Criticisms of Buddhism, Daoism, and the Learning of the Heart-Mind

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Abstract and Keywords
Part of this chapter deals with Zhu Xi’s critique of Buddhism and Daoism: his distinction of the neo-Confucian concept of pattern-principle and virtuous governance from seemingly similar Buddhist and Daoist ideas, his concern with what he saw as both schools’ lack of social and political engagement and their rejection of ethical norms, and the practice of Buddhist meditation and Daoist quietism. Zhu had a certain respect for Zhuangzi, and believed Laozi and the later Daoists were “better than” Buddhists. He reserved a special disdain for the Song dynasty version of Chan and, in particular, for its interpretation of the heart-mind and practice of sudden enlightenment. Significantly, a large portion of his attacks against Chan focus on what he saw as its pernicious influence on scholars in the Learning of the Way and Learning of the Heart-Mind movements. These attacks are taken up in part two of the translation.

Keywords: Buddhism, Daoism, emptiness, non-being, non-action, meditation, quietism, Zhuangzi, Laozi, Chan

Introduction
Throughout the Song dynasty, Confucian scholar-officials, Buddhist monks, and Daoist priests belonged to a single social network, in which they formed friendships, studied, traveled, shared intellectual work, and corresponded with one another. Indeed, many literati promoted a syncretic vision based on the notion that the three teachings formed a single Way.
Throughout his life, Zhu Xi maintained friendships with both Daoist and Buddhist elites. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, he came to be a vocal opponent of both Buddhism and Daoism. The first part of the translation in this chapter deals with three main areas of Zhu Xi’s critique: his distinction of the neo-Confucian concept of pattern-principle and virtuous governance from seemingly similar Buddhist notions of emptiness and Daoist ideas of non-being and governance by non-action; his concern with what he saw as both schools’ lack of social and political engagement and their rejection of ethical norms; and the practice of Buddhist meditation and Daoist quietism.

But, as these selections demonstrate, Zhu did not hold equally negative views toward Buddhism and Daoism. He had a certain respect for Zhuangzi, and believed that Laozi and the later Daoists were “better than” the Buddhists. While Zhu was critical of earlier forms of Buddhism, he reserved a special disdain for the Song dynasty version of Chan and, in particular, for its interpretation of the heart-mind and practice of sudden enlightenment. Significantly, a large portion of his attacks against Chan focus on what he (p.139) saw as its pernicious influence on scholars in the Learning of the Way and Learning of the Heart-Mind movements. These attacks are taken up in part two of the translation.

Zhu Xi’s vehement attacks against Chan Buddhism should be understood within the context of the sociopolitical milieu of literati in the early twelfth century. After the fall of the north to the Jurchens in 1126, neo-Confucians continued to attack former Grand Councilors Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) and Cai Jing 蔡京 (1046–1126), mainly for their promotion of Wang’s New Policies and his interpretation of the Confucian Classics. Perhaps most egregious to them were Wang’s and Cai’s censures of opponents, including the Cheng brothers and their followers. Ultimately, neo-Confucian literati blamed both councilors for the loss of the north.

These criticisms were not simply a rehashing of old factional struggles. When Qin Hui 秦檜 was Chief Councilor (1138–1155), he reinstated Wang Anshi’s commentaries as part of the civil service examinations and renewed earlier criticisms of Learning of the Way, banishing many of its proponents from government service. Qin Hui was also responsible for a policy of appeasement with the Jurchens and the signing of several peace treaties. Zhu Xi and his colleagues in Learning of the Way opposed these treaties and urged the court to retake the north. They came to be known as the pro-war faction.

In this they were joined by a number of Buddhist monks, most prominent among them Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163). Because of his political activism, Dahui was charged with treason, defrocked, and sentenced to fifteen years of exile in the south. That did not stop him from promoting his form of socially engaged Buddhism, which he targeted to Learning of the Way scholars and members of the pro-war faction. Dahui is best known for his rejection of the
more quietistic forms of Chan in favor of the kōan [gong’an 公案] method, a practice he believed was best suited to the active lifestyle of the scholar-official. In short, he believed that kōan practice was the key to the self-realization of the literati class, the victory of the pro-war party at court, and the full resuscitation of the Song.

Dahui’s outreach was successful. Second and third generation disciples of the Cheng brothers were drawn to his teachings, became his disciples, practiced kōan meditation, and freely incorporated his Chan ideas into their writings on Confucian texts.

(p.140) Zhu Xi was not immune to Dahui’s influence. In his teens and twenties, he spent over ten years studying Chan, first with Dahui’s disciple, the monk Daoqian 道謙 (1105?-1152?), who was also involved with the pro-war faction and was exiled for his political activities. During this period, Zhu also corresponded with Dahui.

In 1154 Zhu Xi began to study with Li Tong 李侗 (1093–1163), whose intellectual genealogy could be traced back to the Cheng brothers. Li urged Zhu to turn away from Chan and return to studying the Confucian classics and the Cheng brothers’ writings. Thus began Zhu’s gradual conversion to Learning of the Way.

In 1164 Zhu began a concerted effort to attack the influence of Chan on neo-Confucianism, an effort that would continue throughout his lifetime. That year he composed his “Critique of Adulterated Learning” (Zaxue bian 雜學辨), the bulk of which forms part three of the translation. The work is comprised of passages Zhu selected from four commentaries on classical texts written by Northern and Southern Song literati. To these, Zhu Xi provided his own line-by-line critique. This chapter’s translation contains selections from three of these: Su Che’s “Commentary on the Laozi,” Lü Benzhong’s “Commentary on the Great Learning,” and Zhang Jiucheng’s “Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean.”

Zhu selected these commentaries, in large part, because they were written by renowned literati who enjoyed a wide following. Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112) was primarily known as a literary figure and poet, but his philosophical writings were also well regarded. In addition to his “Commentary on the Laozi,” Su Che wrote commentaries on the Odes, Mencius, and Analects. In these, Su argued that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism were not antithetical but, rather, formed a single Way. Although Zhu Xi did not consider Su Che to be a neo-Confucian, he saw his mixing of the three teachings to be symptomatic of the eclecticism favored by Northern Song literati and a continued danger to those in his own generation.

Zhang Jiucheng 張九成 (1092–1159) and Lü Benzhong 呂本中 (1084–1145) were neo-Confucians who had studied with first-generation disciples of the Cheng brothers and were considered by their contemporaries as leading figures in the
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Learning of the Way and pro-war movements. Both were also disciples of Dahui Zonggao. They freely incorporated Chan notions into their interpretation of Confucian texts and imbued core Cheng-school teachings (p.141) on the heart-mind, pattern-principle, and “investigation of things and extension of knowledge” with a particularly Chan flavor. Zhu was also troubled by the ways in which Zhang and Lü applied these concepts to kōan meditation that would lead to a sudden and transcendental enlightenment (something Zhu admitted he never attained). To Zhu Xi, Zhang and Lü represented a liability to the purity and integrity of the Cheng teachings. He used his “Critique of Adulterated Learning” to replace their ideas with a distinctively neo-Confucian praxis and epistemology.

Zhu’s attacks on Zhang and Lü are personal and rancorous. One can see them as a kind of rejection of, and coming to terms with, his own Buddhist past. Nevertheless, he remained proud of the time he spent studying Buddhism, for he believed it allowed him to detect both the deceptions promoted by monks like Dahui and the slightest Buddhist influences in the writings of his contemporaries.

Translation
Part One: On Buddhism and Daoism

1. Sacrificial Essay for Chan Master Dao[qian] of Kaishan
In the past I pursued learning and read the Classic of Changes, Analects, and Mencius. I examined the way the ancients had become sages and, not realizing my own limitations, sought to emulate them. But all my paths were blocked and my Way impeded. And, in the end, I was unable to make progress. Then, I asked my elders how to proceed. They all told me that it is essential to gain awakening and that nothing surpassed Chan teachings for understanding enlightenment. It was then that I became determined to study Chan. . . .
In the fall of 1146 the Master [Daoqian] came to Gongchen Mountain, and it was at this point that we developed a relaxed and intimate daily relationship. One day I burned incense before him and asked for instruction on this matter [Chan]. The Master had a dictum: “Definitely not this.”3 And for the first time I understood that my separation from the Way, which was growing day by day, was because I lacked proper instruction. . . .
(p.142) Oh the grief! He was taken from us too soon. My revered Master, his wisdom was so comprehensive and complete. It is I who failed to gain awakening, without even a glimpse. Presenting the rich offerings, my tears fall on his spirit tablet. Bereft, I bow my head. He has transcended it all.
(ZXJ [yiji], chapter 3, p. 5698)
2. Letter to Chan Master [Dao]qian of Kaishan

Previously, I was instructed by Miaoxi [Dahui Zonggao] to not allow even the slightest iota of my book learning or cogitation to remain in my heart-mind but only to constantly raise-up the kōan phrase “A dog has no Buddha-nature.” May I receive a word of advice to alert me to my deficiencies. (ZXJ [yiji], chapter 1, p. 5619)

3. Someone was talking about the harm done by Zhuangzi, Laozi, Chan, and Buddhism. [Zhu Xi] said, “Chan teachings do the greatest harm to the Way. Zhuangzi and Laozi did not destroy moral pattern-principles completely. Now Buddhism had already broken with human relations. But Chan, right from its start, completely eradicated moral pattern-principles, leaving no trace. Because of this I say that Chan has done the greatest harm.” After a moment, he added: “If you’re asking about their substance [shi 質], then they’re all the same. But there are degrees of harm. . . . When Buddhism first entered China, it only discussed the practice of cultivation. It didn’t yet have all the Chan talk.” (ZZYL, chapter 126, p. 3014)

4. Mo asked, “Ordinarily, I worry about lapsing into heterodox teachings and so I have never read such works as Zhuangzi and Laozi. Now, I wish to read them. Is that okay?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “As long as you master [your heart-mind], how can reading them be harmful? The important thing is to understand how their ideas differ from those of the sages.” (ZZYL, chapter 97, p. 2498)

5. [Zhu Xi said,] “Zhuangzi said, ‘Each thing has its norm; this is called the nature.’ This phrase, ‘Each thing has its norm,’ is similar to our saying, (p.143) ‘When there is a thing, there is a norm.’ Compared to other thinkers, Zhuangzi is somewhat better.” (ZZYL, chapter 125, p. 3000)

6. [Zhu Xi said,] “‘Bringing peace to the world’ is the most important matter and so there have been many discussions promoting it.”. . . . He further said, “As for Zhuangzi, I do not know from whom he received the transmission, but he himself had insight into the Way itself. Now, after Mencius, neither Xunzi nor other gentlemen could measure up. For example, [Zhuangzi said,] ‘If we speak of the Way but not of its sequence, then it is not the Way.’ Comments such as this are excellent. I think that the source [of his ideas] must have been received from a follower in the Confucian school. Later, any of the good points in Buddhist teachings all came from Zhuangzi. However, Zhuangzi’s knowledge was not perfected, because his practice lacked a certain refinement. Within a short time, all his teachings degenerated. This is what is called ‘The worthy go beyond [the Way].’” (ZZYL, chapter 16, p. 369)
7. It was asked, “What is the difference between Buddhist non-being and Daoist non-being?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “The Daoists still have being. This is seen in the line, ‘Be without desires to see its mysteries; have desires to see its manifestations.’ The Buddhists, however, take Heaven and Earth to be an illusion and the Four Elements [earth, water, fire and wind] to be transitory and unreal. That is complete non-being.” (ZZYL, chapter 126, p. 3012)

8. Qian Zhi asked, “Nowadays, everyone considers ‘emptiness’ (kong 空) to be a Buddhist doctrine and ‘non-being’ (wu 無) to be a Daoist doctrine. What is the difference between emptiness and non-being?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “‘Emptiness’ is a term that encompasses both being and non-being. The Daoist doctrine splits being (you 有) and non-being in two. Before things come into existence, all is non-being. [When things] appear before our eyes, it is being. And so, they call [the former] non-being. But, in Buddhist doctrine everything is non-being. Before things come into existence, it’s non-being. [When things] appear before our eyes, it is also non-being. [Thus, they say,] ‘Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.’ From the great matters of the myriad affairs and things down to the hundred bones and nine apertures [of the body] everything is equally non-being. [The Buddhists have a saying:] ‘To eat all day yet not chew a single grain of rice; to be fully dressed but not wear a single thread of silk.’” (ZZYL, chapter 126, p. 3012)

9. [Zhu Xi said,] “To understand the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism, we do not need a detailed analysis. Their greatest crime is just one thing: they reject the Three Bonds and the Five Constants. There is no need to speak of anything else.” (ZZYL, chapter 126, p. 3014)

10. It was asked, “[Confucius said,] ‘Govern through virtue.’ Isn’t this similar to Laozi’s idea of non-action (wuwei)?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “It was not only Laozi who spoke of non-action. Confucius once replied, ‘Was Shun not someone who governed through non-action? What did he need to do other than make himself reverent and sit facing south?’ What Laozi meant by wuwei was truly to do nothing at all. What the Sage meant by wuwei was not ‘to do nothing,’ since he also added, ‘[Shun] made himself reverent and sat facing south.’ This means ‘rectifying oneself to rectify others’ and ‘being serious and reverential to bring peace to the world.’ Those in later generations who were unable to govern the world were all unable to be seriously respectful and thoroughly reverential.” (ZZYL, chapter 23, p. 537)
11. [Zhu Xi said,] “The Way is the pattern-principle universally followed throughout time. The compassion of a parent, filiality of a child, (p.145) humaneness of a ruler and devotedness of a minister—each of these is an ethical pattern-principle of our public weal. ‘Virtue’ is precisely the attainment of the Way within a person. . . . Laozi said, ‘When the Way is lost, there is virtue.’ Understanding neither [Way nor virtue], he divided them into two different matters and so regarded the Way as an empty thing. We Confucians speak of them as one thing. We call it ‘Way,’ when we refer to this universally shared [pattern-principle] and not simply in regard to a single person. ‘Virtue’ is the full attainment of this Way within oneself. Laozi said, ‘When the Way is lost, there is virtue. When virtue is lost, there is humaneness. When humaneness is lost, there is rightness.’ If one departs from humaneness and rightness, then one is without moral pattern-principles. How can this be the Way!” (ZZYL, chapter 13, p. 231)

12. Hu [Shuqi] asked about the proper method for quiet sitting (jingzuo 靜坐)

[Zhu Xi] replied, “Quiet sitting means to sit quietly as follows: don’t have idle concerns and don’t have idle thoughts. But there is no [special] method.”

It was asked, “When practicing quiet sitting and one thinks of something, then the heart-mind focuses on that thing. But if one has no thoughts, the heart-mind doesn’t have anything on which to focus. What is your view?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “There is no need to focus on something. If one were to focus on something, then it would be like the Daoists who count the inhalation and exhalation of breath and focus their gaze on the white spot on the tip of the nose. They require a prop because their heart-minds are unfocused. If you cannot cut off thoughts it is better to just let it be; there is no harm in that.” . . . [Zhu] further said, “In quiet sitting, when you put a stop to idle and scattered thoughts, then your self-cultivation will go more smoothly.” (ZZYL, chapter 120, p. 2885)

13. [Zhu Xi said,] “Chan is only a method of obstinately guarding [the heart-mind]. Take, for instance, the kōan ‘three catties of hemp’ or ‘dried shit-stick.’ Initially there is no meaning attached to these phrases. They simply teach [practitioners] to deaden their heart-minds, to mull over these phrases continuously, and to focus on them for a long time. Suddenly they have an insight, which is ‘enlightenment.’ The general idea (p.146) is to fix the heart-mind and not let it scatter or become confused and, after a long time, illumination naturally will shine forth. This is how illiterate people are suddenly able to write gathas after they achieve enlightenment. Although the experience of enlightenment is the same,
there are different depths of understanding. I used to enjoy talking to Chan practitioners and this is what they told me. Some of them could really talk it up, but they were extremely boastful and full of hot air. Those like Dahui Zonggao were imposing and charismatic and so were able to stir up an entire generation, including men like Zhang Jiucheng and Wang Yingchen, who both revered him. (ZZYL, chapter 126, p. 3029)

14. Treatise on Buddhism, Part One

It was asked, “Mencius speaks of thoroughly exercising the heart-mind to know the nature and preserving the heart-mind to nourish the nature. Buddhist teachings also take as their basis knowing the heart-mind and seeing the nature. Isn’t this an area where we happen to have similarities?”

Master Zhu replied, “The difference between Confucianism and Buddhism can be summed up in a few single words.”

It was asked, “What are they?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “The nature’ is what Heaven bestows on humans and is replete within the heart-mind. ‘The feelings’ are what arise from the heart-mind when the nature responds to things. ‘The heart-mind’ is the master of the person and unifies nature and feelings. Humaneness, rightness, ritual, and wisdom are the nature and constitute the heart-mind itself. Concern, shame and disdain, reverential attention, and deference and yielding are the feelings and constitute the function of the heart-mind. Therefore, the [Book of Documents] says, ‘Bestow good on the people,’ and the [Odes] says, ‘Where there is a thing, there is a norm.’ . . .

(p.147) “The way [the Buddhists] ‘know the heart-mind’ is to establish another separate heart-mind to know this heart-mind. And, their so-called ‘seeing the nature’ never comprehends the good bestowed upon the people or the norms inherent in things. Having failed to understand the basis of the nature, none of their responses to things or their expressions of feelings ever accord with moral pattern-principles. Thereupon, they consider these things and feelings a burden and cut them off completely . . .

“The heart-mind is the master of the person and is what unites nature and feelings. It is one, not two; it is host, not guest; it directs things rather than being directed by things . . .

“Now, when the Buddhists talk about knowing the heart-mind, it means to shut off seeing and hearing in order to seek to know [the heart-mind] itself while in a trance. This is like using the eyes to see the eyes and using the mouth to bite the mouth. Although their goal is impossible to achieve, it
inevitably results in internal discord. Isn’t this setting up a separate heart-mind? Now if one sets up a separate heart-mind, then the one becomes two and the host becomes guest. . . . They blankly guard themselves, destroy feelings, and abandon affairs. By cutting themselves off from the relations of ruler and minister, father and son, their heart-minds cease to function. . . .

“The so-called kōan method of recent years is, moreover, a shortcut [to enlightenment]. The source of these is Zhuangzi’s discussion of the cicada catcher and bell-stand carver. But [kōans] are more ingenious and intricate. However, being ignorant of the pattern-principle of Heaven and yet selfishly indulging themselves in these practices—how could they deserve praise within the school of the noble person!” (ZXJ (bieji), chapter 8, pp. 5525–5527)

Part Two: Criticism of Contemporaries for Mixing Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism

15. Memorial to the Throne

In recent years, your majesty [Xiaozong r. 1162–1189] has focused his heart-mind on seeking the essentials of the great Way, and has paid considerable attention to the works of Laozi and the Buddhists. These may be rumors, which I don’t know whether to believe or not. If they are true, then I personally believe that this is not the way to transmit the Heavenly endowment of the sacred sages and attain the glory of Yao and Shun. To record and recite flowery rhetoric is not the way to explore the source of, and to bring forth, the Way of governing. Emptiness and quiescence are not the way to unite root and branch and establish the great Mean. (ZXJ, chapter 11, p. 440)

16. [Zhu Xi said,] “When I saw the discussion about Confucianism and Buddhism between Lu Xiangshan and Wang Shunbo, I laughed to myself. The difference between Confucianism and Buddhism lies only in the distinction between emptiness and concreteness. . . . [Lu wrote] that the Buddhists and we Confucians are similar in outlook and that the only distinction is [that we] differentiate rightness and profit, being public-oriented and self-centered. His idea is wrong. If it were [as Lu says], then we Confucians and the Buddhists would have the same basic pattern-principles. And, if that were so, then how could Lu trace our difference to a distinction between rightness and profit? The very sources of our doctrines are different: we Confucians hold that the myriad pattern-principles are real, while the Buddhists hold that the myriad pattern-principles are all empty.” (ZZYL, chapter 124, pp. 2975–2976)
17. Someone said, “Lu Xiangshan says that ‘to restrain oneself and return to ritual’\(^{28}\) does not simply mean that one must rid oneself of desires and resentment. [It also means that] one should not have even a single thought of becoming a sage or worthy.”

[Zhu Xi] responded: “This sort of comment is just like a little child at play. [Lu’s] only concern is to sound lofty. Has there ever been this kind \(\text{(p.149)}\) of talk in the school of the Sage? If people wish to learn to be a sage or worthy, that’s excellent. What could be wrong with that! . . . One can see that Lu’s ideas are simply Chan. [The Buddhist monk] Bao Zhi 寶誌 (418–514) wrote:

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\text{Do not allow the heart-mind to have the slightest thought of self-cultivation.}
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\text{Eternal freedom is within the formless light.}^{29}
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[Lu] wanted to be like this, but how is that possible? . . . “As I always say, if someone must study Chan, it is far better to be clear about it and go study the [the kind of] Chan with the shouting and beating. But, here Lu mixes the words of the sages and worthies with Chan and produces nothing worthwhile—it’s like a dragon without horns or a snake with feet. In the old days, Lu was not like this. Later, he really changed. Now his teachings have ruined the youth (who follow him): they won’t read books, they’re all confused and don’t understand a thing. What a shame! What a shame! It’s just like Xunzi’s unconscionable and reckless criticisms, which led to Li Si who went so far as to burn books and bury Confucians!\(^{30}\) If Xunzi had lived to see Li Si’s actions, he would certainly have regretted it. If Lu were still alive and saw the younger generation all confused like this, he would surely regret his past errors.”

[Zhu Xi] also said, “Lu’s teachings were always clear at the two ends but vague in the middle.”

It was asked, “How were they vague?”

[Zhu Xi] replied, “There were things he couldn’t explain. The reason why he couldn’t explain them was because of Chan. His infatuation with Chan was like the saying: ‘When the mandarin duck embroidery is done, \(\text{(p.150)}\) one may look at it, but no one is given the golden needle.’\(^{31}\) When I was fifteen or sixteen, I too was interested in Chan. One day I met a monk at Liu Zihui’s place and talked with him.\(^{32}\) He just went along with whatever I said, never saying whether I was right or not. But, he told Liu that I understood Chan’s brilliance and spirituality. Later, when Liu told me this, I suspected that this
monk had something wondrous about him and so I asked for his instruction. I thought what he had to say was excellent. . . . Later I was sent to serve in Tong’an. At the time I was twenty-four or twenty-five, and I first met Mr. Li [Tong]. When I spoke with him, Mr. Li just said I was wrong. I, however, doubted Mr. Li had any real understanding and repeatedly questioned him. Mr. Li was a solemn person and wasn’t a glib talker. He instructed me to read only the words of the sages and worthies. Consequently, I set Chan aside for the time being. I thought that, in my practice of the Way, Chan would always be present even as I came to read the works of the sages and worthies. Reading and reading, day after day, I gradually came to savor the words of the sages and worthies. And when I went back to the Buddhist teachings, I gradually saw them to be riddled with flaws and defects.” (ZZYL, chapter 104, pp. 2619–2620)

18. Letter to Wang Yingchen

. . . Generally speaking, those who discuss the Learning of the Way in recent times err in being too lofty. When they study books and discuss their meaning, they typically delight in taking an easy shortcut and leap ahead without passing through an orderly sequence. They always neglect and disdain the complex and subtle points—precisely those places they should ponder—regarding these to be too lowly and trifling to be worthy (p.151) of their attention. Consequently, although some are scholars of broad learning, they inevitably fail to fully understand moral pattern-principles of the world. . . . Having failed to come to a full understanding of pattern-principles, [such scholars] cannot but harbor doubt and uncertainty in their breast. And yet, instead of reflecting on and seeking what is nearby, they become deluded by heterodox [Chan] doctrines. They ensconce themselves in a state of dark unknowingness and all day long blankly chew on meaningless [kōan] phrases, waiting for that single, all-encompassing enlightenment. They simply do not know that only after things are investigated will they become clear; that only after moral relationships are closely examined will they be fully understood.

(“The investigation of things” simply means “to thoroughly probe pattern-principles”; “things have been investigated” is when these pattern-principles are clear. This is the beginning of self-cultivation practice in the Great Learning; by pondering and reflecting over a long
period, each [person] will [progress from a] shallow to deep [understanding]. There is no precipitous point of sudden enlightenment. Discussions by recent Confucians scholars on this point, it seems to me, are also too lofty. . . .

Since they believe themselves to have had this “single, all-encompassing enlightenment,” they remain utterly ignorant about this [investigation of things]—so how could they take themselves to be enlightened? . . .

And yet, they wait for [enlightenment]—something they may never get—making themselves cling to an irresolvable doubt, fracturing their will, depleting their energy and passing years and months aimlessly and in vain. How can this compare to our [Confucian] teaching, which follows an orderly sequence of learning that begins from an elementary level and progresses to an advanced level. [Our learning] engages in discussion, thought, personal practice, and rigorous examination; it prefers difficulty to negligence, the lowly to the lofty, the shallow to the deep, and clumsiness to artifice. By pondering over things in a relaxed manner and gradually understanding them over a long time, the myriad pattern-principles will become transparent and the sequence of things will become clear and unobscured. . . . Fundamentally, there is no other extraordinary state to attain. (ZXJ, chapter 30, pp. 1268–1269)

(p.152) Part Three: “Critique of Adulterated Learning”

19. Su Che’s “Commentary on the Laozi” (Laozi jie 老子解)

Su Che wrote this book late in life to harmonize our Confucianism with Laozi. And, thinking that insufficient, he went even further and supplemented it with Buddhism. How misguided! . . . I truly fear [Su] will disrupt the transmission of our learning and cause the correctness of the human heart-mind to be lost.

[Su wrote:] Master Kong uses humaneness, rightness, ritual, and music to govern the world. Laozi cuts off and abandons these. Some people consider these incompatible. The Classic of Changes says, “What is above form is called the ‘Way’; what is below form is called ‘concrete things (qi 器).’”

I [Zhu Xi] comment: Although the names “Way” and “concrete things” are different, they are really one thing. Therefore [Confucius] said, “My Way has one thread running through it.” This is why the Way of the Sage is the height of the great Mean and perfect rectitude and has never been vanquished through the myriad generations. Mr. Su recites the words [of
the Classic of Changes but does not grasp their meaning. Therefore, his explanation does not have a single word that accords with [the Classic of Changes]. In this, students should first seek it in my explanation so that the meaning of the Sage will be clearly beyond doubt. Therefore, when they next read Mr. Su’s words they will have a clear grasp of his errors. [Su wrote:] Confucius was profoundly concerned about future generations. Therefore, he taught people using concrete things while obscuring the Way.

I [Zhu Xi] comment: The Way and concrete things are one. If one teaches people using concrete things, then the Way is included within them. Why would the Sage obscure it? Confucius said, “I conceal nothing.” How could the Sage have it in his heart-mind to obscure the Way? In general, when Mr. Su speaks of the “Way” being separate from “concrete things,” I don’t know what he is referring to with such names. . . .

[Su wrote:] Therefore, [Laozi] teaches people using the Way, while downplaying concrete things, thinking that if students only understood concrete things, then the Way would remain obscured. Therefore, he discards humaneness and rightness and abandons ritual and music in order to illuminate the Way.

I [Zhu Xi] comment: The Way is the general name for humaneness, rightness, ritual, and music, and these four are the substance and function of the Way. When the sages cultivated humaneness and rightness and created ritual and music, it was all for the purpose of clarifying the Way. Now here, [Su] says that [Laozi] discarded humaneness and rightness and abandoned ritual and music in order to illuminate the Way. That is like giving up two times five but seeking ten. How perverse!

[Su wrote:] Now the Way cannot be spoken of; what can be spoken of is a semblance of it. Those who attain [the Way] rely on its semblance to realize its truth. Those who are hazy about it hold on to the semblance and get trapped by falsehoods.

I [Zhu Xi] comment: When the sages spoke of the Way, they discussed rulers and ministers, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, elder and younger siblings, and the relations between friends. I don’t know whether Mr. Su thinks these words refer to the Way or only to its semblance? And, if one practiced by holding to these, would they really become trapped [in falsehoods]? Still, is it really true that the Way cannot be spoken of? The reason why such a statement exists is because people themselves do not realize that the Way and
concrete things have never been separated from each other. And, so instead, they seek [the Way] in the midst of obscurity and formlessness.

[Su wrote:] There were people in later generations who held onto Laozi’s doctrines and caused disorder in the world, while those who followed Confucius were free of serious flaws.

(p.154) I [Zhu Xi] comment: There are those who were good at studying Laozi, such as the Han emperors Wen (r. 179–157 BCE) and Jing (r. 156–139 BCE) and Cao Shen (d. 190 BCE).41 Indeed, they did not bring complete disorder to the world. But Mr. Su’s doctrines are certain to bring disorder to the world. Among the followers of Confucius, some were superficial, some profound, some flawed, some flawless—we cannot overgeneralize. One like Mr. Su certainly has read Confucian texts, yet his writings and sayings confuse and mislead later generations in this way. How could we call them flawless?

[Su wrote:] There are quite a number who follow Laozi’s words and attain the Way; but those who seek it in Confucius often suffer from not having a place to start [on the path].

I [Zhu Xi] comment: I don’t know what people he is referring to when he says, “There are quite a number who follow Laozi’s words and attain the Way.” How did they attain it? And what Way is it that they have attained? Moreover, when he says “quite a number,” it can’t be only one or two people. Are there really such multitudes who have attained the Way? Confucius “methodically led students on” and “encouraged people without tiring,”43 so they entered the path of virtue, calmly and with understanding. Yet when Mr. Su says “They often suffer from not having a place to enter,” we can know that he has never undertaken this [teaching] for even a single day and has not been able to enter the gate. Of course, [Su] splits the Way and concrete things and, thus, does not consider humaneness, rightness, ritual, and music as related to the Way. Granted, Su’s words concerning “not having a place to enter” cannot harm Confucius’s Way or break students’ intentions [to learn]; with them he simply declares his own lack of knowledge of the Way. . . .

Mr. Su’s “Postface” says: The Sixth Patriarch’s saying, “not thinking of good; not thinking of bad,” refers to [the state] before the feelings arise.44

(p.155) I [Zhu Xi] comment: Although the sages and worthies speak of [the state] before the feelings arise, still goodness is always preserved and there is no bad. The Buddhist saying
seems the same but is in reality different. One must be more discerning.

[Mr. Su’s “Postface”] also says: Now the Mean is another name for the Buddha-nature; and “harmony” is a general term for the Six Paramitas and their myriad practices.\(^{45}\)

I [Zhu Xi] comment: When happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy are all balanced and regulated, that is called “harmony.” Moreover, harmony is the universal Way for all in the world. As for the Six Paramitas and the myriad practices, I don’t know what [Su] refers to; but they destroy and cut off [the relationships between] ruler and minister, father and son and are great impediments to the Way of humankind. Can that really be called the “universal Way”? . . . (ZZWJ, chapter 72, in ZZQS, vol. 24, pp. 3469–3472)\(^{46}\)


His Honor Zhang [Jiucheng] began his studies as a disciple of Yang Guishan\(^{47}\) but left the Confucian school for Buddhism, believing himself to have achieved realization. Then Zhang’s Buddhist teacher [Dahui Zonggao] told him: “You have grasped the main point [of Chan]. Now, when you instruct others you should present your teaching in a variety of guises and preach the Dharma as you think appropriate to the circumstances. Make it so that those on different paths end up arriving at the same place. Then there will be no ill feelings between those who have left the world [Buddhists] and those still in it [non-Buddhists]. But (p.156) you must not let the crude and common sort learn about what I say here; otherwise, they are sure to question what we are doing.”\(^{48}\) . . .

As a result of this, all of Zhang’s writings are outwardly Confucian but secretly Buddhist. When he moves in and out of [Buddhism and Confucianism] his purpose is to confuse the world and lull men to sleep so that they enter the Buddhist school and cannot extricate themselves from it even if they want to. . . .

[In his Explanation,] Zhang writes: “What Heaven decrees is called the ‘nature.’”\(^{49}\) This merely states how precious the nature is; but the person has not yet taken it as their own. “Complying with the nature is called the ‘Way.’” This means that one has embodied the nature as one’s own and entered into humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom. However, one has not yet put them into application. “To cultivate the Way is called ‘teaching.’” This means that humaneness is
practiced between parent and child, rightness is practiced between ruler and minister; propriety is practiced between guest and host, and wisdom is practiced among the wise. From this the degrees and gradations of the Way may be known. I [Zhu Xi] comment: “What Heaven decrees is called the ‘nature’” means that the reason why the “nature” is so named is because it is what Heaven bestows. It is the original source of the moral pattern-principles that human beings have received. It does not merely mean to praise the preciousness [of nature]. And why should the nature require the esteem and approval of people? . . . Moreover, calling it “[human] nature” clearly means that people have already received it. Yet here [Mr. Zhang] says “one has not yet taken the nature as one’s own.” This would mean that when Heaven gives birth to this person it has yet to bestow [the nature] on him but rather puts it in some other place; this would require the person to stand up, go over and get [his nature] and only then “make it his own.” I do not understand, then, prior to taking possession of the nature, what it was that allows a human being to breathe, eat, live, and exist in the world and then get the nature? How can this “nature” be an object that is in a specific location that can then be taken and inserted into the human body? The nature possesses humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom; they are the very substance of the nature. Here [Mr. Zhang] says (p.157) that one embodies [the nature] and only afterwards enters into humaneness, rightness, propriety, and wisdom. This would mean that the four [virtues] have been pre-established over here and afterwards the nature comes to them. I do not understand where the four [virtues] could possibly come from before this nature has entered the person/body. These are all erroneous and forced words that fail to understand the great source. When an intelligent person sees this, he will not need to read the text in its entirety; its errors and aberrations will be clear from this section alone. To practice humaneness between father and son and to practice rightness between ruler and minister—this is the “Way that complies with the nature.” But Mr. Zhang rashly takes it to be “the teaching of cultivating the Way” and thus loses the [proper] order and sequence. . . . [In his Explanation.] Zhang writes: Everyone uses their knowledge to judge right and wrong. But they don’t know how to apply their knowledge to being cautious [over what is not seen] and apprehensive [over what is not heard]. If they would
shift the heart-mind that judges right and wrong toward being cautious and apprehensive, they would know which is greater. I [Zhu Xi] comment: The existence of approbation and disapproval is a normative pattern-principle for all under Heaven, and all people possess the heart-mind of right and wrong. This is why it is considered the beginning of knowledge and if one were to lack it, one would not be human. Therefore, to judge approbation and disapproval is to engage in the thorough examination of pattern-principles and is a priority for students. Mr. Zhang rejects this. We now see how he gives full rein to his idiosyncratic and forced speculations. He is incapable of according with the correctness of Heavenly pattern-principle. But aren’t his words what the Buddhists call “directly grasping hold of the unexcelled Bodhi without concern for approbation and disapproval”? Alas! Don’t these words show the fundamental difference between Confucianism and Buddhism! . . .

[In his Explanation,] Zhang writes: If, in this way, people see into their nature, then they will naturally accord with the Mean and all their prior baseless talk and aberrant actions will be swept away without a trace.

**I [Zhu Xi] comment:** “To see into the nature” is originally a Buddhist term; it implies that a single glimpse is sufficient. Confucians, on the other hand, speak of “understanding the nature.” When one understands the nature, one must cultivate and develop it until it reaches full completion. The effort is gradual and certainly not the achievement of a day or two. . . .

[In his Commentary,] Zhang writes: . . . Only when one understands who it is that loves learning, who it is that practices vigorously, and who it is that knows shame, will one have knowledge, humaneness, and courage. What one understands through words and writing merely comes near to these. When you experience them directly and comprehend [who] it is that experiences them, when you illuminate them in every moment and comprehend them in every affair—only then is it knowledge, humaneness, and courage. There’s nothing to do other than this! . . .

I (Zhu Xi) comment:] . . . The way he writes his explanation drags it into the preposterous and far-fetched. He simply cannot stop himself. Now, “to love learning,” “to practice with vigor,” and “to know shame” simply depend on one’s self. To insist that one must then further seek to know who it is that is doing this is to assert that there is another body outside this
body and another heart-mind outside this heart-mind: if bodies and heart-minds proliferate on and on, where will it end? . . .

(ZZWJ, chapter 72, in ZZQS, vol. 24, pp. 3473–3479, 3484)


[In his Commentary on the Great Learning,] Mr. Lü writes: The extension of knowledge and investigation of things is the basis of self-cultivation. “Knowledge” is “innate knowledge” (liang zhi 良知), it is what we have in common with Yao and Shun. When pattern-principle has been thoroughly probed, then knowledge is naturally attained, what we have in common with Yao and Shun suddenly appears on its own, and one tacitly comprehends it.

I [Zhu Xi] comment: The extension of knowledge and the investigation of things is the starting point of the Great Learning and the first task of students. When one thing has been investigated, then one [aspect] of knowledge is attained. The achievement is gradual. . . . Since the knowledge attained necessarily has gradations of depth or shallowness, how could [Lü] think that in a single moment one transcendently perceives what we have in common with Yao and Shun? This is just the empty Buddhist talk of “a single hearing [brings forth] a thousand awakenings” and “to enter directly [into enlightenment] with one leap.” It is not the concrete work in the Confucian school of “clarifying the good and making one’s person sincere.”

Mr. Lü writes: The subtle qualities of plants and the different features of objects constitute the pattern-principles of things. The “investigation of things” means to seek the pattern-principles that make plants and objects what they are. The phrase “things have been investigated” refers to one’s sudden grasp of the pattern-principle of plants and objects when one’s heart-mind is focused on them.

I [Zhu Xi] note: . . . As to the way students ought to apply themselves, they must have an order of priority and importance and a method for gauging their own experience. Only then will they gradually develop themselves fully through the integration of cumulative practice. How can [Lü] believe that by merely focusing the heart-mind on a single plant or object he will suddenly, and without cause, know what we have in common with Yao and Shun? This again is the Buddhist doctrine of “hearing a [single] sound and awakening to the Way” or “seeing a form and enlightening the heart-mind.” It is certainly not the original intention of the Confucian
canon. . . . [Lü] instead wants to place his heart-mind amidst plants and objects and await his single [sudden] awakening. . . .
[In one of his later letters] Mr. Lü wrote: It is right where empirical knowledge cannot reach that one should “take enlightenment as one’s standard.” This is precisely what we call “the extension of knowledge (p.160) and the investigation of things.” Recently, I temporarily dispensed with the written word and have devoted myself solely to introspection. Still, I am troubled by the confusion of miscellaneous affairs and am unable to devote myself to single-minded practice. . . .
I [Zhu Xi] comment: “To take enlightenment as a standard” is a Buddhist method that we Confucians do not have. Yet Mr. Lü takes it to be the “extension of knowledge and the investigation of things.” This is how he made mistakes in his explanation above, and never realized his error. . . . In our Confucian teaching, “the extension of knowledge and investigation of things” consists in reading books to discover merit and deficiency; and we engage in affairs to examine right and wrong, because there is nowhere that this pattern-principle is not present. Now [Mr. Lü] says he has dispensed with the written word and devoted himself to introspection. Yet he is still troubled by the confusion of miscellaneous affairs and unable to concentrate. This is because he divides pattern-principle and affairs into two. Then, he insists that pattern-principles can be thoroughly probed only when one completely withdraws from worldly activities. . . . Thus, I entirely do not understand what pattern-principles Mr. Lü is [investigating] in his introspection and self-examination! (ZZWJ, chapter 72, in ZZQS, vol. 24, pp. 3493–3494).

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Further Readings

Bibliography references:


Notes:

(1.) Wang Anshi’s New Meaning of the Three Classics (Odes, Book of Documents, and Rites of Zhou), along with his son’s commentaries on the Analects and Mencius, became the orthodox interpretation used in the civil service examinations.

(2.) The fourth commentary, “An Explanation of the Classic of Changes,” was written by Su Che’s elder brother Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101).

(3.) Daoqian used this phrase, “definitely not this” (jueding bu shi 决定不是), to indicate that nothing conceived by the rational heart-mind is capable of expressing the deeper truths of Chan. See Xiaoying 晓瑩 (1128–1220), Luohu yelu 罗湖野錄, chapter 2 in the Taishō (Tripitaka) 83.386c.

(4.) ZXJ refers to Zhu Xi ji 朱熹集 (Collected Work of Zhu Xi): see Zhu Xi 1996 in the bibliography.
(5.) Editor’s footnote: what follows after the ellipsis picks up in the subsequent section of Zhu Xi’s text.

(6.) Zhuangzi, chapter 12.

(7.) Zhu Xi is citing Mengzi 6A6, which is citing the Odes, Mao #260.

(8.) “Bringing peace to the world” is the last of the eight steps described in the opening section of the Great Learning.

(9.) Zhuangzi, chapter 13.

(10.) Doctrine of the Mean, chapter 4.

(11.) Daodejing, chapter 1.

(12.) Heart Sutra (Xin jing 心經). Included in Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra (Da boreboluomiduo jing 大般若波羅蜜多經). See Taishō 8.848c.

(13.) The Three Bonds refer to the relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, husband and wife. The Five Constants are humaneness, rightness, ritual, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

(14.) Analects 2.1.

(15.) Analects 15.5.

(16.) Mengzi 7A19.

(17.) Doctrine of the Mean, chapter 33.

(18.) Daodejing, chapter 38.

(19.) Daodejing, chapter 38.

(20.) Gathas are Buddhist verses written upon attaining enlightenment.

(21.) On Zhang Jiucheng, see the “Introduction,” and the translation, section 20 in this chapter. Wang Yingchen 汪應辰 (1118–1176) was a prominent member of Learning of the Way. Among his teachers were Lü Benzhong and Zhang Jiucheng. He was also a practitioner of Chan, under the guidance of Dahui, with whom he exchanged numerous letters. Zhu Xi and Wang met in 1162 and thereafter carried on a lively correspondence debating the influence of Buddhism on neo-Confucianism.

(22.) Book of Documents, “The Announcement of Tang” (Tang gao 湯誥). After overthrowing the Xia dynasty, King Tang announced the victory and the founding
of the Shang dynasty to his people, claiming that the August Lord (Shangdi) conferred good on the people.

(23.) Odes, Mao #260.

(24.) Zhuangzi, chapter 19.

(25.) The final phrase—“How could they deserve praise in the school of the noble person”—is a paraphrase of Xunzi, chapter 7, “On Confucius.”

(26.) Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) was a contemporary of Zhu Xi’s. Although he held a competing view of neo-Confucianism, which came to be known as Learning of the Heart-Mind (xinxue 心學), the two were friends. They debated their different approaches to metaphysics and epistemology in numerous letters and debates. Ivanhoe has a translation of Lu’s letter to Wang in Tiwald and Van Norden (2014, 257–259).

(27.) Editor’s footnote: what follows after the ellipsis picks up in the subsequent section of Zhu Xi’s text.

(28.) Analects 12.1.

(29.) From Bao Zhi’s “Song of the Twelve Hours” (Shiershi song 十二時頌) in Records of the Transmission of the Lamp (Jingde chuandenglu 景德傳燈錄), chapter 29. See Taishō 51.450b.

(30.) Li Si 李斯 (280?–208 BCE) was the Prime Minister to the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE). He is best known for having implemented the Legalist philosophy of Han Fei Zi (280?–223 BCE). His most famous acts include writing the edict ordering the burning of all books of philosophy, history, poetry, etc., and putting to death a number of Confucian scholars. Zhu Xi’s link between Xunzi and Li Si is based on the putative notion that Xunzi taught both Han Fei and Li Si.

(31.) This phrase, or variations on it, appears often in Chan literature. The translation here is from Thomas and J. C. Cleary, The Blue Cliff Record, p. 244. See Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135), Foguo Yuanwu chanshi Bi yan lu 佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄 in Taishō 48.178a.

(32.) Liu Zihui 劉子翚 (1101–1147) was one of the four men who became guardians to Zhu Xi after his father died in 1143. Liu was intellectually eclectic, freely synthesizing the Cheng brothers’ teachings with Buddhism, Daoism, and the anti-Wang Anshi politics of the pro-war faction. Liu Zihui invited Daoqian to give a Dharma lecture at the temple in his village and that is when Zhu Xi met Daoqian. Another of Zhu’s guardians was Liu’s brother, Ziyu 劉子羽 (1086–1146), who was a disciple of Dahui’s.
(33.) Li Tong 李侗 (1093–1163) traced his intellectual lineage directly back to the Cheng brothers and was also a member of the pro-war political faction. Although he was a fierce opponent of Buddhism, Li promoted a neo-Confucian form of quiescent practice known as quiet sitting.

(34.) On Wang Yingchen (1118–1176), see note 20 in this chapter.

(35.) *Classic of Changes* (Yijing 易經), “Xici zhuan” (“Commentary on the Appended Phrases”), part one.

(36.) *Analects* 4.15.

(37.) It is unclear to which of his explanations Zhu Xi is referring. Long after this was written, Zhu did write explanations of the *Classic of Changes*.

(38.) *Analects* 7.24.

(39.) The word translated “substance” here is rendered “the thing itself” or “thingness itself” throughout most of this volume. It refers to the Way itself prior to any operation of the Way in the world.

(40.) Su is paraphrasing the opening lines of the *Daodejing*.

(41.) Emperors Wen and Jing are remembered for supporting the Huang-Lao school of Daoism. The same is true of Cao Shen 曹参, who served under the first three emperors of the Han. When Emperor Hui (r. 194–186 BCE) appointed Cao to the post of chancellor, Cao instituted Huang-Lao policies as the state ideology.

(42.) *Analects* 9.11.

(43.) *Analects* 7.2 and 2.34.

(44.) Su Che wrote this Postface in 1090. The full statement of the Sixth Patriarch (Huineng 惠能) is: “Not thinking of good, not thinking of evil, just at this moment what is your original face before your mother and father were born?” It appears in a Song dynasty edition of *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (Liuuzu tan jing 六祖壇經) and in other Chan texts, including the Gateless Barrier (Wumen guan 無門關) and *The Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* (Jingde chuandenglu 景德傳燈錄). For the quote in *The Platform Sutra*, see *Liuuzu dashi fabao tan jing* 六祖大師法寶壇經, Taishō 48.349b.

(45.) The Six Paramitas are: charity, precepts/morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. The myriad practices refer to the actions required to achieve the paramitas.

(46.) ZZWJ refers to *Hui’an xiansheng Zhu Wengong wenji* 晦庵先生朱文公文集 (*The Collected Writings of Master Hui’an, Zhu, Duke of Culture*). ZZQS refers to
Zhuzi quanshu 朱子全書 (The Complete Works of Master Zhu): see Zhu Xi 2002 in the bibliography.

(47.) Yang Guishan 楊龜山(1053–1135) was the pen name (hao 號) of Yang Shi 楊時, a leading student of the Cheng brothers and Zhang Jiucheng’s teacher.

(48.) This letter is no longer extant.

(49.) This and the following two quotations are from the opening passage of the Doctrine of the Mean.

(50.) This is paraphrasing Mengzi 2A6.

(51.) This phrase is used by Dahui Zonggao in Dahui Pujue Chanshi fayu 大慧普覺禪師法語, Taishô 47.890b, 890c, and elsewhere in Chan literature.

(52.) In this phrase, Zhang’s original Commentary on the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong shuo 中庸說) has the additional word “who” (shei 誰), which Zhu Xi has omitted. We have decided to translate this phrase as it appears in the original.

(53.) Citing Mengzi 7A15.

(54.) Both phrases appear many times in the Chinese Buddhist canon. See, for example, the Tang master Yongjia Xuanjue’s 永嘉玄覺’s (665–713) Song of Enlightenment (Zheng dao ge 證道歌) and Records of the Transmission of the Lamp (Jingde chuandenglu 景德傳燈錄) compiled by the monk Daoyuan 道原.

(55.) Citing the Mean 20:17 and Mengzi 4A13.

(56.) These are common Chan Buddhist phrases. For examples of Dahui’s use of them, see Dahui Pujue Chanshiyulu in Taishô 47.854a.

(57.) This is another common Chan phrase. See, for example, Dahui’s use in Dahui Pujue Chanshi shu 大慧普覺禪師書 in the Taishô 47.839b.