily condemned "false people" (jiaren 假人) who talked and wrote "false words" (jiayan 假言). 156 Only those whose "mind of a child" (tongxin 童心) has never been tainted are able to perceive

154 "Da Geng Zhongcheng lun dan" 矣敬 中丞論淡, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 24.

155 "Taifu Xi wen xianggong" 太傅席文襄公, Xu Cangshu, 12:244.

156 "Da Geng Sikou" 矣敬 司寇, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 30.
the truth and speak or write genuinely. The best literature should be true to life and could only be written out of this genuine mind.

For him, there are inner and outer truths: there is the possibility of misunderstanding the inner by observing the outer; but on the other hands, close attention to the outer will allow possible access to the inner. This presumes that there is a necessary correlation between a particular inner condition and its external manifestation. The relation between inner and outer is one of manifestation, what is inside making its way outward. The outer does not voluntarily "represent" the inner; rather the expression involuntarily discloses the feeling. What is manifest is not an idea or a thing but a situation, a human disposition, and an active relation of the two: "the writing reflects the man" (wen ru quren 文如其人).

"Disclosure" became implicated in the notion of a world of deceptive appearances and something absolutely behind them, an opposition of "concealing" (zuowei 作偽) and "revealing" (falou 發露). "Revealing" as such was an inconceivable issue for Li Zhi, but he would have understood very well the form of the relation, truth as disclosure. He said, "If we look closely at one's being, we can not be deceived by his true nature. Since one' true being can not deceive, it will reveal even it is hidden in a dark corner." Li Zhi's attention was directed to the fact that what is inner does indeed inform what is outer (appearance) and that there is indeed some necessary relation between the two. Li Zhi's literary thought is

---

"manifestation:" everything that is inner -- the nature of the person or the principles, which inform the world -- has an innate tendency to become outward and manifest.

He was concerned with deceptive appearances and the possibility of misjudgment, most powerfully threatened by deception and lies, and the concern for deception and lies is inseparable from a concern with language. Language is the ultimate form of outwardness, and it embodies most perfectly, yet problematically, the correspondence between inner and outer. There is a level of mere surface, however, if we look closely, we can see why it is the way it is, its origins in circumstance. In this surface we can also infer the stable and constant dimensions of a human nature free from the buffettins of the lived world. This is true for Li Zhi in observing persons; it is true in reading a literary text, which always comes from a person. And that is why a person's true nature decides what is written.

The great Song poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) praised the painting "Wushan" 巫山 as a tiangong (heavenly work 天工) which makes itself stands out from those huagong 畫工 (works of an artisan). Probably inspired by Su Shi, Li Zhi described the celebrated distinction between two huagong: the term huagong 畫工 (achievement of an artisan) and its homonym huagong 化工 (divine achievement).159 "Contrived structure and verbal parallelism," Li Zhi wrote, "can only be used in common literary work; no such rules have any place in truly superior works." The ultimate literary achievement, as Li Zhi described it, was huagong 化工. In the essay entitled "Zashuo" 雜說 ("Miscellaneous Talks") he wrote:

159 "Zashuo." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3: 96.
An artisan is the one who believes he is capable of catching heaven and earth's technique. Yet, he does not know that heaven and earth have no technique. Heaven and earth produce hundreds of flowers, and everyone who sees them likes them; however, one who searches for the technique (of producing these flowers) finds nothing at all.\textsuperscript{160}

This analogy suggests that the art of nature is nothing artificial, and that the supreme work leaves no perceptible technique. Nevertheless, the absence of noticeable technique is quite different from the actual absence of technique. In other words, Li Zhi was not opposed to technique; what he opposed was the pursuit and use of technique in an artificial way. Any work in which the effort to affect a certain manner is apparent, no matter how dexterously wrought, falls into an inferior category.

A literary work is not a "thing made" in the same way one makes a table or a shirt. A literary work can be worked on, polished, and crafted, but that has nothing to do with what a literary work fundamentally is. This difference in definition between the two huagong has immense consequences: it affects the relations between a writer and his writings; moreover, it affects how writers behave. Perhaps the greatest consequence lies in the question of control: if we treat a literary work as "a thing made," then it is the writer's intention; it is not the writer's true self but rather something he has "made." Many writers are concerned about their literary skills, their concerns show the marks of their struggles -- in their works we find marks of their efforts, their intentions, distance, and artistic control.

\textsuperscript{160} "Zashuo." \textit{Fenshu} in \textit{Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, 3: 96.
Li Zhi applied the term *huagong* 畫工 and its homonym *huagong* 化工 in his commentary to *Shuihu zhuan*. He said that the narration in Chapter thirteen is so natural that it leads reader into a realm of Nature, a realm that can never be reached by an artisan's effort. It is purely a work of Nature's wonder. On the other hand, he said Chapter seventy-six is a low literary product because it is just an artisan's work, referring to the author's special effort in the description of military schemes.

Among the literary works, which Li Zhi considers as having reached their height, written either in the classical language or the vernacular, are *Xixiang ji* 西廂記, *Baiyue ting* 拜月亭, and *Shiji* 史記. *The Pipa ji* 琵琶記 is not equal to them; it falls into a second-rate category. The technique of *Pipa ji* is displayed in its use of language, which is the skill of an artisan. The language of *Pipa ji* is "highly skillful," but "it could hardly touch reader's heart." The *Xixiang ji* and *Baiyue ting*, on the other hand, excel in human skill, which is definitely more than adeptness in language. The charm of the language easily fades way, and when it does, a piece of literature that is wholly dependent upon it for its favor becomes unpalatable. Even if the charm stays, it is unlikely that readers will be deeply moved by it.

---

161 "Rongyu tang ke Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan yibaihui zongping" 容與堂刻忠義水浒傳序一百四十總評, in Ma Tiji, pp.92-93.

162 "Rongyu tang ke Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan yibaihui zongping," in Ma Tiji, p.105.

C. Frustration and Literary Writing

During the late Ming, some important concepts regarding literary writing from the high literati tradition began to be associated with the novel. In the literati tradition, for example, the theory that "one takes to writing to express frustration" (*fafen zhushu* 發憤著書) was extremely influential. It was formulated by China's most famous historian, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-85 B.C.), in his much-admired "Letter in Reply to Ren An." ("Bao Ren An shu" 報任安書). In a series of examples of writings composed to express frustration, Sima Qian referred to Zuo Qiuming's 左丘明 writing of *The Speeches of Kingdoms* (*Guoyu* 國語) after he lost his sight and Sunzi's 孫子 writing of the *Art of War* (*Bingfa* 兵法) after his feet were amputated. The calamities of removal from office and physical mutilation that befell Zuo Qiuming and Sunzi were like Sima Qian's own experience. Sima Qian used these examples to justify his choice of the punishment of castration over the death penalty by emphasizing his determination to finish his *Shiji* 史記. Since then, readers have tended to take his famous theory that literature is the product of resentment and use it to explicate the writing of the *Shiji* as an expression of resentment against Emperor Wu (r. 141-87 B.C.), who was responsible for Sima Qian's castration. The notion that writing in general is regularly a consequence of frustration and hardship became widespread. Many traditional writers and critics took frustration to be the most important motivation in a writer's creativity. Qian

---

164 Sima Qian, 130:3300; 62:2735.
Zhongshu 钱钟书 (1911-), in his Guan zhi bian管锥编, discusses the concept of "faren zhushu" as a motivation in a writer's creativity.\(^{165}\) He cited the examples of Han Yu 韩愈 (768-824), Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846), Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751-814), Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 (1007-1072), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086), and others. Han Yu's well-known farewell to Mengjiao say, "Outcry comes where there is injustice" (wu bu de qi ping ze ming 物不得其平則鳴).\(^{166}\) Ouyang Xiu in his preface to the collected poetry of Mei Yaochen 梅尧臣 claimed, "The destitute produces masterpieces." (qiong zhe er hou gong 窮者而後工).\(^{167}\) Their remarks had become part of the vocabulary of literary criticism.

However, it seemed that only poets and prose writers had the privilege to express their frustration. The first critic who used this theory to account for a novelist's creative efforts was probably Li Zhi. In a preface to the Shuihu zhuan, Li Zhi begins with a review of Sima Qian's canonical idea that great literature is the product of the outpouring of resentment, followed by a statement that the Shuihu zhuan is an example of this:

Sima Qian once said: "The Difficulty of Persuasion (Shuinan 說難) and A Loner's Anger (Gufen 孤愤) were works written by a virtuous man who wanted to express his resentment." Thus we may say that if the men of virtue in ancient times could not have written those wonderful works had they not experienced great sufferings and frustrations. Had they written them without suffering, hardship, and frustrations at first, they would have

\(^{165}\) Qian Zhongshu, Guan zhi bian vol. 3, pp. 936-938.

\(^{166}\) Han Yu, "Song Meng Dongye xu" 送孟東野序, quoted in Qian Zhongshu, Guan zhi bian, vol. 3, p. 937.

\(^{167}\) Ouyang Xiu, "Mei Shengyu shiji xu" 梅圣俞詩集序, Jushi ji 居士集, 42:63, quoted in Qian Zhongshu, Guan zhi bian vol. 3, pp. 937.
acted like someone who groaned when he was not sick or who trembled when he was not cold. Even if he did write something, what would be the value? *Shuihu Zhuan* is a work written out of great anger.\(^{168}\)

Here and elsewhere Li Zhi illustrates the motivation of writing as a channel to pour out one's anger or as a mean to express one's frustration (*su xinzhong zhi buping* 訴心中之不平).\(^{169}\) Consequently, Li Zhi's association of the novel with this tradition of literary criticism was crucial in the development of Chinese novel. It signaled that the novel as a narrative genre, at least among some literati, was beginning to be admitted to the pantheon of high literati literature, thus far dominated by prose and poetry. Many novelists and novel commentators, including Jin Shentan, Chen Chen 陳忱, and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670-1698), have followed Li Zhi in appealing to this theory to emphasize the seriousness of their works or of the works on which they were commenting. Chen Chen claims that his novel *Shuihu houzhuan* 水滸後傳 was a book to pour out resentment (*wei xifen zhi shu* 為泄憤之書).\(^{170}\) Zhang Zhupo, in defense of the "pornographic" novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, portrays its authorship as conforming to Sima Qian's theory (*zuo huiyu er xie qifen* 作穢語而泄其憤).\(^{171}\) The *Wuxian caotang* 卧仙草堂 edition of the *Rulin waishi* in its anonymous chapter commentary also comments that the

---


author channeled his anger into his writing of this book as an outlet for his sympathy for victims of injustice (buping zhi ming 不平之鳴).\(^{172}\)

Yet to pour out one's anger is not just a writer's motivation. It is the function of reading and writing as well. Li Zhi himself found much relief in reading and writing. He vividly described how he enjoyed reading by singing and crying with the writer in one of his poems.\(^{173}\) "This world is so narrow," he wrote, "but in books you find no bound." So small is this earthly world that you feel depressed and so large is the world of books that in it you can talk, cry, and pour out feeling freely. Again, the four canonical functions of poetry were enlarged in Li Zhi's writing. He asks, "Who says that the chuanqi cannot incite people's emotions, perceive their feelings, make them sociable, or express their resentment?"\(^{174}\) Incitement (xing 興), observation (guan 觀), sociality (qun 群) and resentment (yuan 怨) are four terms from Confucius' praise of the Songs (Shijing).\(^{175}\) Li Zhi used exactly the same terms to describe a chuanqi drama Hongfu 紅拂. Such echoes of Confucius's voice may have helped lend authority to a position that was radical in its implications. Confucius acknowledged four possible functions in any of the Songs (the capacities to incite, perceive, socialize, and show resentments). Li Zhi held that not only poetry but other literary genres have their inherent affective quality.

---


\(^{173}\) "Dushu le" 談書樂. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 6: 226-227.

\(^{174}\) "Hongfu" 紅拂. Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 4:195.

D. Writing for Eternity

Li Zhi wrote books not only for pouring out his strong feelings, but also for publication, for later generations, and for eternity. In 1600 when Li Zhi was seventy-four, while trying to escape the denunciation by the conservative scholar-officials, he was invited by Liu Dongxing 劉東星 (1538-1601) to his place in Jining 濟寧, Shandong. During his stay in Shandong, he visited the Taibai Building 太白樓, the South Pond 南池 (or Duling Pond 杜陵池), and Confucius Temple 夫子樓, wondering how all these places survived with the names of Li Bai, Tu Fu, and Confucius. He composed two poems of the Taibai Building and another two of the South Pond, expressing his admiration of the two greatest Tang poets and their poetry.176 "It is their great literary works that carry these places into eternity," he wrote in a letter to his disciple, Yang Dingjian 楊定見. Thinking of the past sages, he asked himself what he would leave for the later generations. A time will come when a person's life ends; his career, his wishes, and his thought go no further than his body, as trees and grasses that will decay. A profound spiritual unrest was at work within him -- he was searching for something worth dying for. To carry his thought to eternity, there is nothing to compare with the unending permanence of the literary work (wenzhang 文章).177

176 Fenshu in Fenshu, Xu Fenshu, 6: 238.

177 “Yu Fengli” 與風里, Xu Fenshu in Fenshu, Xu Fenshu, 1:37.
Li Zhi had written and published a number of books. We saw his boundless self-confidence and passion for writing. When he was still in Shandong, he continued to work on *Yangming Xiansheng dao xue chao* 陽明先生道學鈔 and *Yangming Xianshen nianpu* 陽明先生年譜, which again struck strong feeling into his heart and made him cry wildly. But Li Zhi did not let his emotion carry him away, he actively promoted the distribution of his other books. Winning a lasting fame (glory) was based on achievement in writing as well as on publications. Li Zhi arranged for his *Fengshu* and *Shuoshu* 說書 to be republished. He paid considerable attention to linguistic presentation and avoiding printing errors. He asked his friend to tell the publisher, "Since everyone likes Fengshu, please publish it as soon as possible. Be sure to proofread it carefully. Don't misprint. Don't be careless." The very same year saw his *Fengshu* republished.

In fact, Li Zhi's notoriety derived in part from his skill in getting his books into circulation and read. He even got his letters to prominent debating partners into print as soon as he was able to collect enough for publication. Two years after he became a "monk," in 1590, the first edition of Li Zhi's collected works, *Fenshu* 殟書, was published in Macheng. It includes several letters he wrote to Geng Dingxiang 攻 the latter's pharisaical conduct. Zhang Wenda, the censor who lodged the impeachment memorial against Li Zhi that led to his suicide in a Beijing prison, expressed concern that Li Zhi's ideas were, within reason, his own business, but when they were communicated to others they assumed a political character that

demanded state intervention. Li Zhi's coy titles, like *Fenshu* (*A Book to Be Burned*) and *Cangshu* (*A Book to Be Hidden Away*), anticipated what in fact would happen to his books. "What I said was quite offensive to today's scholars. Since I mercilessly expose their fraud, they will kill me and my book will be burned." The Ming state found bans difficult to enforce, however. As a Sichuan provincial censor reported to the throne in 1652, officials many years previously had received the imperial proscription declaring Li Zhi's writings uncanonical, had burned all copies in their possession, and forbade bookstores from selling them; "and yet, even though their circulation is prohibited, many gentry enjoy his books and have hidden them away, so that even today they have not been exterminated." That was exactly what Li Zhi liked to see. He explained why one of his books was called *A Book to Be Hidden Away*. "So named," he said, "because it deals with the rights and wrongs in the history of a thousand years. Because it is not easy to be understood by the shortsighted in this generation, it should be kept in a famous mountain, I mean, kept for later generations." He wrote the first draft of *Cangshu* in 1588 and sent it to Jiao Hong, saying that "I want to present and discuss it with an understanding friend." (zhiyin 知音) Jiao Hong was primarily responsible for publishing Li Zhi's

---


182 A person who can understand the true significance of a piece of literary work or music by knowing what was in the mind of the producer. The term also means an "understanding friend," someone who can grasp a person's true nature. "Da Jiao Yiyuan" 答焦漪園, *Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 1: 226-227.
major works, including *Fenshu, Cangshu* and *Xu Changshu*. Li Zhi regarded Jiao Hong as one of his best friends. He once said, "I can think of anyone who knows me better than Jiao Hong."\(^{183}\) Out of 180 letters included in his *Fenshu* and *Xu Fenshu*, twenty-nine were written to Jiao Hong. Unfortunately, a true friend like Jiao Hong was extreme rare.\(^{184}\) Nevertheless, the lack of understanding readers did not mean the true significance of the book would be vanished. The time would come when people could really understand and appreciate the book. After he wrote the first draft of *Cangshu* in 1588 the next ten years much of his energy was invested in defining, evaluating, and revising -- in his book until it was published in 1599 when he was seventy-three. After the book was published, he went on writing his *Xu Fengshu*. As an old man, he knew he was able to communicate with only a few "understanding readers" through his publications while he was alive. However, what motivated him to write books and to have them published was his belief that the books would carry his thoughts for eternity. Writing was one way for people to heal wounded human heart, transcend the idiocies of daily life, celebrate individualism, and make their stab at immortality. This was part of his search for the true meaning of life.

---

\(^{183}\) "Da Jiao Yiyuan." *Fenshu* in *Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 1: 8.

\(^{184}\) "Pengyou pian," *Fenshu* in *Fenshu Xu Fenshu*, 5: 222.
CHAPTER V
LI ZHI'S ARGUMENTS ON READING

Li Zhi read books. He read everything that he was able to lay his hands on --
fiction and drama as well as philosophy and history. For him there was no boundary
between the classics and the vernacular. Books are food for thought rather than
something for "brainwashing." Interpretation of the classics should lead to
philosophical thinking. Literature changes with the times and each literary genre has
its inherent affective quality.

The discussion in this chapter will focus on his approach to reading the
classics and the vernacular. This chapter will examine how he argues that the classics
should be open for interpretation and reinterpretation and how he elected fiction as
serious literature. The last part of this chapter will analyze how he treats the fictional
world when writing commentaries on it.

A. Critical Approach towards Reading the Classics

Classical studies and the commentarial modes of thinking structured and at
times dominated key aspects of literature, philosophy, and even politics. In the field
of the exegesis of the classics, Li Zhi adopted a critical approach and recognized the
dynamic force in reading the classics.

Interpretation of a classic is possible as well as impossible. A
dynamic interpretation makes the meaning clear, while a static
interpretation is always trapped by language. Interpretation
should not be definitely fixed (buzhi yiding 不執一定); not
being static is to leave room for unlimited reinterpretation
(wuding 無定) which is just like beads running in an abacus -- they yield infinite possibilities. A static interpretation is dead language which is just like (as mechanical as) stamping a seal on paper. What is the use of that?  

Li Zhi's approach was unique in several ways. First, he was trying to break away from the "analytic" tradition or at least to seek balance between this tradition and something very much like what is in the west called the hermeneutic philosophy. To him textual analysis and literary studies (jiejing 解經) are important, but what is more important is that the analysis of the classic should lead to critical thinking (sibian 思辯). By reading and interpreting the classics the reader not only tries to makes sense out of the text but also attempts to communicate with the author and develops and expresses his own ideas. This is not to say that commentarial activities in their developed phases were unaffected by the literary and intellectual character of their classical bases. What Li Zhi stressed is intellectual independence and freedom. He maintained that there is no absolute truth, even in the revered classics. He recognized that the classics did in some aspects seem to fall short of cosmic comprehensiveness. In his mind the classics were products of the past; one did not have to stick to them or rely on the commentaries of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi for the interpretation of the classics. If one had to study without a creative imagination and without a trust of one's own intuition, Li Zhi cautioned, learning would become "brainwashing" (yukuo mentu, mengdong dizi 迷罔門徒, 惑懂弟子). This kind of phony person's phony game would certainly do people more harm than good.

185 "Shu jie yilun qian" 書決疑論前, Fenshu in Fenshu, Xu Fenshu, 4: 134.

186 "Tongxin shuo." Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 3:99.
Second, a reader was able to develop his ideas around a text and expressed them as a commentary. The inexhaustibility of the classics opens room for interpretation and reinterpretation. For Li Zhi, the text should be treated, not as a representation of meaning that is already decided, given, and self evident, but as a tentative and provisional attempt on the part of the writer to capture his current understanding in an external form so that it may provoke further attempts at understanding as the reader dialogues with the text in order to interpret its meaning. There is no way to crystallize the meanings of the classics for the benefit of readers. A good interpretation stimulates further study. Reading and interpreting the classics is a matter not just of extracting meaning from the classics but of constituting meaning by the readers. The ongoing construction of meaning is the dynamic force in reading the classic.

Li Zhi's approach to the classics is fundamentally different from that adopted by the relatively conservative Zhu Xi school and approved by the civil service examination system. The main books deemed worthy of discussion in examination essays were the Four Books (Sishu 四書) and the Five Classics (Wujing 五經), all of which had been single out by Zhu Xi. The Ming official commentaries on the Four Books were written by Zhu Xi whose exposition of the Confucian doctrine remained unchallenged until Wang Yangming. Despite his prominence as both a great official and a scholar, Wang Yangming's influence did not make a significant impact on the civil service examinations during the Jiajing period. Throughout most

\footnote{Tu Wei-ming 1976, p.176.}
of the sixteenth century till the Wanli period, Cai Qing's 蔡清 (1453-1508) *Sishu mengyin* 四書蒙引 (Introduction to the Four Books), Chen Chen's 陳瑋 (1477-1545) *Sishu qianshuo* 四書淺説 (The Four Books Made Easy), and Lin Xiyuan's 林希元 (ca. 1480-ca. 1560) *Sishu cunyi* 四書存疑 (Questions About the Four Books) had been popular commentaries among examination candidates. These three commentaries espoused primarily Zhu Xi's expositions. Although a few examinees did go beyond these interpretations and present their original ideas in the examinations, the only point of view to be officially accepted in the discussion of these works basically was that of the commentaries of the Cheng-Zhu school. Li Zhi held that even Confucian's view could not be the only criteria to judge writers and their writings. Any writer's work should be open for all kind of comments. For Li Zhi, to write commentary on the classics and history is a way to express himself, just as he expressed independent judgements about historical personalities in his *Cangshu* and *Xu Cangshu*.

Third, Li Zhi's approach to the classics was related to what has been described as reading all 'sacred' classics as ordinary literature, an attitude prevalent among some late Ming literati. Indeed the *Four Books* and the classics were no longer treated as sacred, but were treated just like other literary texts to be subjected

---

188 Chen Chen was a Fujian jinshi. For an introduction to his scholarship, and a comparison between his *Sishu qianshuo* and Cai Qing's *Sishu mengyin*, see He Qiaoyuan, "Ying jiu zhi," *Minshu*, vol. 3, 85:1551-1552.

189 Huang Zongxi, "Zhu ru xue'an" 諸儒學案 (part 2), in *Ming ru xue'an*, vol. 2 44:27.

190 See "Xuanju" 選舉, in *Mingshi*, 70:1694.

to critics' scrutiny. Ironically, the development of this intellectual trend in the late Ming was partly because of the civil service examination system itself. Often candidates were distinguished by literary achievements rather than by their knowledge of the classics. On the one hand, the emphasis on literary achievements for selecting successful candidates reduced the authority of the Confucian classics, which were increasingly treated as model of literary writings, rather than canonical texts in the hands of professional critics.  

On the other hand, as a result of attempts of the compiler and publishers to offer multiple explications to the examinees, "heterodox ideas" also found their way in commentaries on the *Four Books* and the classics. For example, in his popular works *Sishu shuocong* 四書說叢, Shen Shouzheng 沈守正, made it clear that he included vernacular novels and any other types of sources as long as they offered insights into the Confucian texts. He listed 226 works in the bibliography, including works by Li Zhi, Wang Gen, Wang Ji (1498-1583), Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 (1547-1629), Yang Qiyuan 楊起元 (1547-1599), even *Chuandeng lu* 傳燈錄 (Records of Transmitting the Lamp), and *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (Anthology for Spreading the Illuminating Truth). Gu Yanwu, writing in early Qing, was particularly strident in his condemnation of the Ming commentators for their "irreverence" towards the Confucian texts.  

It is no coincidence that in the late Ming many of those literati who advocated the active role of the reader in the exegesis of the classics and in the

---


interpretation of literature also played an important part in the development of the fiction commentary tradition. By this mode of reading, Li Zhi intended to capture the sense of engagement in critical thinking, undertaken for the pleasure of constructing and exploring a world through words, whether one’s own or those of another author. While much of our reading of imaginative literature is undertaken in this mode, the classics can also be read in the same way. There is something inherent in the nature of both the classics and fiction that invites readers to participate in the production of meaning. Knowledge, being a state of understanding achieved through constructive mental effort, requires the individual to engage with the relevant texts in a critical and creative manner in an attempt to bring about a correspondence between the meaning represented in the text and the meaning represented in the mind.

B. Reading Fiction as Serious Literature

With the extension of education, the publishing industry expanded rapidly during the Ming dynasty. Publishing centers emerged in every region. Government agencies, private individuals, institutions, and commercial firms all published books. The Wanli reign period saw a marked upsurge in the activities of commercial publishers in Li Zhi’s native Fujian. Analysis of collections of fiction shows the primacy of the southeast coast and lower Yangtze area. Of the ten texts out of twenty-four extant Ming and Qing editions of *San guo zhi tongsu yanyi* whose regional origins can be identified, six were printed in
Fujian, three in Suzhou, and one in Nanjing. In many senses, fiction and drama in the Ming and Qing dynasties developed simultaneously. Authors of fiction and drama freely drew from common and shared pools of story materials in which classical, historical, and oral elements combine to produce an extensive sequence of narratives. This commonality was partly a matter of economic and social background of these cultural activities, since the stage and novel flourished in the same region, especially in the areas around Fujian, Suzhou, and Nanjing, and shared many of the same publishing houses and very nearly the same reading audience.

However, in the traditional scheme, fiction and drama were barely tolerated as entertainment by the elite class. They certainly did not qualify as high art, on the same level with classical poetry, essays, historical writings, and the like (\textit{buneng deng daya zhi tang 不能登大雅之堂}). Li Zhi argued against adherence to classical literary cannons, and in favor of accepting literature of every age as having its own value. He asserted that literary genres change with time and each age has its particular genre. He challenged the supremacy of pre-Qin prose and High Tang poetry: "why must poetry be selected from the ancient period? Why must prose be limited to the pre-Qin period?" He defended fiction as the rising genre suited to the times. A writer should express his own true feelings without imitation of past writings. His approach to literature was expanded by Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610) and restated by Jin Shentan (1608-1661). Yuan Hongdao arrived at an

---

\textsuperscript{194} Sun Kaidi, \textit{Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo shumu}, pp.35-44.

\textsuperscript{195} "Zashuo." \textit{Fenshu} in \textit{Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, p. 97-98.
evolutionary theory of literature. According to him, after having reached its zenith each dominated literary genre naturally gives way to another genre. The "outdated" literary practice of a certain period is to be replaced by a more appropriate mode of writing. Jin Shentan tried to associate fiction with the classics and belles-lettres. It is during this time that some literati readers began to read novel with a serious scholastic approach previously reserved exclusively for the Confucian classics. The seventeenth century saw the flourishing of criticism of fiction, such as the sophisticated works produced by the well-known commentators Jin Shentan and Zhang Zhupo.

From Li Zhi's letters and the testimony of friends we know that Li Zhi wrote a large number of commentaries on a variety of works that include fiction and drama as well as philosophy and belles-lettres. Li Zhi upheld his belief that the popular literature of fiction and drama, written either in literary language or in the vernacular, must be seen as serious literature. Li Zhi listed *Shuihu zhuan* among what he called the "five great works" (*wu da bu wenzhang* 五大部文章). This list of five preeminent masterpieces was reported in a late Ming work by Zhou Hui 周煇 entitled *Jinling suo ji* 金陵琐記:

*[Li Zhi] often says, "there are five great works in the world. In the Han dynasty Sima Qian wrote *Shi ji*. The Tang and Song dynasties had the poetry of Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) and Su Shi. Shi Nai'an's 施耐庵 *Shuihu zhuan* was published in the Yuan*
and the writings of Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1529) in the Ming.\footnote{Zhou Hui, \textit{Jinling suoji}. rpt. in \textit{Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao}, vol. 3, p. 168.}

With the elevation of the status of vernacular literature and increasing literati input, the opposition between \textit{ya} and \textit{su} became less rigid, and critics began to speak of an ideal style attractive to both refined and vulgar readers (\textit{ya su gong shang} 雅俗共賞).

Evidence for distinguishing audiences for vernacular literature during the Ming dynasty is sparse. There are no known data on the numbers of copies printed for any given work, and often little explicit evidence exists to indicate its intended audience. In reality, audiences are not mutually exclusive. Vernacular written fictions and theatrical pieces include works written for both the cultural elite and the general readers. Literary works written in a heavily connotative and allusive version of the classical style were obviously intended for the cultural elite. However, there was another kind vernacular literature intended to be read by a more general audience. The flourishing commercial book production made available inexpensive editions of fiction and drama. In addition to the unabridged editions (\textit{fanben} 繁本), during the Wanli period in Fujian there appeared series of cheaper and cruder printings (often substantially abridged, hence the designation \textit{jianben} 簡本) of \textit{Sanguo}, \textit{Shuihu}, and \textit{Xiyou ji} which contained "few if any historical or literary illusions, besides the most obvious."\footnote{Since they appeared in Fujian, they were also call \textit{Minben} 原本. Idema, pp.xi, liii, lxi, 119.} These editions of novels, and all the other inexpensive texts aimed at the non-elite audience, have hardly been studied in

\footnote{Since they appeared in Fujian, they were also call \textit{Minben} 原本. Idema, pp.xi, liii, lxi, 119.}
modern scholarship, since the Chinese scholars who taught the teachers of our
teachers despised them, and their contempt has been passed on from generation to
generation. Moreover, these books are difficult to find, for the book collectors who
were interested in such "trash" were rare indeed. Nevertheless, the cumulative impact
of these writings on Chinese culture was very great. These texts, standing as they did
on the boundary between the written and the oral, played a crucial role in the
complex process by which elements of the elite culture were translated into the terms
that the non-elite audience could comprehend.

C. Shuihu zhuan Commentary: Li Zhi's Reading of the Fictional World

Li Zhi enjoyed reading and commenting on fictions, because he believed
fiction writers were able to create a true representation of reality. He is credited with
championing the idea of writing commentaries on novels. In Europe, when medieval
writers started writing in the vernacular instead of Latin, they tried to appropriate
some of the power and prestige of the classical tradition by providing commentary
for their own works. For example, the Italian poet Dante's (1265-1321) first major
work, *Vita Nuova* ("New Life") written in his native Italian, was accompanied by his
own commentary. In China, the application of commentary to fiction and drama
was motivated by a desire to raise the prestige of vernacular literature. Fiction was
treated with a serious scholastic approach previously reserved exclusively for the
Confucian classics. Fiction commentators made extensive use of the terms in the

---

200 Scott and Wallace, pp.372-376.
classical exegetical tradition. Indeed, fiction commentaries might even be seen as parodies of the work of canonized classical scholarship. Reader might well be taken in by the likeness of the interpretive apparatus of fiction to its classical counterparts and thus accept fiction as a privileged and authoritative text presented by commentators.

There is little doubt that Li Zhi worked on Shuihu zhuan to promote its popularity. Li Zhi wrote a commentary on a printed edition of the Shuihu zhuan. Around 1589 he requested a copy of the novel from his friend and received it not long after it. It was this text he used for his commentary. According to Li Zhi's "Preface to Shuihu zhuan" included in Fenshu in 1590, it would seem certain that he was working with a hundred-chapter version such as the Tiandu waichen 天都外臣 preface edition (preface dated 1589), or earlier editions commonly associated with Guo Xun 郭勛 (1475-1524). In a note written in 1641 Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1574-1624), in his Youju Fei lu 游居柿錄, recorded that in 1592 he saw one of Li Zhi’s disciples, Changzhi 常志, who was good at calligraphy, engaged in making a fair copy of the novel and Li Zhi was working on a "word-by-word" commentary on it.

Yuan Wuya came visiting and showed me the newly published Shuihu zhuan with Zhuowu’s commentary. I was not very well at that time, but I read it over. I remembered that when Li Longhu (Li Zhi) lived in Wuchang in the mid-summer of the twentieth year of Wanli, I went to visit him. I saw he was

---

201 "Fu Jiao Ruohou," Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, (cengbu 增補) 2:269.
supervising Monk Changzhi to copy out the book and commenting on it word by word.\textsuperscript{202}

In a letter to Jiao Hong published posthumously in \textit{Xu Fenshu}, Li Zhi specifically mentions that he was happy with the commentary he wrote on the \textit{Shuihu zhuan}.\textsuperscript{203}

However, his commentary that exerted the greatest influence on later commentators and writers was that published with the two editions of the \textit{Shuihu zhuan}. The first was published by Rongyu tang 容與堂, a well-known publisher in Hangzhou, in 1610.\textsuperscript{204} The second was published by Yuan Wuya 袁無涯, another famous publisher in Suzhou, in 1612 or slightly earlier.\textsuperscript{205} Both editions have his name Li Zhuowu and the word \textit{zhongyi} 忠義 as part of their titles, and both contain versions of the preface to the novel by Li Zhi that appeared in his \textit{Fenshu}, but in the Rongyu tang edition the attitude of the commentator toward the novel and its main character, Song Jiang, varies from that in Li Zhi's preface. Although the comments in the Yuan Wuya edition are closer to the political thinking of Li Zhi as expressed in his preface than those in the Rongyu tang version, because the Yuan Wuya edition has 120 chapters, the preface had to be revised so that it would accord with the new, longer version of the novel.\textsuperscript{206}


\textsuperscript{203} "Yu Jiao Ruohou," \textit{Xu Fenshu} in \textit{Fenshu Xu Fenshu}, 1:34.

\textsuperscript{204} Sun Kaidi, p.212.

\textsuperscript{205} Sun Kaidi, p.215.

\textsuperscript{206} In my discussion, I will refer to the 120-chapter edition. The differences between the two editions of \textit{Shuihu zhuan} should not affect my overall interpretation here, for I have limited my discussion to Li Zhi's concept of \textit{zhong} and \textit{yi} that gives insight into the theme of the novel and that is consistently elucidated in his other essays.
As A Ying 阿英 (1900-1977) commented, Li Zhi treated the characters in fiction as if they lived the real world. Indeed, Li Zhi found fiction an ideal medium to faithful present the real world. In Shuihu zhuan, he found a clear and unobstructed view of the world. In his preface to the novel, he sees the Liangshan brothers as men of loyalty and righteousness (zhong and yi). Taking their lead from this, the editors of the Yuan Wuya edition also made much of the loyalty and righteousness of their heroes and even claimed that Li Zhi had been responsible for adding the two words to the title. By these two words, Li Zhi provides readers with the key to understanding the central moral concepts of the novel and its major characters. According to Li Zhi, loyalty and righteousness are the two principles that guide Song Jiang and his Liangshan brothers. They showed their loyalty in their service to the country and their righteousness in the personal relationships among individuals. While loyalty follows the Confucian concept of loyalty to one's country and sovereign (more or less of a public nature), righteousness is largely the popular idea of personal honor and selfless friendship (of a private nature), a virtue that is generally ignored in the official historiography.

207 A Ying, "Zhuowu pingshu" 卓吾評說, in Xiaoshuo xiantan, pp. 162-163.


209 Yan Wuya, "Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan quanshu fafan" 忠義水滸傳全書發凡, in Shuihu ziliao huibian, p.12. Jin Shengtan's attack on the inclusion of the words zhongyi in the beginning of his second preface to the novel seems to accept the proposition that Li Zhi had added the words. See Jin Shengtan, "Divu caizi shi Shi Nai'an Shuihu zhuan xu er" 丑才子書施耐庵水滸傳序二, in Shuihu ziliao huibian, p.24.

In the novel, Song Jiang is the epitome of loyalty. In chapter 42, the author specifically made clear that the principle of loyalty is given to Song Jiang by a goddess jiutian xuanmu 九天玄女, who appears to him in a dream and delivers three heavenly books to him. She instructs him that in order to carry out the Way on behalf of heaven (ti tian xing dao 替天行道) he must show loyalty to his country and sovereign. It is in the same chapter that the concept of ti tian xing dao is adopted by the Shuihu brothers as their motto. In chapter 60, when Song Jiang becomes the head of their brotherhood, the first thing he does is to impose the concept of loyalty on his brothers by changing the name of the meeting place from Juyi Ting 聚義庭 (The Hall of Righteousness) to Zhongyi Tang 忠義堂 (The Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness).

However, the author does not emphasize zhong at the expense of yi. The word yi repeatedly appears in the chapter titles throughout the whole novel. Li Zhi defined yi in his essay "On Friendship" as selfless friendship which implies a "personal honor" -- the reputation won as a result of relentless pursuing of yi. A true friend is ready to die for yi. In his own life and his discussion of human relationships (xiao, zhong, and yi), Li Zhi seemed to attach the greatest importance to friendship. As Yuao Hongdao 袁宏道 observed "Li Longhu 李龍湖 (Li Zhi) takes friendship as his own life." Li Zhi himself said, "A gentleman will die for an

---

211 The word yi appears in the titles of chapter 14, 22, 28, 32, 40, 58, 69, and 113 in Shuihu zhuang.

212 "Pengyou pian" 朋友篇, Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 5: 222.

understanding friend. He will not regret if he meets an understanding friend and dies for him.\textsuperscript{214} Carsun Chang described this kind of friendship as "wild kind of chivalry in their relationships with their friends," and that characterization serves also as a very apt description of Li Zhi and his Taizhou school friends.\textsuperscript{215} At the same time, however, there is a noticeable disillusionment even with the possibilities of true friendship. The fate of He Xinyin who was abandoned by his friends, was much on Li Zhi's mind. Moreover, "a true friend is extreme rare."\textsuperscript{216} Probably only in the fictional world of Lishan's "sworn brotherhood" did Li Zhi find the fullest expression of yi.

However, as Li Zhi noticed, the conflicts between zhong and yi have already developed between Song Jiang and his Lishan brothers, which are dramatized in the novel. Song Jiang's wishes for amnesty are against the wishes of many of his brothers, notably Li Kui 李逵, Lu Zhishen 鲁智深 and Wu Song 武松, who distrust the corrupt officials of the imperial court. According to the 120-chapter version, all Liangshan brothers receive amnesty as Song Jiang wishes, and join the Song imperial army.

There they fulfil their duties of serving the country by participating in a series of military campaigns against the invading enemies from abroad and against other rebellious forces at home. The campaigns are successful, though the last one proved to be rather costly, and more than half of the band of heroes died in the course of the

\textsuperscript{214} "Yu Pan Xuesong" 与潘雪松, Xu Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 1: 40.

\textsuperscript{215} Chang, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{216} "Pengyou pian," Fenshu in Fenshu Xu Fenshu, 5: 222.
campaign. Those who survive become further dispersed, and the novel ends tragically with the death of the two leaders, Song Jiang and Lu Junyi. caused by the death of Li Kui whom Song Jiang serves the poisoned wine for fear that he would do something to damage the reputation of the Shuihu brotherhood. Wu Yong and Hua Rong are martyrs to their friendship; they hanged themselves on the trees in front of Song Jiang and Li Kuei's graves. Thus, at the end, the Liangshan brothers prove to the world that they are men of zhong and yi, that they have kept their vows to serve the country and to die for friendship.217

Ironically during the mid-1970s, while Li Zhi was hailed as a great fighter against the Confucian tradition and the imperial institutions, Song Jiang was labeled a wicked traitor who blindly serves the emperor to the extent of sacrificing his devoted brothers and the honorable cause which brought them together. The use of historical and fictional figures as political or ideological symbols is by nature problematic. Li Zhi's reading of Shuihu zhuan is both true to the original and consistent to his own political thinking. He made it clear that Song Jiang and his Lishan brothers were on the side of zhong and yi; in other words, zhong and yi could hardly be found in the Ming court that was supposed to be loyal to the Son of Heaven and serve the people rightfully.218 In this way, Li Zhi was able to justify himself when he stood on the side of the Liangshan rebellions, including their leader Song Jiang.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

Jiao Hong in his preface to Li Zhi's Cangshu believed that Li Zhi's works would definitely go down from history and be regarded by later scholars as "scales and mirror" to distinguish between right and wrong. Li Zhi used the same term Sima Qian had used when he wished his book would be kept for later generations.\(^{219}\) Li Zhi's legacy has come down to us. But as he says in the opening remarks of his Cangshu: "Human judgments are not fixed quantities; in passing judgements, men do not hold settled views,"\(^{220}\) Li Zhi himself has been subject to the most extreme kinds of reinterpretation ever since his books were published.

His books provoked immediate, continuing, heated, and mainly illuminating controversy. His iconoclasm and unconventional behavior attracted a wide follower among his contemporaries. At the same time he was seen as the enemy of all kinds of orthodoxy. The impeachment against Li Zhi and the proscription of his books did not put to rest the controversy over the assessment of his philosophical ideas and the implications of his social and political attitudes in the aftermath of his death. Antagonists continued denouncing him as a perverse heretic against the Confucian tenets and dangerous rebel against the dynastic order, whereas sympathizers hailed


\(^{220}\) "Cangshu shiji liezhuan zongmu qianlun" 藏書世紀列傳總目前論, Cangshu, vol 1, p.7, as translated by K.C. Hsiao in Dictionary of Ming Biography, p.811.
his courageous criticisms of the sterile orthodoxy ideology and the corrupt imperial institutions, inspiring a profusion of forged writings attributed to him. In the end the conservatives triumphed when, follow another posthumous impeachment against Li Zhi in 1625, Emperor Xizong (r. 1621-1628) again decreed a proscription of his writings that lasted until the fall of the Ming. In spite of this, Li Zhi's writings were reprinted and enjoyed great popularity into the early Qing period.

At the same time, among the elite class, there was clearly a very strong reaction against the late Ming radical thinkers -- inspired in part by Li Zhi's extreme iconoclasm and by increasingly severe official injunctions against Li Zhi's works. In the early Qing, a large group of literati thinkers blamed various late Ming thinkers, especially those associated with the Wang Yangming school, for the fall of the Ming dynasty. Li Zhi and various "individualistic" ideologies became the scapegoats and were widely condemned. Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), and Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) were the three leading thinkers and eminent scholars in early Qing. Though probably the most objective of the early historians of Ming thought, and certainly the most sympathetic in his approach to it, Huang Zongxi would not even dignify Li Zhi with criticism. Li Zhi was simply excluded from his Mingru xue'an, which describes more than two hundred Ming thinkers and scholars. No doubt, Huang Zongxi's attitude toward Li Zhi and wild Chan movement was hostile, for one of his main reasons for writing the Mingru xue'an was to rescue Ming thought from Chan influence.  

---

about Li Zhi and the corrupting influence of Chanists and Li Zhi.\textsuperscript{222} He harshly accused Li Zhi of being disrespectful to Confucius, admiring the "notorious" First Emperor of the Qin, and demoralizing the common people by praising a women for choosing her own lover,\textsuperscript{223} etc. In short Li Zhi was a public enemy of the whole society, someone who "disrupted the Way and deluded the common people (\textit{luandao huoshi} 乱道惑世). Wang Fuzhi, though sharing many of Li Zhi's views on philosophy, history, and literature, saw the struggle against such heresies as a rearguard action fought by the truly orthodox. As Li Zhi enjoyed considerable popular support, he was elsewhere accused by Wang Fuzi of "leading the whole empire into wicked excesses, and bringing disaster to the gentry of China."\textsuperscript{224} During Qianlong 乾隆 reign period (1736-1795), Li Zhi's books were still listed among those to be banned or burned.\textsuperscript{225}

Li Zhi was "rediscovered" in the early twentieth century. His appeal seems irresistible to modern readers, many of whom find him a forerunner of their movements or claim him a champion of their causes. He has been seen as the champion of romanticism and individualism in life and literature, as the defender of women's rights, as the far-sighted promoter of popular culture, and as the courageous

\textsuperscript{222} Gu Yanwu, \textit{Rizhilu jishi}, 18.28b-30a. Gu Yanwu also criticized another late Ming figure, Zhong Xing (1574-1624). See ibid., 18.29b-30b. See also Wu Yu, "Ming Li Zhuowu bie zhuang," rpt. in \textit{Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao}, vol. 1, p 45.

\textsuperscript{223} In this case, Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 of the Former Han dynasty (206 B.C. -8 A.D.).


\textsuperscript{225} Wu Zefu 吳哲夫. \textit{Qingdai jinhui shumu yanjiu 清代禁燬書目研究}, p. 243-245.
rebel against Confucianism. These "human judgments" have not been "fixed quantities," but have served many conflicting needs of modern Chinese seeking value in their past even while repudiating much of it, as Li Zhi himself did in reading the classics.

The most extreme reevaluations of Li Zhi in our time were those linked to domestic policy in China from the 1960s through the mid-1970s. During the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Li Zhi was pressed into service for the political campaign. He enjoyed great popularity as an "anti-Confucianist and pro-Legalist." Although the use of Li Zhi as a political or ideological symbol often strayed far from reality, the intense interest in him again proved his importance as a thinker in Chinese history. After 1980, studies of Li Zhi continued to be important in China and in the West.

Li Zhi is a pivotal and influential figure in late Ming humanistic studies. He has been studied not only as a historian and philosopher, but as a social and literary critic as well. He is, first of all, a literary thinker. He tried, in his own way, to interpret the relation between literature and other concerns; to explain the role literature plays and to describe literature and literary works in terms that have resonance in other areas of intellectual and social life. Through his writings he offers

---


227 "zunfa fanrun de daibiao renwu" 尊法反儒的代表人物. See "Editor's Notes," in *Li Zhi yanjiu caikao ziliao*, vol. 1.

228 In 1974 at least forty-two articles and books about him appeared in China. See Lin Haiquan, pp. 452-455; Chan, Hok-lam, pp.196-201; Billeter, pp. 292-293.
an insight into broad areas of concern, desires, and repressed possibilities that lies behind both the writing and reading of literature. He exhibited a healthy acceptance of human desires as good and natural and emphasizes the importance of self-fulfillment and the spontaneous expression of natural human feelings.

Readers of his times and later generations have shared much of his strong feelings and found affinity with his literary thought. "The mind of a child" has inspired writers to be true to themselves and to the literary world they created. Literature and its medium, genres, and styles have changed with the time. Much has changed in human society -- and much of it for the better -- but much has also stayed the same. What remains almost unchanged is the human nature. Hypocrisy, duplicity, and phoniness are still some useful words to describe human relationships. The many dimensions of Ming thought reflect the many dimensions of life itself: life as it was lived there more than three hundred ago in one particular cultural area, with lessons, nevertheless, for us to learn.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


A history of Fujian in the Ming dynasty.

One of the best known and in some ways the best history of Chinese thought in the Ming dynasty. In chapter 35, there are entries about the debate between Geng Dingxiang 殷定向 (1526-1596) and Li Zhi (pt.3).

A collection of essays including critical commentaries on major historical works (shiping 史評) and revisionist interpretations of major figures and episodes (shilun 史論) from the Zhou 周 dynasty (c.1066-221 BC) to the Yuan 元 dynasty (1115-1234). Uses new criteria and viewpoints to evaluate historical personalities.

One of the earliest collections of Li Zhi's works.

This is a bound edition of two of the most important collections of Li Zhi's works. Also known as Lishi Fenshu 李氏焚書. A collection of Li Zhi's poems, letters, essays and comments on philosophy and literature. His "Preface to Shuihu zhuan" 水滸傳序 and "Tongxin shuo" 童心說 are included in the collection.
A textual commentary for this 120-chapter novel Zhongyi shuihu quanzhuanshu 志義水滸全傳, printed and published by Yuan Wuya 袁無涯 (fl.1614) in 1614; preface by Yang Dingjian 楊定見, one of Li Zhi's disciples.

A textual commentary for this 120-chapter novel Zhongyi shuihu quanzhuanshu 志義水滸全傳, printed and published by Yuan Wuya 袁無涯 (fl.1614) in 1614; preface by Yang Dingjian 楊定見, one of Li Zhi's disciples.

A continuation of Cangshu 藏書 (1599). Expresses similar independent and unorthodox judgements about Ming personalities. Historical writings and biographies cover the years from the beginning of the Ming dynasty (1368) to the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign period (1522-1566).

A biography of Li Zhi, "Li Zhi xiaozhuan", was included in this large collection of poetry and biographies.

One of the most important sources of information on literary and intellectual circles during the Ming-Qing transitional period.


Zhu Guozhen 朱國楨 (1557-1632). *Yongzhuan xiaopin 湧幢小品*. *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀 *Edition, vol.3*, pp.1867-2131. There is a brief account about Li Zhi, in which Zhu Guozhen said Li Zhi’s works had been banned but they were still widely read.


Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1672-1755) et al. *Ming Shi 明史* (begun in 1646; completed in 1736; first published in 1739); rpt. 28 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1974. Official history of Ming dynasty. Some 220 of the 332 chapters of the history are devoted to important biographies of the period. Li Zhi is briefly mentioned in the entry of Geng Dingxiang (10:5816-5817). The compilers commented that Geng Dingxiang was outwitted by Li Zhi in their debates. On page 6260, the biography of Zhang Wenda also indicates how Zhang Wenda drew up an indictment against Li Zhi.
Secondary Sources


Chen Qingyuan 陳慶元. Fujian wenxue fazhan shi 福建文學發展史. Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe 福建教育出版社, 1996. A survey of poetry, prose, fiction and critical theory produced in Fujian or by natives of Fujian, mainly from the Tang dynasty to the fall of the Qing dynasty.

Chen Qingyuan 陳慶元, and Chen Qingliang 陳慶良. "Qingdai liangbu Minren shuo Minshi de xiaoshuo -- Taiwan waiji yu Mindu bieji" 清代兩部闡人說閩事的小說--台灣外記與閩都別記, Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu 明清小說研究, 1996.1:153-164.
Important information concerning the old home of Li Zhi in Quanzhou, Fujian and the conditions of his lineage which are valuable to a study of Li Zhi's life and his intellectual development.


Essays on philosophy, popular culture and social values of the Ming dynasty, including the editor's essay "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Ming Thought", which contains a concise and balanced introduction to Li Zhi.


A study of the pre-modern Chinese vernacular short story, especially those in Feng Menglong's 馮夢龍 three collection (known collectively as Sanyan 三言) and in Ling Mengchu's 凌蒙初 two collections (known as Erpai or Liangpai 二拍).

One of the more scholarly and well-documented interpretations of Li Zhi's thought, containing much useful information.

General introduction to the traditional Chinese novel in English, containing information on the plot or textual histories of the major classical novels.


A comprehensive survey of the development of Chinese vernacular fiction: its diversity, creativity, and originality.

Traces the gradual development of *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, from its beginning in the legends about an historical figure, Song Jiang 宋江, to its culmination, five centuries later, in a full-length novel.


Langzhuo daxue zhongwenxi Mengzi yizhu 小組. Mengzi yizhu 孟子譯注, Hong Kong: Wenyu shuju, (1959?).

With a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, copious index.


A new study of the chronology of Li Zhi's life.


A general survey of the development of Chinese literature.

A brief history of Chinese fiction with critical interpretation of some important works. A pioneering fiction writer himself and creator of the modern Chinese short story, Lu Xun compiled his notes from his lectures at Beijing University, based on the knowledge of fiction then available.


Collection of essays on Latin and the vernacular in medieval literature which are expansions and elaboration of papers read at the York Manuscript Conference held in 1987.

An anthology of the medieval literary theory and criticism. Covers the tradition of systematic commentary on authors both sacred and profane, Latin and vernacular, 'ancient' and 'modern', from around 1100 until around 1375.


A set of studies of what is known in Chinese as "the four extraordinary books" (*si da qishu* 大奇書) — *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅, *Xi you ji* 西游記, *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳, and *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義.


Introduces the most important trends and commentators and discusses their mutual influence on each other in the course of surveying the commentarial tradition. Solutions by authors of fiction in pre-modern China to the challenge of this tradition are outlined and examined through specific examples.

Consists of the translation into English of traditional Chinese *dufa* 諭法 essays for *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅, *Xi you ji* 西游記, *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒傳, *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史, and *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢. The first chapter also contains essays by the translators that apply different approaches to the field of traditional Chinese fiction criticism.


A bibliography of Chinese fiction, which classifies fiction by thematic categories.


A textual and stylistic study of autobiographical writings, including Li Zhi's autobiography "Zhuowu lunlue." The author considers 1568-1680 the golden age of Chinese autobiography.
A critical account of Li Zhi's life and thought.


Complied by the staff of the Department of History, Xiamen University, from 1974 to 1975, and subsequently made available for "internal circulation." It incorporated a wide range of writings on Li Zhi by Ming and Qing scholars, as well as excerpts from the genealogies of Li Zhi's lineage retrieved from his native place since the 1950s.

A study of traditional fiction criticism with positive evaluation of pingdian 批點 style commentary. Li Zhi is treated as representing the "true spirit of Chinese classical fiction criticism."


A general introduction to Li Zhi's life and his writings.

A study of Li Zhi's life, his worldview and his philosophy from a Marxist perspective.
