Buddhist and Daoist influences on Neo-Confucian thinkers and their claim of orthodoxy

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Abstract
This article aims to describe the Buddhist and Daoist influences on the formation of Neo-Confucianism in particular regarding its selection and exegesis of Confucian Classics and its view of the cosmos and the nature of man, as well as the quest for a certain mental state. The Buddhist and Daoist influences on Neo-Confucianism and the syncretistic tendencies during the Song and Ming dynasties made the question of heresy and orthodoxy acute. Thinkers who borrowed many alien elements are especially prone to strongly defend themselves with claims to orthodoxy, and at the same time are highly critical of the other traditions they often have forsaken at an earlier stage in their development. It is impossible to determine who was most influenced by Buddhism, Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. The difference between them is not a difference in degree but that they adopted different parts of Buddhism, Zhu Xi more of its philosophy, whereas Wang Yangming more of its praxis.

Keywords: Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, syncretism, heterodoxy, orthodoxy, Song and Ming dynasties

To trace what are Buddhist and Daoist elements in Neo-Confucianism is very difficult since the three traditions are all very complex. The kind of Buddhism found in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279) was a tradition that had been deeply influenced by the Chinese mood of thinking, that is, Daoist beliefs as well as Confucian ideas. From the very beginning of Buddhism’s arrival in China, shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, Buddhist ideas were explained by means of Daoist terms. Buddhism also influenced Daoism, and Daoism and Confucianism had also been influencing each other for a long time, if they ever had been totally separated. What we are trying to grasp therefore comprises several multilayered traditions.

The concept of Neo-Confucianism is related to several Chinese terms, like lixue 理学 “School of Principle” or Song Ming lixue 宋明理学 “School of Principle from the Song and Ming dynasty”, xinxue 心学 “School of Heart and Mind”, and daoixue 道学 “Learning of the Way”, although none of these is a direct translation. Lixue

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usually refers to the School of Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who are regarded as the main figures of the rationalistic wing of Neo-Confucianism. Xinxue refers to the School of Lu Xiangshan 陆象山 (1139–93) and Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1529), the idealistic wing of Neo-Confucianism. Daoxue is a term that derives from the idea that there was an orthodox transmission of the Way through a line of early sage-rulers to Confucius and then to Mencius (ca 371–289 B.C.). Followers of this idea were called daoxuejia 道学家. The English term Neo-Confucianism is wider than all these Chinese terms, bringing together several different thinkers and contradictory philosophical ideas. It is most likely that the Japanese adopted the term from European Orientalists. Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan, 1895–1990) seems to be the first scholar to use its Chinese equivalent xin ru xue 新儒学, which in turn was translated back into English by Derk Bodde as Neo-Confucianism. It ought to be mentioned that the term Neo-Confucianism should be distinguished from New Confucianism dangdai/xiandai xinruxue 当代 / 现代新儒学, which refers to the modern Confucian movement of the twentieth century. However, the New Confucian movement is to a great extent inspired by Neo-Confucian thinkers. There is therefore a strong link between the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties and the New Confucianism of the twentieth century. Some scholars are critical of the term Neo-Confucianism, claiming that there was never a distinct break between the earlier Confucians and the thinkers usually labeled Neo-Confucian. I agree with this to a certain degree, but find it practical to use Neo-Confucianism, especially in this article, to cover both the School of Principle and the School of Mind.

There has been some discussion about who was most influenced by Buddhism: Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. Wing-tsit Chan argues that Wang Yangming’s affinities with Buddhism are exaggerated. My hypothesis is that it is not possible to compare the degree of influence; they were both influenced by Buddhism but were attracted to different parts of the Buddhist philosophy and praxis. Whereas Zhu Xi was more influenced by Huayan philosophy as it survived within Chan Buddhism, Wang Yangming incorporated more adoptions of Chan Buddhist praxis. When adopting Buddhist and Daoist elements, the question of orthodoxy becomes acute, and this is most likely one reason for the Neo-Confucian obsession with this question. The significance of orthodoxy and heterodoxy lies in the question of the essence of different traditions. Another hypothesis in this article is that representatives of orthodoxy often stay very close to the heterodoxy; in other words, because they are dangerously close to heterodoxy, they feel compelled to claim an orthodox stance. Most of the Neo-Confucians discussed in this article have been accused of heresy. At the same time they defend themselves and use the word heresy, yiduan 异端, about a certain stance, tendency or attitude of their adversaries, while their own stance is characterized as orthodox, zhengtong 正统.

The main characteristics of Neo-Confucianism

In the following discussion, I will focus on four characteristics of Neo-Confucianism and examine each of them in order to grasp the Buddhist and Daoist influences on each aspect. First, Neo-Confucianism is a movement of reinterpreting the Confucian classics. Certain classics, like the *Four Books*: the *Analects*, *Mencius*, the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*, became more important than before the Neo-Confucian era, and the questions raised in relation to the old texts were different. Second, the Neo-Confucian view of the cosmos and the essential nature of things was described by concepts like *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳, the five phases *wuxing* 五行, the Supreme Ultimate *taiji* 太及, and Principle *li* 理, and Material force *qi* 气. A pioneer in this respect was Zhou Dunyi 周敦颐 (1017–73), but the systematization was mainly performed by Zhu Xi. Third, the view of man was described by a similar vocabulary and was closely related to the view of the cosmos. Fourth, the Confucian sage was an ideal, and to realize the mental state of the sage was regarded as the goal of life. To reach this ideal state of mind, methods for self-cultivation were ordained. The five Confucian ideals, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, *li* 礼, wisdom, and loyalty, were regarded as cardinal moral principles, and the Neo-Confucians argued that the moral principles were inner qualities. In this respect, they resembled earlier Confucianism, but they had a different view of moral praxis and human desires. It would be tempting to say that the Neo-Confucian thinkers had a more negative view of desires compared to the view found in the Confucian Classics, but this article only goes so far as to suggest that the Neo-Confucian view of desires diverges, at least if we recognize He Xinyin and Li Zhi as belonging to the Neo-Confucian tradition. The main part of this tradition rejects desires, in a way very similar to the ideals of the Buddhist monk. No matter what the view of desires, the methods of self-cultivation in most cases came from the *Four Books* or from early Confucian learning, mainly aimed at developing skills of the mind. It has been suggested that a common tendency within Neo-Confucianism, which is different from earlier Confucianism, was a kind of fundamentalism and “restorationism”. The leaders of Neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty used the slogans “Return to the Past” and “Restore the old order” *fugu* 复古. One component of this attitude was to return to certain Confucian classics.

Reinterpretation of the classics

Interpreting the classics has always been a fundamental activity of Confucians. From the former Han-dynasty (206 B.C.–25 A.D.), when Confucianism became the official ideology under Emperor Wu (156–87 B.C.), the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Changes* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* were counted as the five classics, but already during the later Han dynasty (25–

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4 In this I follow to a great extent Chen Lai, *Songming Lixue* 宋明理学 2008, p. 11.
5 Wm Theodore De Bary, 1959, “Common Tendencies in Neo-Confucianism.” In: *Confucianism in Action*, p. 34.
the *Analects* and the *Book of Filial Piety* were added. Gradually, the number of classics increased.\(^6\)

For the Neo-Confucian thinkers, certain texts became more interesting than others. Han Yu 韩愈 (768–824), who is regarded by many scholars as a forerunner of the Neo-Confucian era, turned his attention toward *Mencius*. Han Yu places Mencius in the orthodox line of succession from Confucius. It was the discussions on mind and human nature and Mencius’ method of self-cultivation through nourishing the mind that appealed to Han Yu and his contemporaries. It is very likely that the reason for this interest in the *Book of Mencius* was the Neo-Confucians’ familiarity with similar Buddhist discussions. One could say that the Buddhist interest in the mind and Buddhist and Daoist meditation techniques cleared the way for a new Confucian interest in early Confucian texts dealing with similar topics. Later, Zhu Xi would select *Mencius* as one of the *Four Books*, which became the core curriculum for the civil service examination for six hundred years until the system was abolished in 1905. During the Zhou dynasty (770–221 B.C.), the position of Xunzi (ca 298–238 B.C.), an antagonist of Mencius but also a Confucian, was as high as that of Mencius, and during the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.–206 B.C.) Mencius was forbidden by the legalist ruler Qin Shi Huangdi (259 B.C.210 B.C.), but during the Song and Ming dynasties the supremacy of Mencius was unquestioned by the Neo-Confucians.\(^7\)

The *Great Learning* was another text that Han Yu held in high esteem, and which Zhu Xi regarded as the most fundamental and most suitable for a beginner student. Therefore, Zhu Xi placed it as the first of the *Four Books*, followed by the *Doctrine of the Mean*, the *Analects*, and *Mencius*. The *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean* are originally chapters from the *Book of Rites*. As is explained above, the Neo-Confucian methods of self-cultivation was inspired by the *Four Books* and by early Confucian learning. The aim was to develop skills of the mind.\(^8\)

The *Book of Changes* consists of two parts, the first being a manual of divination and the second, called the *Ten Wings* or *shiyi*, consisting of commentaries on the first part. The *Ten Wings* are traditionally attributed to Confucius. Modern scholars assume that the *Book of Changes* was put together as a coherent text in the ninth century B.C., and that the *Ten Wings* dates from different periods, some before Confucius’ time and some after.\(^9\) The Confucians regard the *Book of Changes* as a Confucian classic. At the same time, it is also a very important text for the Daoists. The older parts of the text were written before Confucianism and Daoism had crystallized into two different and opposite currents of thought. The following section will show the importance of this text for the development of Neo-Confucian cosmology.

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\(^8\) Chen Lai, 2008, p. 11.

Buddhist and Daoist Influences

A different view of the cosmos and the essential nature of things

The Neo-Confucian view of the cosmos has deep roots in Chinese thought. An important source of inspiration for Zhu Xi was Zhou Dunyi. Zhu Xi places him at the beginning of the *daoxue* tradition, something which has been criticized by those who argue that Zhou Dunyi was a pseudo-Daoist and that the *daoxue* tradition should begin with Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033–1108). Zhou Dunyi’s famous *taiji tu* 太极图 or “Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate” has been a hot topic of scholarly debate, and the views on its Daoist or Buddhist origin diverge. Some argue that it goes back to a Daoist priest, Chen Tuan 陈抟 (ca 906–989). The exact appearance of Chen Tuan’s Diagram is not certain, but Zhou Dunyi mentions him in his writings. Some scholars argue that he should not belong to the *daoxue* tradition, which in that case would begin with Cheng Yi. For example, A.C. Graham claims that Zhou Dunyi was a Confucian-Daoist syncretist. Graham blames Zhu Xi for making Zhou Dunyi the founder of Neo-Confucianism and argues that Zhou’s contribution to Neo-Confucianism was only the Supreme Ultimate.11 Wing Tsit-chan is not one of those who want to place Zhou Dunyi outside the Neo-Confucian tradition, but he recognizes that Zhou assimilated the Daoist element of *wuji* 无极 to Confucian thought and argues that he was inspired by the Daoist classic *Daodejing* in using this concept. The fact that Zhou uses the diagram for rational philosophy and not, like the religious Daoists, to obtain elixir for immortality, is what makes him a Confucian and not a Daoist, according to Chan.

*Wuji* has been translated in several different ways; Wing-tsit Chan translates it as “non-being”, but Feng Youlan/Fung Yu-lan (or Derk Bodde) uses the word “ultimateless”12 and Julia Ching translates it as “limitless.”13 The discrepancies in understanding Zhou Dunyi are not only related to separate concepts but also to the totality of his philosophy. Zhou Dunyi’s explanation of his own diagram was inspired by the *Book of Changes*. He begins his commentary on the diagram by speaking of *wuji* and *taiji*, which through movements produce *yang*. When *yang* has reached its climax, it is followed by quiescence, which produces *yin*, as in the *Book of Changes*, but in the latter text this is followed by the Four Emblems sixiang 四象 and the Eight Trigrams bagua 八卦. In contrast, Zhou Dunyi says that *yin* and *yang* produce the Five Phases, *wuxing* 五行, which are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. The circle under the Five Phases (see the figure) represents how *yin* moves the female and *yang* the male. The last circle likens the union of the two sexes to the production of the myriads of beings. When studying the diagram from top to bottom, the reader gets an illustration of how *yin* and *yang* give rise to the phenomenal world, but Zhou

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10 Tze-ki Hon follows Joseph Adler in translating *taiji tu* as “the Supreme Polarity.” See his article “Zhou Dunyi’s Philosophy of the Supreme Polarity”, in *Dao Companion to Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, 2010, Makeham ed., Springer Science+Business Media, B.V. p. 2. They argue that *taiji* means the unity of the *yin-yang* polarity, but for me the term Supreme Polarity emphasizes the polarity and not the unity, so I still prefer “the Supreme Ultimate.”

11 A.C. Graham, 1958, *Two Chinese Philosophers, Ch’eng Ming-tao and Ch’eng Yi-ch’uan*, p. xix.


Taiji and wuji

The qian principle becomes male
The kun principle becomes female
Production and transformation of all things
Dunyi also asks us to read it from the bottom up, which illustrates how human beings take part in the unfolding of the universe.\(^\text{14}\)

In addition to the indications of Daoist influences on Zhou Dunyi’s thought there are also those who point to Buddhist influences. The Japanese scholar Azuma Juji 吾妻重二 suggests that the diagram of Ālaya-vijñāna (storehouse consciousness) made by the Buddhist monk Zongmi (780–841) may have influenced him. Zongmi’s diagram is based on Yogacara Buddhism and its view of the mind/consciousness (ālaya). In Azuma’s analysis, there is a parallel between the Supreme Ultimate taiji and ālaya.\(^\text{15}\)

Zhou Dunyi says that the principle of the Supreme Ultimate, li, also pervades man, and since the Supreme Ultimate is good; man’s nature is also good. The goodness in man makes him sincere, cheng 诚, and this sincerity is the foundation of the sage. Zhou further says that sincerity lies in non-activity and that the origin of evil is activity. Hence, Zhou was later accused of overemphasizing tranquility. The Cheng brothers, Cheng Hao 程颢 (1032–85) and Cheng Yi, were students of Zhou Dunyi for a while, so his ideas were transmitted to them. The Cheng brothers did not take the civil service examination or hunt animals. In this decision, they were probably influenced by Zhou Dunyi, indicating that Zhou had Buddhist inclinations. Since Zhou Dunyi connects his metaphysics with ideas on moral behavior, the New Confucian thinker Mou Zongsan calls the philosophy of Zhou Dunyi “moral metaphysics.”\(^\text{16}\) This does not contradict the fact that through Zhou Dunyi certain Daoist elements take part in the Neo-Confucian formation of cosmology and the Neo-Confucian path to becoming a sage.

In contrast to Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai 张载 (1020–77) discards both yin and yang and the Five Phases. Instead, he identifies the material force qi 气 in the Supreme Ultimate itself. The Chinese concept of qi is very old and is variously translated as “breath”, “energy”, “ether”, or as above, “material force.” It is compared to the Greek word pneuma and to the Sanskrit word prāṇa. Usually it is associated with Daoist yoga techniques, as in the text Guanzhi from the fourth century B.C.\(^\text{17}\) For Zhang Zai, yin and yang are only two aspects of qi which lie behind a process of perpetual integration and disintegration. This idea made him strongly oppose the Buddhist belief in annihilation and Daoist non-being. He could only see a transformation of things. A famous statement of this is: “The universe is one, but its manifestations are many.”

The Cheng brothers made the concept of the Principle, li 理, the basis of their philosophy. This concept is also found in Daoism, as well as in Buddhism, but it was never their central concept as it is in the philosophy of the Cheng brothers.\(^\text{18}\) Chinese Buddhists associated the term li with consciousness prajñā. According to the Cheng brothers, everything and everyone has Principle and is governed by it. If Zhang Zai said: “The universe is one, but its manifestations are many,” Cheng Yi, with his emphasis on Principle, made a paraphrase: “The Principle is one, but its manifestations

\(^{14}\) Feng Youlan only mentions the top to bottom reading. See Fung p. 442.

\(^{15}\) Ching, 2000, p. 18.

\(^{16}\) Hon, 2010, p. 8.

\(^{17}\) Ching, 2000, p. 28.

are many.” This idea has its root in Buddhist philosophy, especially Huayan philosophy, which stresses the harmony of principle and facts shi 事.\textsuperscript{19} In Huayan philosophy, \textit{li} is a general truth or principle that governs phenomenal things, shi. Everything enters or penetrates everything else, but without losing its own identity. One metaphor for this is Indra’s net, which pictures a universe in which every entity that exists is like a jewel placed at one of the knots of a vast net. Each jewel reflects all the other jewels, that is, each particular reflects the totality. The totality is both a unity and a multiplicity.\textsuperscript{20} This idea influenced Zhou Dunyi, who stresses the interdependence of the universe and the myriad things \textit{wanwu}万物.\textsuperscript{21}

Zhu Xi (1130—1200) is the great synthesizer of Neo-Confucian thought. He took the ideas of Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and the Cheng brothers and combined them into one system. For him, the Supreme Ultimate \textit{taiji} involves both \textit{li} and \textit{qi}. \textit{Li} is incorporeal and unchanging. It is above form, whereas \textit{qi} is within form. All things have both \textit{li} and \textit{qi}. \textit{Qi} is the physical form of everything and is subject to transformation. \textit{Li} is eternal and all-pervading. Although there is only one \textit{li}, each thing has its own particular \textit{li}. \textit{Li} and \textit{qi} are seemingly dualistic but in reality are never separated. Zhu maintains that it is impossible to say that \textit{li} precedes \textit{qi}.\textsuperscript{22}

The nature of man

Early in Confucian tradition, Mencius and Xunzi maintained the opposing views of human nature. According to Mencius, we are all basically good. The proof, in his view, is that everyone who sees a child falling into a well will immediately react and feel an impulse to save the child. Xunzi said that man has a tendency to be selfish and that we therefore need rewards and punishments to stimulate us to do what is good and avoid evil behavior.

The Tang thinkers Han Yu and Li Ao 李敖 (?–844) had discussed human nature and its relation to feelings. According to Li Ao, the seven feelings – joy, anger, pity, fear, love, hate, and desire – cause obscurement and destroy man’s original nature. When the movements of the feelings cease, the mind becomes clear and man can return to his original nature. These ideas come very close to Buddhist philosophy, but whereas the Confucians talk about nature, \textit{xing} 性, the Buddhists use the expression “original mind” \textit{benxin} 本心.\textsuperscript{23}

As we have seen above, Zhou Dunyi argues that human nature is good and that evil comes with activity. Cheng Hao maintains a similar view. According to him, human nature in its original tranquil state is neither good nor evil. Good and evil arise when human nature is aroused and manifests in feelings and actions. Therefore, the main task of moral and spiritual cultivation is to calm one’s nature and be impartial. Cheng Hao compares human nature to water. Dirty and turbid water is also water, so evil is also a part of human nature, but man has to make an effort to

\textsuperscript{19} Chan, 1973, p. 544.
\textsuperscript{21} Ching, 2000, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{22} Ching, 2000, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{23} Fung, 1983, p. 414.
purify his nature and calm the mind. He says that “the original goodness of human nature is like the original clearness of water.”

Zhu Xi is also a follower of Mencius’ optimistic view of human nature. Zhu Xi believes that everyone can become a sage, but he is also aware of the existence of evil. Like everything else in the world, human beings are endowed with li and qi. Zhu Xi says that man’s nature is the principle, li, of the mind. Emotions are the movements of the mind and they are manifestations of qi. Zhu Xi does not condemn human desires as such, only the wild and violent passions. It is when the emotions go to excess that they become evil.

The Neo-Confucian notion of feelings often comes very close to the Buddhist term “passions” fannaọ 烦恼 or klėsa. The Neo-Confucian tradition has therefore been accused of a negative attitude towards feelings, love, and passion. As in many other cases, judgments differ. Chen Lai argues against Neo-Confucianism being a sort of asceticism. He says that the Neo-Confucian slogan “adhere to the Heavenly principles and reject desires” does not mean that one should eliminate all sexual feelings and emotional longings, only those that oppose moral principles. Chen Lai further argues that sexual intercourse between husband and wife was regarded not only as normal behavior by the Neo-Confucians but also as having a metaphysical dimension corresponding to the power of Heaven and Earth. Nevertheless, Zhu Xi seems to be zealous in “uprooting” and “killing” bad feelings and weeds of evil behavior. His attitude is in sharp contrast to the attitude of later Neo-Confucians of the Ming dynasty adopted by He Xinyin 何心隐 (1517–1579) and Li Zhi 李贽 (1527–1602). Inspired by the founder of the Taizhou movement, Wang Gen 王艮 (1483–1541), and his affirmation of the self, He Xinyin wanted to liberate man from traditional forms of self-repression. He maintained that it was impossible for man to be without desires, since the wish to be without desire is also a sort of desire. For He Xinyin, self-expression was more important than self-restraint, which is why he read a famous passage in the Analects in a completely different way. According to traditional reading, it says about Confucius: “There were four things from which the Master [i.e. Confucius] was entirely free. He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism.” He Xinyin interpreted this as if “Confucius would have nothing to do with non-egoism, non-insistence, non-obstinacy, and having no-ideas-of-one’s-own.” Li Zhi, who is characterized as an arch-individualist by de Bary, wrote an essay called Childlike Mind (Tongxin 童心) in which he praises the original and pure mind of the child. According to him, the greatest threat to this pure mind is moral doctrines and principles. One difference between He Xinyin and Li Zhi is that He Xinyin was not attracted by Buddhism or the movement “the three teachings merge into one,” san jiao he yi 三教合一 which suggested that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism had the same basis. In con-
contrast to him, Li Zhi was inspired by the *Diamond Sutra* and was also receptive to the three teachings movement. He even forsook his family and took the tonsure, although this tonsure was not performed by a Buddhist monk and therefore not officially sanctioned. Needless to say, these two thinkers were strongly criticized by contemporary and later Neo-Confucians. They were both arrested and subsequently killed, He Xinyin by his jailers and Li Zhi by his own hand. Whether Zhu xi’s attitudes regarding feelings and selfishness on the one hand, and those of He Xinyin and Li Zhi on the other all belong to Neo-Confucianism is a question of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but it is a historical fact that the position of Zhu Xi belongs to mainstream Neo-Confucianism, whereas He Xinyin and Li Zhi place themselves in the margin.

### The ideal of the Confucian sage and his mental state

As has been pointed out previously, the Neo-Confucians had a positive view of man’s ability to improve himself through exercises and learning, even though they recognized that it was very difficult to become a sage. Zhu Xi maintains that the mind should control the emotions and desires. To control the emotions, Zhu Xi ordains quiet sitting, *jingzuo*. Zhu Xi practiced both Buddhist and Daoist meditation for many years, but he later lost his belief in the possibility of totally emptying the mind. Instead of speaking of stillness or quietude, he therefore chooses the word reverence, *jing*. This is similar to Cheng Yi. There are scholars, like Liu Ts’un-yan, who have come to the conclusion that Zhu Xi was more influenced in his mental cultivation by Daoism than by Buddhism. Zhu Xi’s practice of Daoist meditation in his youth resulted in the text *Instructions for Breath Control*. He also wrote commentaries on Daoist Classics. Although he changed his mind about Buddhism and Daoism, he never abandoned the idea of meditation and its beneficial effects on human nature.

The goal strived for is a state of mind before emotions occur. According to Zhu Xi, this is the state the *Doctrine of the Mean* refers when it talks of the mean, *zhong*. It is a sort of emotional equilibrium. The meditation of Zhu Xi includes self-examination, which entails correct behavior. In Neo-Confucianism, the view of man and the view of meditation are seldom separate from ethics. Inspired by the *Great Learning*, Zhu Xi also advocates the investigation of things. By the investigation of things Zhu Xi means the study of the inherent principle in everything. It is clear that his examination has two directions, one inward and one outward. This must have been his way of harmonizing activity and tranquility. Zhu Xi’s emphasis on the investigation of things was criticized by Lu Xiangshan. They were contemporaries and met a few times to discuss essential questions, but their differences regarding learning and the way to sagehood were obvious, and this was the reason why the School of Principle, *Lixue*, and School of Mind and Heart, *Xinxue*, became the two

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29 Ibid., See de Bary’s chapter “Innocence and intelligence” pp. 193–197.
30 Ching, 2000, p. 115.
opposite schools within Neo-Confucianism. Lu Xiangshan said that one can find principles by concentrating on the mind and that “the Six Classics were all footnotes to his [Lu Xiangshan’s] mind.”\(^{33}\) Hence, Zhu Xi criticized him for Chanism, saying “when he speaks of meaning of things, he acts like a salt smuggler in central Fukien, who hides the salt underneath fish to avoid detection. For his teaching is basically Ch’an, but he covers it up by using our Confucian language.”\(^{34}\) Lu Xiangshan, in return, criticized Zhu Xi for Daoist tendencies, when Zhu Xi equated t'ai ji with wu ji.\(^{35}\) However, it was not until the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) that the rational learning of Zhu Xi was thoroughly challenged. This challenge came from Wang Yangming, who was initially greatly influenced by Zhu Xi and his idea of “the investigation of things.” As a young man, Wang Yangming and a friend of his decided to follow Zhu Xi and investigate the principle in things. They started with an investigation of bamboo. After some days of intensive attention to the bamboo, his friend fell ill, and a few days later the same happened to Wang Yangming. The result was that Wang Yangming lost his belief in the doctrine of Zhu Xi and opposed it on almost every point. Wang Yangming came to the same conclusion as Lu Xiangshan, namely that the only thing a man needed to do was to investigate the mind. Hence, Wang Yangming became the most influential proponent of the School of Mind and Heart during the Ming dynasty.

Usually, the idealistic Wang Yangming, like Lu Xiangshan, is regarded as more influenced by Buddhism, and especially Chan Buddhism, than the rationalistic representative Zhu Xi. Like Lu Xiangshan, he believes that principle is inherent in mind, contrary to Zhu Xi who advocates an objective study of principles in things. Despite this, Wing-tsit Chan argues that both the critics and the supporters of Wang Yangming have exaggerated his affinity with Buddhism and have underestimated his attacks on it.\(^{36}\) Chan especially criticizes the Japanese expert on the relationship between Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, Tokiwa Daijo 常盤大定 (1870–1945), for this tendency. Wing-tsit Chan points out that both Zhou Dunyi and Zhang Zai had close relations with Buddhists, but that Wang Yangming did not have any Buddhist friends and that his visits to Buddhist temples did not imply any deep connection to Buddhism. Wing-tsit Chan further observes that Wang Yangming did not converse with Buddhists in the temples as, for example, Cheng Hao did.\(^{37}\) Wing-tsit Chan admits that Wang Yangming uses Buddhistic language but argues that he uses this language to express ideas that are non-Buddhist. However, when Wang Yangming equates the Confucian “innate knowledge of the good,” liang zhi 良知, with what the Buddhists call “original state,” he is speaking of the ideas, and is not only using Buddhistic language. The idea of innate knowledge comes from Mencius. Wang Yangming added that this knowledge has to be extended into action. This is what he calls “the extension of innate knowledge,” zhi liang zhi 致良知. Wing-tsit

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 151.  
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 150.  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 140.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 209.
Chan admits that the idea that the principle is inherent in mind is more Buddhist than Confucian, but claims that Wang Yangming received it not directly from Buddhism but rather via the earlier Neo-Confucian thinker Lu Xiangshan. However, this does not contradict the fact that Buddhist ideas influenced the thought of Wang Yangming.

Wang Yangming is a man of action whereas Zhu Xi is an intellectual. It is therefore natural that Zhu Xi was attracted by the philosophy of the Huayan School, while Wang Yangming’s inclinations were more towards the anti-intellectualism of Chan Buddhism. Regarding Daoism, they adopted certain ideas and attitudes in their youth. Wang Yangming spent almost thirty years studying Daoist literature. It is unlikely that this did not leave an imprint on him. In answer to a question by a disciple, he once said: “Innate knowledge liangzhi is one. Its active function is called spirit, its pervasion the qi, and its condensation the sperm. How could these things be taught in concrete form? The sperm of the true yin is the mother of the qi of the true yang; the qi of the true yang is the father of the true sperm of the true yin. The yin is rooted in the yang, and vice versa; they are not two different things.” In this quotation, we can clearly see his Daoist influences. Hagiographical material claims that he attained a stage of Daoist enlightenment in 1502. This was regarded as a preliminary stage before the practitioner can form “a sacred embryo” in his “cinnabar field.” However, Wang Yangming later denied that it was possible to ascend to Heaven and become an immortal as religious Daoists believed. In addition, Zhu Xi rejected Daoism in his latter days.

Syncretism and definitions of orthodoxy
Different thinkers and religious leaders during the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties went in and out of the existing traditions. This was not without inner struggles, but it was at least possible for them to change stance several times during a lifetime. Zhu Xi admitted that he delved into Buddhism and Daoism for over ten years during his youth. After he met his teacher Li Tong, he decided to concentrate on the learning of the Confucian sages. Wang Yangming explores a similar path of development. “He went in and out of Buddhism and Daoism for a long time. After having experienced difficulties during his exile among the barbarians, his mind was moved and his nature strengthened. Because of this, he pondered over what the sages would have said in a situation like this. Suddenly, he was enlightened about the meaning of the investigation of things and extension of one’s knowledge, [he understood] the Way of the sages, and that nature is sufficient in itself without searching for anything false from outside.” Other thinkers made a different journey, like the Buddhist leader from the late Ming dynasty, Ouyi Zhixu 蕃益智旭 (1599–1655). He was born in a Buddhist family, but began writing commentaries on the Confucian classic

39 Ibid., p. 314.
40 Ibid., p. 310.
41 Ching, 2000, p. 152.
the Analects and became convinced of its truth while reading it. However, later he came to the conclusion that Confucianism was distorted by the Neo-Confucians and that the Confucian classics could only be understood completely through Buddhist interpretation. Another example is Yunqi Zhuhong (1535–1615), who began his career as a Confucian literatus passing the lowest level of the civil service examination at the age of seventeen. Eventually he became one of the most influential Buddhist leaders during late Ming dynasty. Conversion is perhaps not a proper word in this Chinese context. It might be described as a change of perspective rather than the complete paradigm shift implied in the concept of conversion. It is also important to keep in mind that the Confucian and Daoist classics were a common cultural heritage for educated people during the Ming period, whether Buddhists, Daoists, or Confucians. In the same way as the Buddhists commented on the Confucian Classics, the Neo-Confucians made commentaries on Daoist and Buddhist scriptures. During the late Ming dynasty, Matteo Ricci and other Jesuit missionaries entered China, which created a new religious and ideological confrontation. I will not go into this question in this article, but it would be fruitful to investigate attitudes towards Buddhism compared with Christianity which had not yet become a part of the Chinese cultural heritage as the Buddhist religion was at the time of the formation of Neo-Confucianism.

At the same time as Song and Ming thinkers changed their convictions, they also criticized each other. This criticism becomes very apparent after a “conversion”. It is a paradox that thinkers who have borrowed many elements from other traditions are harsher in their criticism than those not having made such a journey. One striking example is Han Yu, who implemented or reimplemented a Buddh-Daoist interest in the mind into Confucianism and became an important persecutor of Neo-Confucianism. At the same time, he is the most well-known critic of Buddhism, having written an essay criticizing the imperial welcoming of the Bone of Buddha in 819. His inner tension between an attraction to Buddhist theories of the mind and hostility towards Buddhist religious praxis is obvious. This inner tension would later be a recurring theme in Neo-Confucian attitudes. Han Yu’s criticism was based on the simple idea that Buddhism was foreign and barbarian. Later, the criticism formulated by Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming would be much more sophisticated. The Buddhist leader Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655) criticized Christianity basically because, in his view, it transferred ethical responsibility from man to God and Jesus Christ. However, his criticism of Christian dogmas in the Collected Essays Refuting Heterodoxy (Pixie ji) might mainly have served as a means to conceal his earlier attacks on Buddhism, something he regretted after his “conversion” to Buddhism. Zhu Xi criticized Buddhism for several reasons, among other things for dividing the mind into two, one examining the other. In his Treatise on the Examina-

43 Ibid., p. 940.
44 See Chin-fang Yu, 1981, The Renewal of Buddhism in China; Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis, N.Y.: Columbia U.P.
tion of the Mind (Guan xin shuo 观心说), Zhu Xi says: “The mind is that with which man rules his body. It is one and not a duality, it is subject and not object, and controls the external world instead of being controlled by it. Therefore, if we examine external objects with the mind, their principles will be apprehended. Now (in the Buddhist view), there is another thing to examine the mind. If this is true, then outside this mind there is another one which is capable of controlling it.”

He was also critical of the Buddhist as well as Daoist overemphasis on tranquility, saying: “Mencius also wanted to preserve the restorative influence of the night. But in order to do so, one has to pay attention to what he does during the day.”

Wang Yangming argued that the Chan Buddhist ideal of Huineng and Shenhui to be without thoughts is impossible. He says in Instructions for Practical Living 传习录: “To be vigilant and prudent is also thought. Vigilant and prudent thought never ceases. If vigilant and prudent thought disappears slightly, it is because one becomes dizzy or because it is transformed into an evil thought. From morning until evening, from youth to old age, if one wants to be without thoughts, that is, to cease to know, it is not possible unless one is asleep or like a withered tree or dead ashes.”

He further argued that the Buddhists did not live up to their own ideal of non-attachment and accused them of escaping from the burdens of social relations.

During the late Ming dynasty, a different view on orthodoxy and heterodoxy emerges in the teaching of Wang Ji (1498–1583). He was a disciple of Wang Yangming, and shifted the main focus within Neo-Confucian circles from criticizing Buddhism and Daoism to an internal critique of the “secularism” or “vulgarity,” suxue 俗学, of Neo-Confucianism itself.

The discussion about orthodoxy and heresy is related to the syncretistic tendencies, which are fairly strong even during the Song dynasty but became more accentuated during the Ming dynasty. Zhu Xi advocated the ideal to “meditate half the day and study the other half,” a famous quotation from Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi (Zhu Zi Yulei 朱子语类, fascicle no 12). But what is the difference in essence between the different meditation techniques jingzuo 静坐 of the Confucians, yangqi 养气 as the Daoists called it, and the chan 禅 praxis of the Buddhists? Is it just a question of social affiliation and language style?

During the Ming dynasty, the Neo-Confucians as well as the Buddhists became more aware of the similarities between the different traditions, and therefore the ideas of “the three traditions merge into one” san jiao heyi, or “the three traditions are identical” san jiao yizhi 三教一致, This became an ideal for some of them, like Lin Zhao’en 林兆恩 (1517–1598). He took the structure of inner alchemy and grounded it in the cosmological symbol system shared by the Confucians and the

47 Ibid., p. 650.
Daoists. He furthermore developed a system of mind-cultivation in nine stages, in which he integrated the three teachings into a single way, thereby becoming the “Master of The Three Teachings.” Wang Ji also accepted the idea of three teaching as one and inspired the iconoclast Li Zhi in this direction. Consequently, syncretism is discussed among a wide range of scholars investigating Song and Ming religion. Recently, a tendency to use the concept of hybridization instead of syncretism in scholarly works can be seen. Frits Graf makes a distinction between normative and descriptive definitions of different religious systems. He then suggests that the term “hybridization” be used for descriptive definitions, and the term “syncretism” be left for the believers in different religions. This seems to be a kind of social marker used by the scholar of religious studies rather than an attempt to clarify the dynamism itself. It is probably more clarifying, to argue like Judith Berling, that religious traditions often have several layers of orthodoxies, depending on who is making the definition. She claims that in the case of Chinese religion, there are definitions formulated by the state/emperor, definitions formulated by the religious elite like leaders of monasteries and other religious institutions, and definitions formulated by the intellectual elite are all linked to different forms of religious identity.

To focus on the highest social level, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty, Ming Taizu (1328–1398), or Emperor Hongwu, is an interesting case. Due to his poor and orphaned childhood, he spent his youth in a Buddhist monastery, where he received his literacy. Later, he joined an anti-Mongol religious sect, the Red Turbans, which was related to the White Lotus Society and was influenced by a mixture of Buddhist and other religious ideas. His upbringing made him interested in Buddhist matters, but not partial toward Buddhism. In his Essay on the Three Teachings, he regarded the three traditions as complementary. For him “Confucianism was the Way of manifest virtue, while Daoism and Buddhism were the Way of hidden virtue, secret aids of the Kingly Way. Together, the Three Teachings constituted the Way of Heaven.” In this way, the syncretistic tendencies of the Ming dynasty received imperial sanction.

A parallel to the syncretistic tendency is the process of bureaucratization through which all religions went during this period. In 1395, it was decided that all monks had to take an examination on Buddhist scriptures. The examinations resembled the civil service examinations insofar as the monks had to write essays in the “eight-legged” style. Emperor Hongwu’s favorite sutras, the Descent to Lanka Sutra (Laṅkāvatāra), the Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedikā), and the Heart Sutra (Hṛdaya) were studied and commented, and he personally wrote a preface to the Heart Sutra. During the late Ming period, abbots of great monasteries were selected on

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54 Romeyn Taylor, 1983, An Imperial endorsement of syncretism: Ming T’ai-tsu’s essay on the Three Teachings: translation and Commentary, Journal of Ming studies, 16: 31–38 (Spring 1983) Emperor Hongwu did not necessarily compose the text himself, but since he sealed it he was aware of it and responsible for its ideas.
the basis of the examinations. In 1383, the Emperor Hongwu further created the Central Buddhist Registry, which was divided between the “right” patriarchs in charge of supervising the examination of monks and officials, and the “left” patriarchs in charge of supervising meditation and the study of gong’ an cases. Monks who violated the Buddhist precepts were punished. During the Ming dynasty, secularized or married Buddhist monks became widespread. This custom seems to go back to the Yuan dynasty, when Tibetan Buddhism was introduced into China, and is possibly linked with the tantric practice of sexual yoga. The Ming rulers tried to control it with various regulations and penalties for married monks. Regarding the Daoist religion, the Emperor Hongwu established an Academy for Daoist Affairs, xuan jiaoyuan 玄教院, to oversee Daoist organizations and temples, a parallel to the offices established to control the Buddhist sangha. The Central Daoist Registry, dao lu si 道录司, controlled the numbers and conditions of ordination in order to limit the size and potential influence of Daoist religious institutions.

The above-described governmental control of religions indicates that the obsession with defending oneself as a true exegete of a certain tradition was not only an intellectual game but was also based on real threats; and the fear was not only on the part of the individual proponents of conviction, it was also on the part of the ruler. As mentioned above, the Emperor Hongwu had personal experience of religious rebellion, which must be one reason why he wanted to control the religious organizations in detail. It is possible that his impartiality towards the three traditions was a powerful strategy rather than a manifestation of tolerance, or in other words, his way of establishing an equilibrium of balance of terror. Peter K. Bol has pointed out that the Emperor Hongwu was suspicious of his own bureaucracy and executed 45,000 officials, their kin, and their associates. However, the danger of expressing heretical views is not evident in all instances. Theodore de Bary has noted that the Wang Yangming School continued to flourish during the Ming dynasty despite official suppression. He further notes that the grounds for persecution were usually political and not ideological. It seemed especially dangerous to get involved in court politics. When the Buddhist leader Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1544–1604) was arrested and beaten to death with thirty strokes of a bamboo cane, it was not due to his Buddhist conviction but his connection with the Dowager Empress, and his having criticized the Emperor for unfilial behavior. The reason Wang Yangming was struck forty times in front of the Emperor and sent into exile was a memorandum he wrote against the imprisonment of some scholars who had protested against the usurpation of power by the eunuch Liu Jin.

57 Ibid., pp. 930–931.
58 Ibid., P. 905.
59 Ibid., p. 911.
60 Ibid., p. 959.
61 Peter K. Bol, 2008, Neo-Confucianism in History, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Asia Center, p. 95.
64 See the introduction by Wing-tsit Chan, 1963, in: Instructions for practical living and other Neo-Confucian writings by Wang Yangming, New York: Columbia U.P., p. xxiv.
De Bary tentatively suggests that “perhaps we fill in the picture with our own picture of totalitarian control in the forms developed today and, superimposing on the past, assume that the same intense and pervasive pressures operated to stultify thought.” The only case of pure ideological persecution is Li Zhi, who goes to the extreme in expressing heretical views. His books *A book to burn* (*Fenshu* 焚书) and *A book to be hidden away* (*Zangshu* 藏书) are provocations that resulted in his imprisonment and the burning of his books. Not only were his views heretical, his actions also reveal a wish to follow inner conviction rather than any written or unwritten rule.

If Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and other traditions are regarded as rivers, they may at a certain time in history have divided and formed three distinct streams, but during their wanderings they sometimes merge, either partially or entirely. The fierce persecution of the Buddhist Sangha during the Tang dynasty, which reached its peak in 845, blocked one river, but obviously the water took another route and oozed into the other two water systems, above all into the Confucian stream, which developed into something new. Structural parallels between that which Paul Demiéville calls the “subitist” and the gradualist way can be found in the opposition between Daoism and Confucianism, between the sudden and gradual path within Chan Buddhism, and also in the contradiction between the so-called left and right wings of the Wang Yangming School. Does it amount to a substantial difference in conviction and praxis, or do the contradictions merely move from tradition to tradition and from one epoch to another? Peter N. Gregory has shown how the Tang-dynasty Buddhist leader Guifeng Zongmi (780–841) anticipated Zhu Xi’s criticism of Buddhism in his critique of the Hongzhou line of Chan, and that they were both anxious to create an ontological basis for their ethics. Zhu Xi developed his theory on human nature to provide such a basis.

The Qing scholar Huang Zongxi (1610–95) showed a similar concern in his criticism of Wang Ji and Wang Gen. In his monumental work, *The Records of the Ming Scholars, Mingru Xue’an* 明儒学案, Huang Zongxi declares:

Thanks to Wang Gen and Wang Ji, the teaching of Master Wang Yangming became popular in the world, but it was also because of them that his teaching gradually ceased to be transmitted. Wang Gen and Wang Ji often showed dissatisfaction with the teaching of their master, and attributed the secrets of Buddhism to him. They climbed up [using] Wang Yangming, and then turned [his teaching] into Chan Buddhism. When Wang Ji passed away, no disciple was superior to him. Furthermore, his teaching was saved and corrected by the Jiangyou School. Therefore, [the damage to his teaching] was not too severe. When Wang Gen had passed away, there were those who could grasp snakes

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65 De Bary, 1959, p. 29.
66 Ibid., p. 30.
and dragons with their bare hands, and transmitted [the teaching of Wang Gen] to Yan Shannong (Yan Jun) and He Xinyin.  

Huang Zongxi’s criticism of Wang Ji and Wang Gen is interesting. That Wang Ji was influenced by Buddhism is not difficult to see. His reformulation of Wang Yangming’s four maxims into “four forms of non-existence” shows clear Buddhist influences. Wang Yangming taught that: “Absence of good and evil characterizes the mind in itself; existence of good and evil characterizes the movement of the will; to know the difference between good and evil is innate knowledge, liangzhi; to do good and avoid evil is ‘investigation of things’ gewu.” Wang Ji said: “If one realizes that the heart-mind is neither good nor evil, then the will, the knowledge, and the investigation of things are also characterized by absence of good and evil.” Wang Ji’s four negations echo the fourfold negation catuṣkoṭi of Nagarjuna, although Wang Ji is concerned with moral questions, unlike Nagarjuna, who is interested in the ontological problem. Despite suggested Buddhist influences, Huang Zongxi is not without appreciation of either Wang Ji or Wang Gen. He even quotes Wang Yangming, admitting that Wang Ji’s understanding of Wang Yangming was for men of superior understanding. Unlike Wang Ji, Wang Gen was an autodidact and had not passed any level of the civil service examinations. He was more of a religious leader than a learned scholar. The ideas of Wang Gen lack the Buddhist influences we find in the teachings of Wang Ji. Monica Übelhör, who has written a monograph on Wang Gen, argues that the only Chan Buddhist traces in Wang Gen thinking are in his pedagogy. The annotations in the Complete works of Wang Xinzhai refer solely to the Confucian Classics like Mencius, the Great Learning and the Book of Changes. Annotations from Buddhist sutras are nowhere to be found, so how is it that Huang Zongxi accused him of Chan Buddhist influences? What kind of ideological stance did Huang Zongxi take? The question of Huang Zongxi’s political convictions has been discussed by scholars like de Bary and Struve. During the 19th and 20th centuries, Huang Zongxi’s Mingru Xue’an was praised as a new genre, using the anthology of primary source material as a much more scientific way to let the reader make an independent judgment about the thinker in question. Struve both questions the pic-

70 Huang Zongxi, Mingru Xue’an, p. 703. There is a selected translation of Mingru Xue’an edited by Julia Ching with the collaboration of Chaoying Fang, which uses the title The Records of Ming Scholars, University of Hawaii Press, 1987. I am responsible for all translations from Mingru Xue’an in this article.
71 Ibid., p. 237–238.
72 Ibid., p. 238.
73 Ibid., p. 238.
ture of Huang Zongxi as the pioneer of this genre, and questions Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) and his modern agenda of “finding prototypes in China’s past for just about everything that seemed modern and scientific.” She also argues that the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty exacerbated the rivalry between the idealistic School of Mind and the rationalistic School of Principle, but she does not discuss Huang Zongxi’s attitude towards Buddhism. However, from his political stance and the fact that he was a devout disciple of Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周 (1578–1645) it might be possible to draw some tentative conclusions about his views on the Buddhist religion. At least, it is obvious that the label Buddhist in some sense is pejorative in his writings. As a Ming loyalist, he might harbor a similar Han chauvinistic attitude to that of Han Yu, considering the Buddhist religion to be foreign and barbarian. Another hypothesis could be that to defend the Wang Yangming School, accused of facilitating the Manchu takeover, he attacked some of its more extreme proponents in order to save the main bulk of the school. In the quotation above, it is obvious that the main object of his dislike was not Wang Gen himself, but were the brave men who “grasped the snakes and dragons with their bare hands,” and especially their followers Yan Jun 颜鈞 (1504–1596) and He Xinyin. The most eccentric followers of the Wang Yangming School, Li Zhi and He Xinyin, are not even given biographies in the Mingru Xue’an. Wu Zhen has pointed out that the section about Wang Gen and his Taizhou School, the Records of Taizhou School (Taizhou Xue’an 泰州学案), in the Mingru Xue’an, does not contain the two characters for “Wang Yangming School” (wangmen 王门) as do all the other Schools of Wang Yangming. The reason could be that Huang Zongxi did not regard the Taizhou branch as a “true” branch of the Wang Yangming School, a view maintained by many scholars after Huang Zongxi. The main problem for Huang Zongxi, and for those who followed him in criticizing Wang Gen, must have been Wang Gen’s emphasis on the idea that everyone is a sage. The danger of this is that it weakens the need for self-cultivation.

Conclusion

The Buddhist theories of the mind and Daoist methods of meditation made Confucians like Han Yu interested in questions about the functions of the mind and different forms of meditation. This interest stimulated a new reading of Confucian classics and made the Neo-Confucians more inclined to read and comment on classics such as the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, the Analects, and Mencius, texts dealing with self-cultivation.

In the taiji diagram of Zhou Dunyi, certain Daoist elements became a part of his cosmology and accordingly also a part of the Neo-Confucian cosmology in general. Other Neo-Confucians, like Zhang Zai, emphasized the material force qi, which is

78 Ibid., p. 480.
79 Ibid., p. 481.
80 I thank Deng Zhifeng, Dept of History, Fudan University, for giving me this explanation.
81 Wu Zhen 吳震, Taizhou xuepai yanjiu 泰州学派研究 (Research on the Taizhou School), 2009, p. 455.

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associated with Daoist yoga and breathing exercises. The concept of Principles li, mainly associated with the Cheng brothers, was already found in Buddhism and Daoism prior to them. When Zhu Xi made a synthesis of the ideas of his predecessors about qi and li, he came very close to the philosophy of Huayan Buddhism. It is most likely that he was familiar with the Huayan philosophy preserved within the Chan Buddhist school. A common idea in Huayan and Neo-Confucianism is that every particular unit reflects the totality, and that the totality is unity and multiplicity at the same time. A consequence of this is that man as a microcosm reflects the macrocosm.

When it comes to their view of man, the traditions tend to regard desires as taking man further away from the goal of life; however, there are differing views on whether desires should be eliminated completely. The Neo-Confucians, who combine family life and responsibilities in society, tend to acknowledge emotions which do not contradict moral principles but reject passions and wild emotions. Consequently, the adherents of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism practice self-cultivation, including meditation. The goal is to calm the mind and cause the wild emotions to diminish and disappear. The Neo-Confucians have an optimistic view of man’s possibility of improving himself through self-cultivation, although they admit it is difficult and takes a long time.

It is impossible to determine, who was most influenced by Buddhism, Zhu Xi or Wang Yangming. They were both influenced to a certain degree, but they adopted different parts of the Buddhist tradition. The intellectual Zhu Xi was more inclined towards Buddhist philosophy, whereas Wang Yangming, as a man of action, was naturally more attracted to Chan Buddhist praxis. The Buddhist and Daoist influences on the formation of Neo-Confucianism made the question of heresy and orthodoxy acute. During the Ming dynasty, syncretistic tendencies reached a climax. This tendency is called “the three teachings merge into one” san jiao he yi and was strengthened by the first emperor of Ming, who regarded the three teachings as complementary. The more a certain thinker incorporates elements from another tradition, the more anxious he is to depict himself as orthodox and the stronger his criticism of the other traditions seems to be. Han Yu, Zhu Xi, and Wang Yangming were all influenced by Buddhism and/or Daoism and at the same time they criticized these traditions in different ways. Huang Zongxi, who experienced the Manchu takeover and was a Ming loyalist, defended Wang Yangming but criticized some of his followers, the so-called “Zen wildcats,” and ignored others. For him, Chan Buddhism was a pejorative label, but to determine whether he was xenophobic against the foreign Buddhist religion in the same way as Han Yu would require further investigation.

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