

Article

Harmonious Accommodation among Coexisting Multicultural Ethical Frameworks through Confrontation

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Abstract: This paper interrogates the skepticism surrounding comparative ethics, particularly the question of its relevance in a world where ethical decision-making processes are primarily presumed to be dictated by one universalist culture. The paper argues that all cultures are inherently intercultural, evidenced by the historical coexistence of ideas and practices. Post-comparative ethics, which emphasizes the situational application of intellectual comparison and integration, is inevitable for postcolonial, non-Western societies. Historically, societies have navigated a variety of ethical frameworks, with some, like medieval Chinese society, embracing a plurality of beliefs. This pluralism is exemplified by the harmonious accommodation (*yuanrong* 圓融) of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Using the example of Song Dynasty Chan master Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲, this article illustrates that intercultural ethics can be both diverse and sincere. Dahui's pluralistic approach demonstrates that sincere commitment to multiple ethical systems is possible in our multicultural situation. I will discuss common approaches to the multicultural situation, such as expedient synthesis, theoretical synthesis, and crude syncretism, before illustrating the advantage of Dahui's *kanhua* 看話禪 method as harmonious accommodation through confrontation. This underscores the importance of shifting the debate from "Why compare?" to "How to compare?" in achieving the accommodation of different ethical frameworks.

Keywords: Dahui Zonggao; post-comparative ethics; comparative philosophy; Confucianism; Chan buddhism; *Yuanrong*



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1. Introduction

A common question raised against comparative ethics is "Why compare?" What ethical insights can be gained by comparing other cultures that are unachievable through exploring and innovating within our own? Critics often view comparative ethics as merely a matter of personal curiosity, frequently manifested as a Western scholar's fascination with an exotic foreign culture. I argue that this trivialization of comparative ethics rests on the assumption that each individual adheres to a single culture, defined by a universalist and essentialized ethical framework. This assumption however contradicts many people's actual experiences of a multicultural situation,¹ especially those of postcolonial cultures. In this paper, I define "culture" or "ethical framework" as a set of practical acts that guide one's life, regulated by a theoretical basis for interpreting the world (hermeneutics). These practical acts may be fuzzy and incoherent, and although the theoretical basis often claims universality, it is frequently revealed as incomplete in everyday life. The question for people in a multicultural situation is instead "How to compare?" As Eric Nelson puts it:

No contemporary form of social-historical life has a closed horizon of interpretation or is without its own multi- and intercultural history of material and communicative reproduction and interaction. Communities are already interculturally formed. (Nelson 2017, p. 255)

From a hermeneutical perspective, few can claim that their ethical framework is rooted in an "untainted" tradition. For example, in Chinese-speaking regions, contemporary speakers cannot discuss ethics without using Western-originated terms such as democracy, free-

dom, rule of law, and rights. For contemporary Chinese speakers, as a postcolonial people, their multicultural situation is not a choice, but a reality imposed on them. In this context, the question “Why compare?” is irrelevant. This multicultural situation is most pertinent to postcolonial populations, whether in formerly colonized countries like India, Brazil, and Egypt, or among diasporic communities such as Korean Americans, British Indians, Turkish Germans, and Black Frenchwomen. For these people, political multiculturalism may be a choice, but their multicultural situations are not.

Nelson and others aim to expand the concept of inter/multicultural situations to include majority populations in the West. For example, Macau-based German philosopher Hans-Georg Moeller defines post-comparative ethics, in contrast to comparative ethics, not only as the “de-barbarization” of non-Western people, but also the “re-barbarization [of] ourselves—and ‘we’ are no longer ‘Westerners,’ but ‘our’ mainstream philosophical discourses wherever they may take place” (Moeller 2018, p. 42). Therefore, even average “Westerners” should ponder whether their own ethical situation is as mono-cultural as they believe. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully establish Nelson’s and Moeller’s ambitious positions. Therefore, this article invites readers to self-reflect on whether they find themselves in such multicultural situations. Those in such situations may struggle to interpret their own traditions to develop a coherent ethical framework.

I argue that this problem is not exclusively modern or postmodern; it has also been prevalent throughout history, and we may find potential solutions by looking back. By emphasizing “contemporary,” Nelson does not imply that contemporary ethics is inherently more multicultural than its classical counterparts, but that classical forms of social-historical life were also often “interculturally formed,” and this inter/multiculturality is not diminished by the claimed universality of contemporary philosophy. These “universal” ethical frameworks frequently turn out to be essentialized Western European ethics that often fail to even accurately describe contemporary Western societies, let alone post-colonial societies with their diverse indigenous beliefs.

Historically, many societies have long possessed a variety of ethical frameworks. Some, such as medieval European societies, refused to acknowledge this fact, while others, such as medieval Chinese society, constructed their identities around a plurality of beliefs. The medieval Chinese were known for their concept of “harmonious accommodation of the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism” (*sanjiaoyuanrong* 三教圓融).² Each of these teachings has its own ethical framework and can be considered a distinct “culture” that interacts with the others.³ However, it is important to note that accommodating these different ethical frameworks was not without struggles. Indeed, such syntheses invariably raise questions: What happens when teachings conflict? Were the medieval Chinese merely feigning pluralism, or were they moral relativists? Was the apparent harmony between beliefs a result of insincerity, or was it a pretense for the domination of one teaching over the others?

In this article, I refer to the pluralistic position of Song Dynasty Chan master Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163) to argue that successful and honest intercultural ethics can preserve both diversity and sincerity at the deepest levels. He is renowned for his pluralistic motto: “the mind of bodhi is the mind of loyalty and appropriateness” (*putixin ji zhongyixin* 菩提心即忠義心). This motto suggests that Buddhist and Confucian ethical principles, despite seeming incompatibility, refer to the same underlying principles. I argue that the key to his surprising claim is his *kanhua* 看話 method, which achieves true liberating harmony through apparent confrontation. Dahui’s approach enabled sincere commitment to multiple ethical frameworks simultaneously, hence being highly relevant to the multicultural situation.

Unlike traditional comparative ethics, which often emphasizes the “de-barbarization” of “exotic” cultural practices, individuals in multicultural situations find it necessary to accommodate diverse ethical–hermeneutical traditions within themselves. Using Moeller’s terminology again, post-comparative philosophy not only encompasses “de-barbarization” but also seeks to “re-barbarize” mainstream philosophy by rejecting its unannounced nar-

rative dominance. Whereas comparative philosophy attempts to rationalize non-Western philosophies in terms of Western narratives, post-comparative philosophy aims to level the playing field, allowing different cultures to express themselves in their own languages.⁴ Comparison requires two or more entities that are different but concern the same thing. In traditional comparative ethics, that same thing is the same narrative. In post-comparative ethics, that same thing is the same situation. We are in a similar situation to Dahui and therefore could interact with him, even though we use a different set of vocabularies. Post-comparative ethics in this sense is not a novel approach, but a return to actual events on the ground, that comparison and integration among different ethical frameworks are not gimmicks but intrinsic to many of us, especially those hailing from postcolonial backgrounds. Instead of “Why compare?”, we should be asking “How to compare, so that accommodations can succeed?” This article presents a unique historical case of accommodation and advocates for the necessity of post-comparative ethics.

2. Synthesis of Ethical Frameworks before Dahui

The Tang and Song Dynasties in China (618–1279) faced a challenge similar to that encountered by Europe a few centuries ago and by our contemporary world: the emergence of ground-breaking new beliefs. In late classical Europe, this challenge was the advent of Christianity; in medieval China, it was the rapid expansion of Buddhism. By the end of the era, the harmonious accommodation of the three teachings mostly became the consensus, in contrast to the domination of Christianity in medieval Europe. The process, however, was not without its ups and downs, and the success of the resulting “harmonious accommodations” remains questionable. I picked Dahui because his approach to this problem was very distinctive, even for other Chinese Buddhist thinkers. Before delving into the details of his approach and effects, I will introduce the general situation of the Great Synthesis up to Dahui’s time and some typical positions with their respective problems.⁵

Buddhism was introduced to China around the first century and rapidly gained popularity during the chaotic centuries leading up to the establishment of the Tang Dynasty. From the very beginning, Chinese Buddhists borrowed terms from Daoism for translation of their sutras and also engaged in intellectual debates with the Daoists. Around that time, many specific Chinese sects of Buddhism were established, with infusion mostly from Daoism. Chan Buddhism 禪宗, to which Dahui belonged, also matured around this time. The emphasis on nothingness (*wu* 無) rather than emptiness (*kong* 空) in Chan Buddhism reflects the strong influence of Daoism. Buddhism grew so popular in the Tang Dynasty that, by the late Tang Dynasty, it was even threatening the dominance of Confucianism, the imperial ideology since the first century BCE. The renowned Tang Confucian scholar Han Yu 韓愈, (768–824), often regarded as the founder of the Neo-Confucian movement, actively advocated against Buddhism, calling for a revival of Confucian dominance. The Great Persecution of Buddhism by Emperor Wu of Tang (840–846)⁶ led to catastrophic consequences for Chinese Buddhism. Evidently, at this time, Buddhism and Confucianism were in a life and death struggle, resembling religious conflicts elsewhere.

Buddhism and Confucianism differ significantly in their metaphysical and ethical accounts. In the eyes of Neo-Confucian scholars, Confucianism engages with day-to-day life, while Buddhism is escapist. While political participation is a crucial aspect of Confucianism, Buddhism appears to dissuade its followers from active political involvement. Moreover, Buddhist monks live apart from their families, contrasting sharply with Confucianism, where family is paramount. At more granular levels, Buddhist practices such as head shaving, vegetarianism, and celibacy, all conflict with core Confucian rituals. The *Xiaojing* 孝經, a paramount Confucian classic (especially important in the Tang Dynasty), starts with the commandment, “The body, hair, and skin are gifts from one’s parents and should not be deliberately harmed (身體髮膚, 受之父母, 不敢毀傷).” Vegetarianism challenged ancestral worship practices involving animal sacrifices, while celibacy posed a challenge to the Confucian responsibility of producing offspring. Additionally, the xenophobic notion that Buddhism, often labelled with the term “barbarian” (*hu* 胡), is a foreign religion,

and therefore untrustworthy, was prevalent. In this sense, Han Yu's agitation against Buddhism also represented a tendency towards cultural purism.

Despite these differences, Buddhism, especially Chinese Buddhism traditions like Chan and Pure Land, continued to grow in popularity after the Great Persecution. Following the establishment of the new Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127), many Confucian reformers continued to see Buddhism as Confucianism's greatest threat (see Guan 2001). Their responses, however, evolved from outright persecutions of Buddhism and adherence to cultural purism towards enriching Confucianism the sophisticated metaphysical systems of Buddhism, which were conspicuously absent in the Confucianism of the time. This movement eventually led to the convergence of the three teachings during the two Songs.

Dahui's denomination, Chan Buddhism, played a pivotal role due to its unique background. As mentioned before, Chan was heavily influenced by Daoism from the very beginning. Additionally, Song Chan Buddhism saw an increased incorporation of Confucian principles in daily practices. Dahui stands as the renowned example of a Chan master incorporating a wide array of Confucian ideas.⁷ The most well-known among these ideas is his claim that "the mind of bodhi is at the same time the mind of loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and appropriateness (*yi* 義), they are the same in essence and different only in name (菩提心則忠義心也，名異而體同)" (T1998A, p. 912).⁸ The "mind of bodhi" refers to humans' original Buddha nature⁹, central to Chan practices. *Zhong* and *yi*, on the other hand, are primarily found in Confucian moral philosophy. These two kinds of minds are usually seen as opposite to each other: the mind of bodhi pertains to a solitary spiritual life aimed at enlightenment, while the latter an involved social life aimed at moral social conducts. Dahui transcended these distinctions. Although a Buddhist monk, he was actively involved in social-political affairs throughout his life. Centuries after his death, Buddhist Ming loyalists during the Manchu conquest of the Ming Dynasty still regarded him as the epitome of a patriotic monk (see Liao 2013). This involved persona stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical image of a Chan master as a quiet recluse. In fact, Dahui devoted much of his life to criticizing overly quietist Chan practices. Dahui's emphasis on the equal importance of Buddhist soteriology and Confucian social moral philosophy reflected the significant synthesis of his time while showcasing his unique personal characteristics. His uniqueness is manifested in his deviation from the three most common modes of intercultural ethical integration for Dahui's contemporaries. I would like to name them "theoretical synthesis," "expedient synthesis," and "crude syncretism." As for Dahui's position, Levering (1978) emphasizes his usage of the "Three Teachings return to one (*sanjiao guiyi* 三教歸一)" in the sense that "the Three teachings are all path to the same ultimate goal, sagehood" (Levering 1978, p. 140). I will build on this insight, but first of all, I will guide the discussion towards that direction by laying bare Dahui's criticism of the other modes of integration.

2.1. Theoretical Synthesis

Theoretical synthesis refers to the practice of conceptually uniting two distinct ethical frameworks without extending that unity into daily ethical practice. This approach is best represented by the Tang Dynasty Chan master Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841). Guifeng, a master before the Persecution, was deeply involved in integrating Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as various sects of Buddhism. Similar to Dahui, he referenced the key Confucian term *yi* (translated as "appropriateness" in the previous quotation from Dahui). A Guifeng saying cited by Dahui in one of his letters reads:

Do things in accordance with *yi*, then you are acting out of an enlightened mind; do things in contrary to *yi*, then you are acting out of a delusional mind. When you are unenlightened and led by feelings, you would be at the whim of karma at the end of life but when you are enlightened and not led by feelings, you would be able to turn your karma around. (作有義事，是惺悟心。作無義事，是狂亂心。狂亂由情念，臨終被業牽。惺悟不由情，臨終能專業。) (T1998A, p. 932)

Dahui quoted and argued against this statement in a letter to the Confucian scholar Wang Yingchen 汪應辰 (1118–1176). The character *yi*, which originally meant the “appropriate conduct of a person” (義, 己之威儀也) (Xu 1963, p. 267) evolved to designate two common concepts in the Chinese language: (1) meaning/definition; (2) appropriateness/justice. Just as *ren* 仁 is central to Confucius’ teachings, *yi* is fundamental to Mencius’, with *ren* and *yi* often paired together to encapsulate the Confucian ethical framework.

According to the editors of the Song official Chan compilation called *Jingde Chuan-denglu* 景德傳燈錄, when Guifeng talked about *yi*, he was stressing its theoretical aspect:

Clearly, the *yi* in this quotation pertains to rational ethical theory (*yili* 義理), not humanity and justice (*renyi* 仁義) or the kindness one is morally obliged to repay. (*enryi* 恩義) (義謂義理非謂仁義恩義意明。) (T2076, p. 308)

Although Guifeng himself did not explicitly state this, the depiction of him as a rational thinker aligns closely with his overall philosophy (hence, the compilers’ confidence). Contrary to most Chan masters of his era, who generally held negative views towards sutra-based schools such as consciousness only (唯識 Chinese Yogācāra) and Huayan 華嚴, Guifeng advocated for “the unity of Chan and the doctrinal schools (*jiao-chan yizhi*, 教禪一致).” In the aforementioned quote, he arguably extended this theoretical approach to the integration of Buddhist and Confucian thought. He argued that, from a theoretical standpoint, Confucian rational ethical theories do not conflict with Buddhist doctrines, suggesting that an enlightened Buddhist would comprehend these theories. Guifeng did not elaborate on the practical actions that could arise from this theoretical understanding.

Dahui’s criticized Guifeng, stating, “now when one looks at Guifeng’s statement, one cannot help but realize that this old man has divided emptiness into two realms “ (T1998A, p. 932). It seems that Dahui accused Guifeng of some sort of dualism. Was Guifeng’s statement not specifically aimed at bridging two philosophies? Did Dahui not also make similar statements, such as the aforementioned “the mind of bodhi is the mind of loyalty and appropriateness (*yi*)”?

The difference lies in Dahui’s interpretation of *yi* as moral feeling (*renyi*), rather than rational theory (*yili*). For Dahui, theory should not eclipse practice. As he stated in the same letter, “theorizing and practicing are one (為學為道一也)” (T1998A, p. 932). Arguing for the theoretical compatibility of Confucianism and Buddhism is one thing; truly integrating them in practice is another. For example, it is easy to argue that both social matters and spiritual matters are important, but when one is forced to make a practical choice between, say, eating meat or not, it is much harder to say, “both are good.” In Confucianism, sacrificing animals to ancestors is seen as a social responsibility, whereas in Buddhism, vegetarianism adheres to the commandment against killing. How, then, can one adhere to both simultaneously? Faced with these practical decisions, Guifeng invariably chose the Buddhist path. Thus, the compatibility he argued for remained purely theoretical.¹⁰ Levering notes that Dahui departs from Guifeng as “[he] sees Confucianism also as a path of self-disciplined *practice* toward a goal of realization...” (Levering 1978, p. 142/italics my emphasis). For Dahui, therefore, Confucianism shares not only a theoretical alignment with Buddhism but also the same practical goal.

We face similar situations in today’s world as well. Often, we agree to certain consensus “in principle” and then leave those agreements aside and still do things the old ways. Such agreements then merely serve to legitimize our existing, frequently contradictory lifestyles. For example, the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights sometimes contains actionable, specific statements like “Slavery and slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms,” but more often general statements like “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person,” which can be interpreted in radically different ways. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a prime example of how the right to life and liberty can sometimes be at odds. The drafters of the UDHR were aware of this danger, as evidenced by the last article that prohibits using the declaration to justify acts that oppose its other parts, though it remains unclear how this prohibition can be enforced. Dahui was equally dissatisfied with such patchwork solutions and Guifeng’s ‘all-is-good’ state-

ment. He raised the bar higher. In the letter to Wang, Dahui argued that “Confucianism is Buddhism, Buddhism is Confucianism (儒即釋釋即儒)” (T1998A, p. 932).

2.2. Expedient Synthesis

Such bold claims inevitably raise questions about sincerity and seriousness. This brings us to the second common form of synthesis, expedient synthesis, by which I mean the practice of pretending to accept certain ideas only for the sake of tricking people to believe in something else. We are all too familiar with politicians and companies pretending to have certain beliefs only to appease their voters or customers. Someone like Dahui certainly had the motivation to engage in this. The Confucian scholars were the dominating class of Song Dynasty. They were the monasteries’ main benefactors and could also enact pro- or anti-Buddhist policies. Dahui was abbot of several famous monasteries; so, in a sense, it was his responsibility to maintain good relationship with his Confucian “clients.” What harm is there in pandering a bit to your benefactors? This is particularly relevant given Buddhism’s tolerance for expedient means, epitomized by the concept of *upāya*, or *fangbian* 方便 in Chinese. In fact, it was believed that all of Buddha’s words are in some sense expedient words aimed at enlightening the masses because the ultimate truth is ineffable. This functionalist attitude is most evident in Chan Buddhism, whose central tenets are “no establishment of (fixed) language” and “transmission without dogmas (不立文字、教外別傳).”

Many contemporary Buddhist scholars, such as Morten Schlütter, tend to emphasize Dahui’s social–economic motives. In *How Zen Became Zen* (2008), Schlütter makes the case that Dahui’s support of Confucianism was motivated mostly by his desire to win over the influential Confucian clientele from his sectarian rivals. Schlütter argued that “support and patronage from members of the literati...was also crucial for the success of the Chan school in general and for the growth or decline of individual Chan lineages in particular” (Schlütter 2008, p. 55). Support for this comes from Dahui’s close relationships with prominent Confucian scholars and court officials. According to Schlütter, in his most famous endeavor during his lifetime, the sectarian conflict between *kanhua* Chan (which Dahui developed) and silent illumination Chan, Dahui’s beliefs were shaped by the marketing war against the other Chan sects. Schlütter argues, “The need for literati patronage...deeply influenced the development of Chan ideology and soteriology and stimulated the rise of silent illumination and *kanhua* Chan” (Schlütter 2008, p. 55). This claim extends beyond merely stating that Chan masters were involved with the literati. Schlütter places patronage as a transformative factor in the growth of Chan theories and practices, not the other way around. Schlütter particularly notes Dahui’s concern over many literati’s inclination towards silent illumination, especially in the context of *kanhua* Chan’s critique of it. He says, “Dahui was even more concerned about the appeal that silent illumination held for...the educated elite. By far most of Dahui’s attacks on silent illumination, as well as most of the passages in which he advocates *kanhua* Chan, are found in sermons dedicated to literati or in letters written to them” (Schlütter 2008, p. 125). If the purported synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism in Dahui’s teachings is merely an expedient means, it cannot be considered a genuine synthesis and thus fails as a model for robust post-comparative ethics.

Nevertheless, I would like to point out that Dahui’s teachings and personal experiences paint a very different picture from this scenario of expediency. His personal choices indicate that his belief in Confucian principles was as sincere as his commitment to Buddhism.

In terms of teachings, Dahui actively dissuaded Confucian scholars from abandoning their social roles to join monastic life. In a letter to a lay practitioner, Dahui stated that remaining in the laity does not preclude enlightenment. It is even a more valuable kind of enlightenment. Monks are not tested by all the temptations of the material world. A lay person, on the other hand, must overcome that great difficulty to reach enlightenment.

Therefore, a lay person's enlightenment is even more valuable than that of a monastic. Dahui said:

There is no need to pursue a monastic life. There is no need to deform yourself, harm your appearance and attires, forsake your heavenly nature and cease offering to your ancestors, or betray Confucianism. The Buddha does not ask people to do this. He only says "productive works are not against truth. Do not go against reality but follow your own nature and become enlightened in accordance with reality." (不須求出家、造妖捏怪、毀形壞服、滅天性絕祭祀、作名教中罪人。佛不教人如此，只說.....治生產業，皆順正理。與實相不相違背但只依本分，隨其所證。) (T1998A, p. 895)

The words Dahui used to describe monastic life are harsh, and almost sound like a hard-line Neo-Confucianist. It even complicated matters for himself as he was also a monastic. Was he, therefore, not accusing himself of "forsaking heavenly nature"?

To that point, Dahui again emphasized the importance of moral feelings (*renyi*). He quoted Buddha saying the first step towards enlightenment is to follow one's own nature. The Chinese context included reverence for the spirits of one's dead ancestors, although per Buddhist cosmology, the spirit of the ancestors should not remain in this world after their death. One might argue he was merely conserving cultural traditions by retaining the appearance of ancestral rituals. However, when read in conjunction with the previously mentioned letter to Wang, it becomes clear that cultivating one's inner moral nature was a crucial aspect of Dahui's practice. This nature may appear differently in different cases, but in the end, they all converge to where the Buddhists call buddhahood and the Confucianists call sagehood.

Further convincing evidence of Dahui's sincerity in valuing Confucianism is his concrete actions that aligned with Confucian emphasis on social and political responsibilities.¹¹ Although as a Buddhist monk, Dahui's desire to attract the support of Confucian scholars did not necessitate his active participation in politics, he chose to do so. He became a vocal supporter of the pro-resistance (to the Jurchen occupation of Northern China) camp in the imperial court. The proximity of Jingshan monastery 徑山寺, where he was the abbot, to the imperial capital meant it was frequented by notable pro-resistance officials who discussed court politics with him.

In April 1141, Dahui welcomed his close friend and Neo-Confucian scholar Zhang Jicheng 張九成 (1092–1159) to Jingshan. Zhang and Dahui had repeatedly met and written to each other before. Zhang's understanding of Buddhism deeply impressed Dahui. Another point of similarity between these two men was their aligned political stances. Both men supported armed resistance against the Jurchen¹² Jin Dynasty, who had occupied Northern China after swiftly defeating the Northern Song army between 1125 and 1127, which in the eyes of many Chinese of that time was a disaster both for people's livelihood and for their cultural tradition. During this meeting, Dahui recited a poem to Zhang that invoked the imagery of the "bow for god's arm (神臂弓)," a weapon that the Song army used against Jurchen invaders.

Meanwhile, the imperial court was dominated by the defeatist prime minister Qin Hui 秦檜 (1091–1155). Emperor Gaozong 宋高宗 (1107–1187) was also known to favor appeasement, despite its widespread unpopularity. The Song people yearned to liberate their compatriots, who in their eyes were living under the oppression of foreign invaders. In response to the widespread discontent, Qin's government grew increasingly autocratic. It was under this circumstance that Dahui showed his unwavering support to Zhang's pro-resistance movement. He repeatedly expressed his support to other Confucian statesmen as well. For example, in this letter to Cheng Jigong 成季恭¹³: "Although I am a Buddhist monk, my love of the emperor and the country is equal with that of you righteous and loyal Confucian statesmen (予雖學佛者，然愛君憂國之心與忠義士大夫等)" (T1998A, p. 912). Indeed, he was again standing alongside his benefactors as well. However, his active participation in politics and challenges against the government could significantly undermine any financial motivations.

Dahui is said to have compared Qin's government to a "stinky leather sock" (*choupiwa*, 臭皮襪) pretending to be "a thousand layers of armor" (*qianchongjia*, 千重甲). The government was greatly offended by both Dahui and Zhang. Qin had both men exiled and Dahui's status as a monk revoked for the next seventeen years. In that year, Dahui was fifty-three years old and the head of one of the most prestigious monasteries in the nation. He had no reason to risk angering the prime minister if his only goal was to keep his monastery running. His actions aligned with his words, showing a genuine belief in the Confucian principles of loyalty and appropriateness. Were he a spiritual leader or politician today, he would be renowned for his sincerity and commitment to both ethical frameworks with which he identified. The question now arises: How was this possible?

2.3. Crude Syncretism

Before discussing Dahui's own solution, let us explore one last widely adopted form of intercultural ethical synthesis: crude syncretism. This is the type of synthesis most closely associated with the Chinese concept of harmonious accommodation of the three teachings (*yuanrong*), yet it includes nuanced but significant differences that I will delineate. Crude syncretism refers to the practice of dividing one's ethical life into different domains, allowing a single ethical framework to govern each domain. This approach allows for the combination of multiple ethical frameworks into a new, harmonious ethical system without conflicts. This kind of "harmony," however, feels more like some ad hoc patchwork than a coherent and sincere ethical framework. Practitioners chose to overlook the apparent conflicts between different systems. In China, it could be argued that this passive "harmony" was an inevitable compromise among the Three Teachings, with none able to completely dominate. Most ordinary people are content with such an incoherent system, as long as it functions. Within this system, however, all original belief systems are de-contextualized, fragmented, and forcefully assembled based on expediency. For instance, an individual might seek good grades at a Confucian temple, good fortune at a Buddhist temple, and good health at a Daoist temple, thereby overlooking the higher ethical goals of those frameworks—social responsibility in Confucianism, enlightenment in Buddhism, and naturalness in Daoism. Can those customs still count as ethical frameworks if they no longer pursue ethical goals?

In a slightly improved scenario, one might still uphold the objectives but confine them to isolated domains. It is common to adhere to Confucianism for social affairs and Buddhism or Daoism for personal matters. This form of crude syncretism, however, risks fragmenting one's ethical life, or as Dahui put it, "dividing emptiness into two different realms." This could lead to being either inconsistent or insincere. One domain might also become subordinate to the other, for instance, the personal to the social, or vice-versa. For example, when it comes to voting on whether to allow the building of a homeless shelter in their community, a self-declared progressivist who "believes in equality" might choose to reject the bill on the conservative ground of inviolable rights to private property.

Admittedly, Dahui's own teachings also contained elements of crude syncretism, like those of many Buddhists in his era. In Chinese Buddhism, the effort to reconcile different beliefs as well as different branches of Buddhism is called *yuanrong* 圓融, literally meaning "perfectly melting together," and can be translated as "harmonious accommodation".¹⁴ In Dahui's letter to Cheng Jigong, which provided our key quote about the loyal-appropriate and bodhi minds, he also cited Huayan master Li Tongxuan's 李通玄 (635–730) effort to merge *yuanrong* and "differentiated practices (*xingbu* 行佈)" into an even higher form of *yuanrong*. There are various interpretations of *yuanrong* from this elevated perspective. The most common interpretation is that the different teachings are considered identical in nature. Thus, a comprehensive evaluation of any tradition would lead back to the same source.

In a sense, this was indeed Dahui's ultimate argument. For Dahui, that source was termed *dao* 道. In his own words, "although sages of the three teachings [the Buddha, Laozi and Confucius have different doctrines (*jiao* 教), their *dao* returns to the same source

(三教聖人立教雖異，而其道同歸一致)” (T1998A, p. 906). Unlike Guifeng, Dahui’s conception of *dao* could not remain purely theoretical. Dahui was more interested in its ethical practices. He told several disciples that the ultimate goal of all three teachings was to “encourage people to perform good deeds” (勸人為善). In all three teachings, ethical acts involve first discovering one’s inherent good nature and then acting in accordance with it:

From ancient times there is this format for goodness. [In terms of Confucianism], one reads extensively to understand where the sage places their mind. Once you understand that your mind will be on the right path. Once your mind is on the right path then all kinds of desires and wrong teachings cannot pollute you. (古來自有為善底樣式。博極群書只要知聖人所用心處，知得了自家心術即正，心術正則種種雜毒種種邪說不相染污矣。) (T1998A, p. 913)

It presents an intriguing scene where Dahui, the Buddhist master, instructs a young Confucian scholar in Confucian studies using Confucian terminology. This fluency in Confucian language indicates that Dahui considered himself an insider in Confucian discourse.

Dahui’s pursuit of *yuanrong* extended beyond Confucianism. He also defended Daoism against criticisms from Neo-Confucian scholars. In a direct response to some Neo-Confucian criticism on Buddhism and Daoism, Dahui said:

The criticism of Laozi’s technique for longevity is similar to the forced criticism of Buddhism as nihilistic. Laozi never talked about keeping one’s body in the world as long as possible. He said only that serendipity and effortless action is where one returns and resides when one becomes natural. (如俗謂李老君說長生之術，正如硬差排佛談空寂之法無異。老子之書元不曾說留形住世，亦以清淨無為為自然歸宿之處。) (T1998A, p. 906)

While it is understandable that, as a Buddhist monk, he defended Buddhism, his willingness to defend Daoism, a potential rival for “clientele,” is noteworthy. This further demonstrates that Dahui’s endeavor toward *yuanrong* transcended mere expediency.

Dahui was also cognizant of the issue of *yuanrong* being used as a metonym for crude syncretism. During a public sermon, he cited a conversation with the lay practitioner and Confucian scholar Feng Ji 馮楫 (?–1153). When queried about the differences between Confucianism and Buddhism, Feng told Dahui, “They possess different doctrines but share the same goal of encouraging people to perform good deeds (若論立教，則有不同；若論勸人為善，則同)” (M1540).¹⁵ However, Dahui quickly pointed out that they align in the principles (*li*) but diverge in specific practices (*shi* 事) (然於理則同，於事則不同). He provided the example that Confucianism mandates marriage and the continuation of the bloodline, whereas Chinese Buddhism demands that monks abstain from marriage. Therefore, in terms of concrete matters, Confucianism and Buddhism can offer contradictory guidance for actions. What should one do? Feng’s response was typical of crude syncretism: Buddhism addresses other-worldly concerns, and Confucianism focuses on this-worldly matters (釋氏主出世間教，儒主名教). Taiwanese scholar Lin Yizheng¹⁶ contended that the fact that Dahui quotes Feng Ji here indicates agreement with Feng’s views (Lin 1999, p. 155), which would lead to the conclusion that Dahui also saw Confucianism and Buddhism as governing two separate parts of the world (for ethics and soteriology). This stance would place him perilously near to crude syncretism.

I wish to highlight two distinctions between Dahui and crude syncretism: (1) Unlike a crude syncretist, Dahui unequivocally acknowledged that Confucianism and Buddhism ethical practices were contradictory; (2) For Dahui, the priority was not to keep different traditions separate to maintain a peaceful façade, but to seek the ineffable *dao* that reconciles their apparent contradictions and underlying harmony.

The first distinction is elucidated by Dahui’s comments on how joining Buddhist monasteries would interfere with Confucian social responsibilities. Crude syncretists aimed to conceal such incompatibilities to prevent conflict. In contrast, Dahui explicitly noted that practitioners encountered either/or choices in those situations and that conflicts were inevitable. As Levering puts it, “[Dahui said that] facile reconciliation [...] results in mis-

understanding both Buddha and Confucius, obscuring both the real differences in conceptualization and the real truth of each" (Levering 1978, pp. 149–50). The second distinction is illuminated by Dahui's emphasis on soteriology. For him, this-worldly concerns transcended mere material existence, serving both as manifestations of and paths toward enlightenment. In the sermon citing Feng Ji, Dahui encouraged Prefect Yu, the official sponsoring the sermon, to contemplate "this one thing under your own feet, namely where you came from before birth and go to after death (自己脚跟下生從何處來百年後却向甚處去底一件事)" (M1540).¹⁷ He advised most of his lay followers to keep this concept forefront in their minds. Feng Ji's type of crude syncretism, while easily understandable and more comfortable for practitioners, does not fulfill Dahui's soteriological objectives. It embodies the same issue Dahui criticized Guifeng for: dividing emptiness into two realms—the world and the transcendental one.

Both these two differences fundamentally distinguish Dahui from crude syncretists, despite both groups prioritizing harmony: Crude syncretists aimed to prevent different intellectual traditions from infringing on each other's domains so as to avoid conflict and achieve passive harmony in everyday life; Dahui, on the other hand, was ultimately committed to finding the deepest harmony within the *dao*. While he acknowledged Feng Ji's point that Confucianism and Buddhism have their strengths in distinct areas, he did not hesitate to reveal their contradictions. Thus, Dahui's approach to harmonious accommodation uniquely did not pursue complete harmony in its manifestations. Indeed, he readily exposed the inner conflicts of these manifestations, believing that through these conflicts, a deeper harmony of the *dao* would emerge.

3. *Kanhua*: Harmonious Accommodation through Confrontation

Miriam Levering agrees that, for Dahui, "things which are clearly different in phenomenal manifestation may be one in essence, and two apparently different things may be shown to be the two sides of the essence-manifestation coin" (Levering 1978, p. 143). She claims that "Ta-hui's ability to live with three distinct faiths and yet believe them all true lies in a willingness to ignore differences of phenomenal detail" (Levering 1978, p. 166). However, as quoted in the previous section, Levering also observes that Dahui did not pretend that there are no conflicts between Confucianism and Buddhism. How do we explain this apparent contradiction? I suggest bringing in the leitmotif of Dahui's *kanhua* method: harmony through confrontations. *Kanhua* meditation is Dahui's most famous invention, and continues to be practiced in Chan monasteries today. By his era, Chan Buddhism had developed a sophisticated literary tradition, despite its disdain for fixated language. Many Chan masters between the two Songs worked to solve this problem by turning away from intellectualist gradualism towards more spontaneous practice.¹⁸ Some introduced silent illumination meditation, which entirely disregarded the Chan literature, requiring practitioners merely to sit and empty their minds. Similar to the "McMindfulness" phenomenon among middle-class Western meditators, many Confucian scholars gravitated towards this simple method for its work-related stress relief. Dahui was, however, concerned that these practitioners were not genuinely pursuing enlightenment. He sought a method that could make use of the existing Chan literature without becoming mired in fixated language.

That was the starting point of his invention of *kanhua*. The initial step involves allowing doubt to surface regarding one's worldview. Doubt renders the world elusive, naturally prompting one to seek clarification. The doubt asks for both a clarification, therefore is enlightening, and of the world, therefore is not isolated in the will to a transcendental realm. Dahui, hence, often reiterated the renowned assertion that "great enlightenment follows great doubt (大疑之下必有大悟)" (T1998A, p. 886).

Having established a right kind of will for enlightenment, Dahui's signature approach was to assign each practitioner a critical phrase (*huatou* 話頭) from a famous Chan story (*gong'an* 公案, literally "public case"). The most frequently used is the Chan story of Zhaozhou's *wu* 無. Others are usually from classical Chan stories as well. The novelty of Dahui's approach involved extracting a critical phrase from the entire Chan story. For example, in

Zhaozhou's "dogs have no buddha nature," the critical phrase is the single utterance, *wu* (no, nothing). This critical phrase renders the Chan story characteristically "non-sensical." Out of all possible responses, why did Zhaozhou chose one that makes no sense? Similar to the aforementioned existential contemplation over life and death, this critical phrase also stirs up great doubt in the practitioner. In several letters, Dahui explicitly stated that the doubt concerning life and death should be transferred to the doubt surrounding the word *wu* (但將這疑生不知來處死不知去處底心移來無字上) (T1998A, p. 911). The critical phrase is positioned directly at the heart of existential doubt to facilitate this process.

Transferring existential doubt onto the critical phrase has an immediate effect. The disillusioned mind trapped in the cycle of life, along with the great existential doubt, will cease (則交加之心不行矣, 交加之心既不行則疑生死來去底心將絕矣) (T1998A, p. 911). Futural tense is needed here as Dahui clarified that one should *begin* the *kanhua* practice at the threshold between the extinguishment and non-extinguishment of existential doubt regarding life and death 但向將絕未絕之處 (T1998A, p. 911). After sufficient preparation, the core of *kanhua* practice takes place within this liminal space. However, this is where describing the *kanhua* practice becomes nearly impossible.

We know where the practice should occur, but how does it unfold? Dahui used several verbs to designate this act. In the letter to Householder Miaoming, from which the previous quotes are derived, the verb used is *siai* "struggle" (*siai* 廝崖). This "struggle" was intended to underpin all daily activities. This consistency was crucial for Confucian scholars, often busy government officials with limited time for regular religious practices like sitting meditation and chanting. Dahui stated that, as long as they kept the critical phrase in mind, they were practicing *kanhua*. He considered it a superior practice to allocate specific times for sitting and chanting. Practitioners now integrate *kanhua* meditation into every moment of their lives. For example, still in the Miaoming letter, Dahui said: "Buddha Dharma permeates your everyday life, your moving, staying, sitting up, and lying down, your eating and drinking, your daily interactions (佛法在爾日用處、行住坐臥處、喫粥喫飯處、語言相問處)" (T1998A, p. 911).

The practitioner should not, however, seek any gradual, tangible improvement through this daily practice. Dahui was a firm believer in sudden enlightenment. When the appropriate time (*shiji* 時機) arrives, enlightenment will suddenly "splash out" 時節因緣到來驀然噴地一下 (T1998A, p. 887). Contrary to the dramatic phrasing of enlightenment "splashing out," Dahui's description of *kanhua* practice's culmination elsewhere is admittedly more anti-climactic: enlightenment simply occurs, without anything extraordinary. However, there are psycho-somatic signs indicating one is in the correct state.¹⁹ Dahui described this state with terms like "tasteless (*meiziwei* 沒滋味)," "clueless (*meibabi* 沒巴鼻)," "hot at mind (*xintoure* 心頭熱)." The word most frequently used, however, is "bored/stuffy (*men* 悶)." This term is sometimes paired with "frustrated (*fanmen* 煩悶)," and at other times with "confused (*mimen* 迷悶)." Boredom is apparently the disposition Dahui chose to highlight. He consistently reminded his correspondents that feeling insurmountable boredom signified being precisely in the "right moment (好底時節)" (T1998A, p. 939). However, even with everything done correctly, enlightenment cannot be assured. Practitioners can only prepare an open time-space, where enlightenment "could" occur. The entire *kanhua* process serves as preparation for the potential arrival of enlightenment, which lies beyond human control.²⁰ *Kanhua* concerns not the theoretical understanding of the *huatou*, but ultimately a direct experience of enlightenment. In Victor Sōgen Hori's words, it is a form of "vertical insight, the insight that comes from the experience of realizing, making real, the nonduality of subject and object" (Hori 2006, p. 206).

I propose applying the *kanhua* approach to the concept of harmonious accommodation. Just as enlightenment may be firstly experienced as boredom and frustration in *kanhua*, the harmony of the *dao* could present itself as challenges to the dogmatic perceptions of individual traditions. Echoing the earlier quote, Dahui concurred with Feng Ji that the ultimate principle—the emerging and ineffable *dao* underlying various traditions—is harmonious, though its manifestations (experience-wise necessary, given *dao*'s ineffability) in-

variably differ. Bernard Faure, in his discussion of the perlocutionary function of *gong'an* practice, notes that “they also imply a shift from the ontological standpoint that conceives of truth as already there [...] toward a conception of truth in the process of emerging in constant actualization” (Faure 1993, p. 213). Dahui introduced practical steps to this theoretical insight by demonstrating that conflicts within individual traditions sharply enhance our understanding of the emerging and ineffable *dao*.

The crucial point is that stagnated ideas must be dismantled for the harmonious origin to reveal itself anew. Adherents of pure traditions risk equating their tradition with the entirety of the ultimate truth. However, Dahui maintained that words could not encapsulate the ultimate truth. All specific traditions represent facets of the ultimate truth but never the entirety of it, including any dogmatic beliefs within Buddhism. Yet, in reality, many individuals view their own tradition as the singular embodiment of the ultimate truth, deeming all other traditions as heretical. This tendency was epitomized in Dahui’s era by Neo-Confucianists who disregarded their Buddhist roots and sought to eradicate Buddhism and Daoism in pursuit of Confucian purity. Even crude syncretists were forming a new tradition that would once again claim to exclusively represent the ultimate truth. This inclination I term “cultural purism.”

While Dahui did not overtly draw this connection, his stance against cultural purism closely mirrored his *kanhua* approach to everyday language by appealing to his audience’s personal experiences. Considering the famous “the mind of loyalty and appropriateness is the mind of bodhi,” it is clear that the operative element was the *xin* 心, the “(heart-)mind.” In Chinese philosophy, the mind is considered a realm beyond language, accessible only to the individual. Yet, if individuals are true to themselves, they will experience similar moral and transcendental feelings. In Chan, this concept is encapsulated in the motto “directly pointing to the mind (直指人心),” which immediately follows the principle of “no establishment of [fixated] language.” Dahui was not verbally explaining the equivalence of these two kinds of minds; instead, he directly asked his audience: “Do you experience these two minds simultaneously?” He anticipated a resounding “yes” from his audience, as that reflected his own experience.

This feeling made it explicit to his contemporary Chinese audience that, deep within their own minds, they were simultaneously 100% Confucian and 100% Buddhist, perhaps also 100% Daoists, among others. For Dahui, Buddhist liberation was undoubtedly the “first matter of life,” yet Confucian humanity and appropriateness were equally indispensable, as was Daoist effortless action. Stopping here, one might believe that this is not a significant issue. Delving into the details, however, reveals that these traditions are in conflict with each other, as Dahui acknowledged. At this juncture, the audience would find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. They must recognize the existence of diverse sources within their tradition, yet also acknowledge that these sources conflict with one another. What, then, is the escape from this predicament?

Perhaps there is no exit, nor is there a need to seek one. It is precisely the unattainability of harmony at the manifested level that enables a deeper harmony at the *dao* level. Many people drift further away from the *dao* because they become too entangled in the pursuit of a pure tradition. Consequently, they overlook the other facets of the *dao*. By adhering to Dahui’s advice, however, if one leans too far in any one direction, they are promptly reminded of the additional aspects of the *dao* that also merit attention. Dahui’s concept of harmonious accommodation encourages continuous movement along the *dao*, preventing stagnation in any single tradition, including Buddhism, akin to how *kanhua* liberates practitioners from the constraints of everyday language. Interestingly, moving away from Buddhism in this manner actually fulfills the Buddhist principle of emptiness. “The mind of bodhi is the mind of loyalty and appropriateness” itself can be considered a critical phrase. Whenever we find ourselves ensnared by the illusion of purity, merely contemplating this paradoxical critical phrase can free us to traverse the *dao* once more. Diltheyan scholar Makkreel would concur that Dahui’s *kanhua* approach to interculturality aligns closely with his vision of a multicultural hermeneutics that “take account of both

the media that make commonality possible and those obstacles, real or imagined, that divide us” (Makkreel 2015, p. 52). Drawing from Lyotard’s concept of “differend,” these obstacles can create scenarios where “something ‘asks’ to be put into phrases that do not yet exist” (Makkreel 2015, p. 52). Thus, a hermeneutics rooted in contradictions holds the potential to engender something novel.

4. Effects of Harmonious Accommodation through Confrontation for Post-Comparative Ethics

Dahui’s approach might appear counterintuitive, yet it offers a novel alternative that merits consideration for post-comparative ethics and our broader multicultural context. In our day-to-day life, engaging with different ethical frameworks is not just an “interest” but a necessity. Similar to the medieval Chinese, many of us are simultaneously committed to conflicting ethical frameworks.

This article initially explored various common responses people have to this situation. Some, like Guifeng Zongmi, find satisfaction in theoretically reconciling different ethical frames. We might believe that all religions strive for goodness or enlightenment, yet ultimately, one must choose actions like burning incense at the Qingming Festival (a Confucian ancestral worship ceremony). One should not underestimate the significance of “marginal” issues such as this. This “minor” ceremony triggered the Chinese Rites Controversy during the 17th and 18th Centuries, ultimately leading to the prohibition of Catholicism in Qing China. On an individual level, theoretical reconciliation offers little aid in practical decisions, instead providing a misleading assurance that one’s beliefs are not contradictory. Some individuals are fully aware that their beliefs clash but feign conformity for expedient reasons, like adhering to social norms or placating loved ones. Their practices lack a moral intention from the outset. Then, there’s the Chinese model of syncretism, in which one adheres to a particular ethical framework within a specific domain. This approach not only fractures the integrity of ethical frameworks but also segments different aspects of one’s life. If the primary purpose of sitting meditation is relaxation after work, to what extent does it remain Buddhist? To what extent does it retain its ethical–soteriological essence?

As this article contends, Dahui opposed these practices. The harmony sought by these individuals merely constitutes the absence of contradictions within one’s mind and confrontations within society at large. While eradicating societal confrontations is a noble goal and a cornerstone of contemporary multicultural societies, purging one’s mind of contradictions leads one to become either a dogmatic cultural purist or an amoral opportunist. The former will lead to societal confrontations eventually and the latter to outright moral skepticism. The dilemma Levering faces in terms of Dahui’s recognition or ignorance of the conflicts between Confucianism and Buddhism stems from her judgment that Dahui adhered to the cultural purist principle common among many Chinese, which holds that “one cultural unit should have one state to govern it, and that the political unit should rest on an ideological unity—a clearly defined way of doing and thinking” (Levering 1978, p. 103). Levering’s dilemma can be resolved by recognizing that, for Dahui, apparent confrontations are not inherently detrimental but can lead to a higher form of harmony.

Dahui’s *kanhua* method shows that apparent harmony might conceal deeper inconsistencies, and perceived confrontations can guide one towards recognizing the ineffable harmony underlying diverse ethical frameworks, known as *dao*. Key to Dahui’s approach is sincerity. One has to first of all sincerely commit to an ethical life, even if it results in confrontations within one’s beliefs. According to Dahui, negative affect, such as frustrations, may not necessarily indicate something adverse. It is through frustration that one may seek improvement along the path of *dao*. All ethical frameworks are manifestations of the *dao*, and as such, they are valid only in specific contexts. While no ethical framework can claim universal truth, each reflects aspects of the *dao*.

Even for those skeptical of an underlying harmony called *dao* beneath all ethical frameworks, harmonious accommodation through confrontation remains valuable for prevent-

ing prejudice. Becoming a cultural purist by anchoring beliefs in a single ethical framework, be it Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, or Marxism, often leads to overlooking the reality that individuals are influenced by multiple ethical traditions simultaneously. This can lead to fundamentalism, where no thoughts but their own are permitted. Dahui urged individuals to sincerely reflect upon their ethical commitments. Cultural purists are devoid of such reflection, as their narratives offer no pause for introspection. They readily dismiss other beliefs upon encountering differences. Dahui advocated for perpetual doubting of one's thoughts. Such doubt arises from a sincere commitment to an ethical life. These doubts frequently precipitate internal confrontations that halt one's habitual thinking, compelling reflection. For example, a Buddhist–Confucian grappling with the decision to become vegetarian is compelled to confront their deeper ethical convictions. The crucial aspect is not their consumption of meat, but the rationale behind it. A dogmatic Confucian may dismiss vegetarianism as unfilial, thus missing a deeper inquiry. Conversely, someone deeply committed to ethical principles would ponder the reasons behind animal sacrifice. They can then base their ethical choices on thorough reflection. Such individuals are more likely to accept differing choices from others, as they understand—not merely tolerate—perspectives from the other side.

In conclusion, Dahui's method of harmonious accommodation through confrontation embodies a sincerely ethical stance that values diversity. For him, diversity is not a problem to solve, but a crucial element for a successful ethical life. Thus, for Dahui, comparing different ethical frameworks is not merely intriguing, but necessary and organically integrated into everyone's ethical life. Hence, his approach strongly advocates for a shift towards post-comparative ethics, underscoring the value of comparison in addressing real-world issues.

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Notes

- ¹ I use the term “multicultural situation” in contrast to the more widely used “multiculturalism.” Multiculturalism, a controversial concept, generally refers to the equal treatment of marginalized cultures within a society. Some proponents, such as Charles Taylor, equate it to a politics of recognition (see Taylor's (1994) chapter “The Politics of Recognition” in *Multiculturalism*), where minority cultures are recognized and respected as equal. Others, like Nancy Fraser, argue that it should also encompass economic redistribution (see Fraser's (1997) response in *Justice Interruptus*). Both arguments for multiculturalism approach from a societal perspective, focusing on the question of justice. However, this article focuses more on the phenomenon in which multicultural individuals face the ethical dilemma of choosing which ethical framework to follow. I am not discussing whether these individuals support a political orientation known as multiculturalism, but rather the existential reality they inhabit, which is inherently multicultural.
- ² Recent scholarship has challenged the notion of the “Three Teachings” as three distinctive “religions” or “thought systems.” Tomoko Masuzawa, for example, points out that the essentialized categorization of certain “world religions”—such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—is a Western invention, reflecting Western essentialized biases about what constitutes a religion (see Masuzawa 2005, pp. 2–13). I fully recognize that the distinctions between these three religions are much fuzzier in practice than they appear. I adhere to the same principle James Robson applied to Daoist–Buddhist interactions: “however we read the material and textual record, we must resist interpreting the medieval religious landscape in terms of later constructs that are often coloured by European conceptions of religions as church-based sectarian groups” (Robson 2009, p. 325). Similar warnings have been issued by other scholars of medieval China, including Christine Mollier (2008) and Robert Sharf. I will approach these interactions from the perspective of a participant in that exchange himself—namely, Dahui Zonggao, the protagonist of this article.
- ³ Although I have defined culture in a specific way, counterarguments could persist that these three traditions all belong to the same overarching Chinese culture, thus precluding discussions of a multicultural situation in medieval China. Scholars such as Robert Sharf caution against the notion that Chinese Buddhism is merely an offshoot of South Asian culture (See Sharf 2002, pp.

17–21). The purported Indian origins of Chinese Buddhist traditions, such as Chan and Pure Land, are often considered later constructs. My claim does not extend as far as that of some Chinese Buddhists who view Chan Buddhism as the secretly transmitted teachings of the Indian master Bodhidharma. I just want to argue that Buddhism’s spread to China introduced certain non-indigenous features into the Chinese culture. For example, the 20th-century Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan argued that Buddhism introduced the concept of the “universal mind” to Chinese thought (Feng 1976, p. 243). My claim is simply that not all aspects of Chinese culture can be traced back to the origins of Chinese civilization, with the influence of Chinese Buddhism serving as a prime example.

The example Moeller provides is Roger Ames’ work on Confucian role ethics, where Ames invokes Confucianism in its own terms to tackle ethical problems.

Miriam Levering (1978) has an exhaustive account on the historical development of the Three Teachings with Dahui at the center. My account here is a brief overview of that history highlighting Dahui’s role.

Huichang Huifo 會昌毀佛.

As Miriam Levering points out, “Among Ta-hui’s [Dahui] dharma heirs and their students the notion that the ‘Three Teachings return to one’ became very popular, and Ta-hui is afforded credit (or blame) for having been the source of its popularity” (Levering 1978, p. 105).

All translations of Dahui’s writings are my own, as discussing the translations of specific words is crucial for this article.

Bodhi means awakening in Sanskrit.

Arguably even at the theoretical level, Guifeng’s integration remains hierarchical. Based on Guifeng’s *Yuanren Lun* 原人論, Levering points out that for him, “only Buddhist teachings, and in fact only the teachings of one school of Buddhism, enable one to understand the most profound truth about the origin of man” (Levering 1978, p. 110) and that “he regards Confucian and Daoist understandings of the original nature of man as merely provisional” (Levering 1978, p. 111).

Mahayana Buddhism itself of course also emphasized social responsibilities and compassion but in traditional Chinese thought, a key difference between Confucianism and Buddhism was that the former concerned the public while the latter concerned the individual.

The Jurchens were Tungusic-speaking hunter–gatherers and semi-pastoralists from what is today’s Manchuria region. They were also the ancestors of the Manchu people who founded the Qing Dynasty.

This was a mid-level official (*jiji*, 機宜) whose biographical data cannot be found; *jigong* was his courtesy name *zi* 字.

I took the accommodation part from William Crawford’s 2009 translation in the title of Pang Pu’s “An Accommodation (*yuanrong*) of Anxiety and Joy” (Pang 2009) and added “harmonious” to highlight its emphasis on harmony (*he* 和), not conformation (*tong* 同).

No pagination on CBETA for M1540, scroll four section A30 onwards. The following quotes on Feng Ji are from the same place.

林義正 (Lin 1999), see his “Synthesis of Confucianism and Buddhism: An Investigation with Dahui Zonggao’s Thoughts at the Center”.

Same place as the earlier M1540 quotes.

Robert Buswell credits Dahui’s “short-cut” method of *kanhua* as the pinnacle of subitism (the opposite of gradualism) as in it “all traces of ‘gradualism’ have been rigorously excised” (Buswell 1987, p. 90).

Bernard Faure cautions us against a psychological reading of Chan practice, an essentialist and reductionist act he accuses D.T. Suzuki of committing (Faure 1993, pp. 63–64). Although I am referring to a psychological impact here, I emphasize that the end of Chan practice transcends the psychological. That caution might suit Dahui’s criticism of silent illumination’s fascination with tranquillity. However, in *kanhua*, the psycho-somatic reactions are not the goals in themselves but indications of moving beyond fixated language.

Victor Sōgen Hori (2006) discusses a similar practice called *jakugo* in contemporary Japanese Zen, detailing his own experiences, which resonate with Dahui’s description of *kanhua*. Hori recalled being assigned Zhaozhou’s *Wu* (Jpn. *Mu*) to meditate on and spending weeks searching for the answer in the *Zen Phrase Book*. His master, growing impatient, provided a hint, leading Hori to suddenly see the answer all over the *Zen Phrase Book*. (Hori 2006, p. 179) This story closely mirrors Dahui’s experience with his master Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063–1135). It illustrates that the “torture” of thinking over the phrase repeatedly still remains an integral aspect of contemporary Chan/Zen practice.

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