inscription at a remote postal station near Dunhuang, the very edge of the imperial territory. The inscription provides a calendared chart of ordinances that dictate proper activities and behaviours. Campany's explicit point is that remote border marked the limit of the known and enforceable imperial order, and the chart was a nugatory effort to project that order beyond its realistic reach. He links that to an attempt to map the Chinese dreamscape; such an attempt is similarly limited. What he does not say, but richly implies, is that the domain of dreaming in China, its interpretation and its narratives, provided a counterpoint to, if not escape from, the officially promoted and officially reported, albeit highly idealized, perfect social order governing daily life in pre-imperial and imperial China.

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The Objectionable Li Zhi: Fiction, Criticism, and Dissent in Late Ming China. Edited by Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, and Haun Saussy. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2020. Pp. vii + 281. $99.00 hardcover, $30.00 paperback.

Studies of Li Zhi's 李贄 (1527–1602) works, life, and times abound, to the extent that it has become a mini academic industry. This is not a bad thing; after all, Li Zhi lived in the late Ming period, which has fascinated later scholars because it was a time when much of Chinese elite and popular culture burgeoned in different ways, often eliciting passionate disagreement among its contemporaries on how the legacies of the past should be interpreted and developed. *The Objectionable Li Zhi* brings together eleven essays by today's scholars who address topics that many of them have explored in their earlier studies and offers a worthy companion to the editors' earlier volume of selected translations of Li Zhi's writings.[1] The titles of the essays clearly show their authors' perceptive admiration for Li Zhi, but they do not necessarily agree on how they see their subject. It is to the credit of the editors that they are comfortable with the diverse and sometimes contradictory interpretations of Li Zhi's actions, thought, and practices presented in the essays.

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[1] Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, and Haun Saussy, trans. *A Book to Burn and A Book to Keep (Hidden): Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

After the editors' introduction, the first essay by Wai-yee Li examines some themes that pervade the volume. She discusses several of Li Zhi's best-known works on his never-ending struggle to reach or return to the real, the genuine (*zhen* 真) that characterizes the innate self, untainted by experience and contact with the outside world—a struggle expressed through the contradictory views in his writings, making readers aware of the impossibility of achieving a unitary genuine essence. Even writing about it posed some insoluble problems—both because self-reflection splits the self into the original unconscious self and the being doing the reflecting, and because to convey the genuine to others requires a degree of performance and literary guile.

Readers of both Li Zhi's own time and later encountered the hazards of (mis)reading his views. In her essay, Maram Epstein points out that in Li's autobiographical "A Sketch of Zhuowu" (*Zhuowu lunlue* 卓吾論略), his passionate avowed commitment to the quintessential Confucian virtue of filial piety refutes the modern notion during the May Fourth and Maoist periods that he repudiated Confucianism. On the other hand, the next essay by Martin W. Huang, "The Perils of Friendship," points out that Li Zhi was criticized by his conservative Confucian contemporaries because he openly expressed his devotion to friendship and through his writings and his actions often elevated such relationships above the others among the five Confucian relationships (*wulun* 五倫). Huang argues that Li Zhi's prime valuation of friendship had to do with his determination to seek out soulmates, whom he prized above his wife or children and hence neglected the other four relationships, at least in the eyes of his critics. As Huang concludes, "Li Zhi's case painfully demonstrated to people then and later that friendship, when pursued as passionately as he pursued it, could fundamentally challenge the ethical underpinning of the orthodox Confucian understandings of the most important human relationships" (p. 69).

In the next essay, "A Public of Letters," Timothy Brook examines the letters between Li Zhi and the scholar-official, Geng Dingxiang 耿定向 (1524–1596), the elder brother of one of Li's soulmates and a close friend himself before Li broke with him. Although Brook provides his readers with many interesting details of the epistolary debates between Li and Geng, the main focus of the essay is less on "the message of the letters [between Li Zhi and Geng Dingxiang] than to the medium through which Ming writers most often expressed not just their friendships but their ideas about friendship" (p. 75). Among Ming writers, expressions of friendship went beyond private correspondence, in that the letters were often hand-copied for a somewhat wider readership and also edited and compiled in collections that were published for an even broader audience. One may ask then

why write letters as letters to individual recipients to begin with? Such a letter originally addressed to an individual recipient often would need to be redacted before being printed. Why not just write an essay designed from the start for a broad audience? Is it that the private exchanges or debates between two individual correspondents encouraged less formal, more spontaneous, and more impassioned debates that can *then* be redacted and polished before publication? The example that Brook offers, of the correspondence between two embattled (though never totally estranged) friends who passionately argued about issues so important to them both, may support this supposition. A pity that we do not have the original letters, or even handwritten copies of the originals made by the writer or recipient, but just the printed versions, so we cannot prove or disprove this guess.

The next chapter in the volume, Handler-Spitz's "Affiliation and Differentiation," continues with the theme of friendship, addressing specifically Li Zhi's notions of teacher-student relationships and his actual ties with two of his most important mentors, Wang Ji 王畿 (1498–1583) and Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515–1588) from the Taizhou branch 泰州學派 of Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) School of the Mind, and with some of his students. Li Zhi owed to his mentors not only his understanding of the Yangming teachings, including his deepening knowledge of Buddhism, but also the development of his own role as a teacher. As Li Zhi realized, "teachers must not presume to understand their students or offer too much guidance. Each student must discover his own voice" (p. 98). Also revealing is that Li Zhi received not only students with whom he formed deep connections, such as Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1623), who attained his own individual intellectual independence, but also those who came to study the Confucian classics with the aim of doing well in the government examinations.

For all the adulation Li Zhi received for his writings and teachings in his lifetime, there was also bitter and vitriolic criticism of, among other issues, his giving Buddhist teachings equal weight to Confucian ones, as well as his supposed immoral behaviour. As Ying Zhang's "Image Trouble, Gender Trouble" points out, such criticism was published widely, culminating in Li Zhi's arrest in 1602 on the recommendation of the censor Zhang Wenda 張問達 (d. 1625). Modern studies of Li Zhi provide, however, a much more sympathetic view of his view and relations with women. For example, like his mentors, Li Zhi also accepted women students. Pauline Lee's "Native Seeds of Change" discusses Li's belief in the innate equality of potential in men and women—that both men and women possessed the ability to understand the Dao 道, but far fewer women were given the opportunity to cultivate their innate knowledge because of their limited socio-economic circumstances. One wonders, however, how he judged that some women

were less capable of developing their intellectual and spiritual abilities and therefore, not worthy of his highest esteem and friendship and affection—e.g., his wife, and possibly his daughters. Pauline Lee acknowledges that Li Zhi's "strategy for bringing women into the world of men may seem unimaginative or limited" and that "We may wish that he had been able to consider difference rather than simply sameness between men and women" (p. 140). Nevertheless, it is difficult to wonder, when Lee mentions the Song neo-Confucian thinker Cheng Yi's 程頤 (1033–1107) view that a widow and her children starving to death because she remained unmarried was morally superior to her remarrying, about what Li Zhi thought of leaving his own wife and children in Gongcheng 共城 to fend for themselves and two of his daughters starving to death, or whether, despite Li Zhi's praise of his wife's Confucian virtues and obedience to his wishes, he could impose such distance (literally) between himself and her.[2]

Li Zhi's innovative contributions to and his reflection of late Ming society and culture are the subjects of the next three essays. In "An Avatar of the Extraordinary," Kai-wing Chow argues persuasively that Li was not only "an outspoken iconoclast, a nonconformist, and an advocate of the extraordinary (*qi* [奇])" (p. 145), but that he also was an eloquent spokesman for many of the social and cultural developments occurring in the mid- and late Ming. Like a number of scholar-officials, Li Zhi came from a merchant family, so, as Chow notes, his "popularity flourished in large part because his ideas and values resonated with those of the mercantile literati, a social class that developed out of the conjoining of career paths and social practices associated with conventional literati (*shi* [士]) and merchants (*shang* [商])," and that "The values he openly promoted and vociferously defended echoed and gave shape to a new ethics of the *shishang*, which cannot be classified neatly in terms of any of the conventional intellectual systems of Confucianism, Daoism, or Buddhism" (p. 151). One of the fascinating instances of Li Zhi's truly unconventional thinking is expressed in his praise of the eight-legged essay—the format for answering questions in the government examinations—along with examples from two very different genres of literature—the novel *Outlaws of the Marshes* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) and the drama *The Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji* 西廂記). Despite Li Zhi's scathing contempt for what he saw as the conventional and unthinking attitude toward Confucianism and the hypocrisy of so many officials of his day, he actually considered the eight-legged essay

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[2] In Lee's own book, *Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), she does discuss Li Zhi's relationship with his wife (pp. 32–35, 76–79, 117–20).

to be a new genre capable of expressing fresh new ideas and deeper understanding of the classics and be written in a style of his time—truly *shiwen* 時文 of a high quality.

As for Li Zhi's deep interest in Buddhism, Jiang Wu in "Performing Authenticity" would argue that it also exemplified a widespread trend in the late Ming in which many individuals did not necessarily become devotees practising Buddhist rituals but were interested in the philosophical ideas found in Buddhism, to be delved into together with Confucianism and Daoism as part of the Three Teachings (*Sanjiao* 三教). Indeed, Li Zhi actually began to study Chan Buddhism as he learned about Wang Yangming's teachings of the School of the Mind. Thus just because after his resignation from official life, Li Zhi lived for some time in Buddhist monasteries, shaved his head (but kept his beard) and wore Buddhist garb did not signal that he had become a Buddhist. Instead, Li Zhi was a prominent representative of what Jiang Wu terms "learners of the Dao." Li Zhi's "textual spirituality" was expressed in different ways, ranging from writing, compiling, and printing religious texts, including his own ideas. These works included those on or about not just Buddhism, but also Confucianism and Daoism, as well as "popular religion." Another aspect of Li Zhi's involvement in Buddhist ideas was what Jiang Wu refers to as "performance," in particular the public discussions involving several speakers in Chan encounter dialogues (*jifeng wenda* 機鋒問答), which also served as part of his role as a teacher, and such dialogues were often recorded by his admirers and published.

The idea of performance is also taken up in the next chapter, "Performing Li Zhi," where Robert Hegel considers the commentaries on fiction written by one Li Zhuowu 李卓吾, who may or (probably) may not have been the historical Li Zhi. The important point here is that whoever the actual author was, the commentaries resonate closely with the real Li Zhi's evaluation of the masterpieces of late Ming fiction—*Loyal and Righteous Outlaws of the Marsh* or *Water Margin*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi yanyi* 三國志演義), and *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西游記)—and of his entertaining and trenchant writing style. Thus the commentator(s) recruited by canny publishers who knew fully Li Zhi's popular appeal to their readers were "performing" Li Zhi for the reader. Li Zhuowu, the fiction commentator, demonstrated how many educated readers of the late Ming thought of the historical Li Zhi's views on reading, on characterization, and on the authenticity (reflecting real life) of the fiction commented on. We may, however, ask: would the historical Li Zhi have been as specific as Li Zhuowu in directing the reader on how to read? In other words, Li Zhuowu, the commentator, is performing Li Zhi ideas but also following and expanding on the millennia-long

textual tradition in which a reader does not approach the original text by itself but is immediately confronted with annotations and commentaries; by adding commentaries to popular works of fiction, the publishers and commentators are arguing that these works are worthy of considered reading, like the classics and other scholarly works. But what about Li Zhi's notion that any individual should develop his/her innate wisdom by rejecting any teacher's ideas, which is the key theme in Handler-Spitz's essay on "Affiliation and Differentiation"? How hard it would be for a reader to do this when perusing a page replete with Li Zhuowu commentaries!

As already noted, Li Zhi was both exulted and excoriated for his ideas and his personal behaviour in his own lifetime. Neither his admirers nor his critics formed a homogeneous group that saw him in the same way. Among the latter, there were the conservative Confucians who were angered by Li's challenge to their interpretation of the classics, his abandonment of the life of an official, his supposed failure to live by Confucian ethics, as well as his deep and ostentatious flirtation with Buddhism. As Miaw-fen Lu's "The Question of Life and Death" discusses, there were also others who disagreed with Li Zhi's ideas but felt that he was worth arguing with and wrote their own views on a variety of philosophical subjects, including what remains of human nature and an individual after death. Many Li Zhi detractors also saw him as a representative of the decadent and degenerate social and cultural trends that were instrumental to the collapse of the Ming dynasty. Some of the most influential late Ming and early Qing thinkers, such as Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), who were the forerunners of the evidential research (*kaozheng* 考證) movement, were severe critics of Li Zhi. Both Li and these critics decried the corruption of Confucianism but for different reasons. Li Zhi argued that the original classics had been subject to misinterpretation (from the Han onward), especially by the adherents of the Cheng-Zhu 程朱 neo-Confucian teachings. On the other hand, a number of thinkers from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were critical of the interpretation of Confucianism by both the Cheng-Zhu and the Wang Yangming schools and directed their focus on what Lu terms "concrete actions such as building human relationships and fulfilling ethical obligations in everyday life (*riyong renlun* [日用人倫])" (p. 221). Moreover, the orthodox Confucian stance championed by the Qing state resulted in an official attempt to silence or at least ignore Li Zhi. It was no surprise that Li Zhi's works had no place in the *Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書) or this huge collection's abstracts (*Zongmu tiyao* 總目提要), except for the editors' scathing remarks about other authors either writing in "the manner of Li Zhi (*Li Zhi zhi xiqi* [李贄之習氣])" (p. 223)

or having high regard for Li Zhi in their work. Lu suggests that, in the eighteenth century, Li's influence was declining so there was less debate about his ideas. What is striking is that even Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798), someone who could in some ways be considered a kindred spirit of Li Zhi, would say that Li was "an evil person recognized by all" (p. 223). Nevertheless, Li Zhi's writings continued to circulate during the High Qing, even if they could not be printed. By the late nineteenth century, his reputation would undergo a huge revival. Not only his *Cang shu* 藏書 (A Book to Keep (hidden)), but his entire oeuvre would again be welcomed by later generations of readers.

Questioning and reinterpretation of the past occur in any historical period, and not all those doing the re-examination have the same motives and they do not arrive at the same conclusions. Li Zhi was justifiably noted for his wide-ranging ideas and questions about so many subjects, including Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, popular literature, political and social commitment, and the roles and potential of men and women. By no means was he the only one in the late Ming wondering and questioning the "conventional" beliefs and practices, but his writings made him one of the most eloquent and entertaining—and, to many, enraging—authors of a time that Handler-Spitz calls an unruly age.

As noted at the beginning of this review, we now have plenty of information and studies about Li Zhi in his own time; perhaps to understand any more of him, as well as to understand later times, we can focus on how his life and writings were perceived in these later periods. In Miaw-fen Lu's essay, she uses this approach to a certain extent in discussing the criticism of Li Zhi in the early and mid-Qing. It might be time to make a concerted effort to examine the influence of Li Zhi and how he was perceived in later times.

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