Article

Fang Yizhi’s Transformation of the Consciousness-Only Theory in Yaodi Pao Zhuang: A Comparison and Analysis Based on Literature

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Abstract: Yaodi Pao Zhuang (Monk Yaodi Distills the Essence of the Zhuangzi, 藥地炮莊), written by Ming dynasty scholar Fang Yizhi (1611–1671), was one of the greatest annotations of Zhuangzi 庄子 in the late Ming dynasty. However, the Buddhist thought in Yaodi Pao Zhuang has scarcely been examined. Drawing on the revival of the consciousness-only (vijñaptimātratā, 唯識) theory during the Ming dynasty, this study discussed how Fang Yizhi transformed the theory to annotate Zhuangzi in Yaodi Pao Zhuang through literature comparison and logical analysis. Meanwhile, from a speculative viewpoint drawing on Yi studies (studies of the Yi Jing, 易學), Fang Yizhi demonstrated that “storehouse consciousness” (alaya-vijnana, 阿賴耶識) could have contrasting properties of defilement (samklesa, 染) and purity (suddha, 淨). Moreover, he proposed “consciousness is wisdom” to replace the consciousness-only view of “transforming consciousness into wisdom” prevailing in the Tang dynasty, thus providing the conditions for the interpenetration of the consciousness-only doctrine into Zhuangzi. This study’s results highlight the positive implications of Fang Yizhi’s mutually supportive interaction model of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism for addressing contemporary cultural conflicts.

Keywords: Yaodi Pao Zhuang; Fang Yizhi; consciousness-only doctrine; Ming dynasty

1. Introduction

Fang Yizhi (1611–1671), a native of Tongcheng, Anhui, used the pseudonym Yaodi after becoming a monk in his later years and is known as Master Yaodi. During the dynasty change from the late Ming to the early Qing, he transformed from a survivor of the previous dynasty to a Zen monk. In his later years, the Qing authority arrested him in a literary inquisition that caused his death when he was escorted to Guangdong. In addition to his solid family education, he read extensively about different schools of thought and eventually developed his academic style, possessing “a great wealth of wisdom accumulated over centuries” covering fields such as Yi studies, literature, philosophy, and science. He was a prolific writer of works such as Wuli Xiaoshi (Bits of Cognition on the Principles of Things, 物理小識), Dongxi Jun (Uniting the Opposites, 東西均), and Yi Yu (易餘). Furthermore, in his later years, he compiled annotations of Zhuangzi titled Yaodi Pao Zhuang.

In China, with the continuous collation and publication of Fang Yizhi’s works, there have been many studies related to Fang Yizhi’s Zen Buddhism in recent years. This research wave first began among Hong Kong and Taiwanese scholars, among whom was Liao Chao-heng, who analyzed how Dongxi Jun reflected the ideas of Huayan (Avatamsaka, 华嚴) Buddhism and Caodong (Soto, 曹洞) Zen based on the Dongxi Jun Annotations by Fang Pu, a mainland Chinese scholar. Starting from Fang Yizhi’s master–disciple relationship, Xu Shengxin analyzed the connotations of the Zen (Dhyana) doctrines (禪法) of “fire, furnace, earth, and pottery-wheel” (huo, lu, tu, and jun, 火、爐、土、均). Moreover, Deng Keming highlighted that Fang Yizhi’s ideas on Zen were theoretically and practically relevant (Xing 2012). Zhu (2019) analyzed Fang Yizhi’s thinking breakthroughs in his interpretation of Zhuangzi with Chan. The research wave flowed to mainland China, where...
Xing (2019) analyzed the development and evolution of Fang Yizhi’s ideas on Zen in the first two stages. Subsequently, he systematically examined the origin and content of Fang Yizhi’s ideas on Zen and their relationship with studies of Zhuangzi (Xing 2021). Furthermore, Xing Yihai’s studies pushed research of Fang Yizhi’s Zen Buddhism to a new level by providing an in-depth discussion of the origin and lineage of Fang Yizhi’s Caodong Zen Buddhism and its relationship with his family-taught Yi studies. Some scholarly studies also focused on Fang Yizhi’s interpretation of Zhuangzi from the Zen Buddhism perspective. Han (2018) argued that as a monk, Fang Yizhi “concocted” (pao, 炮) the essence of Zhuangzi to open a spiritual space for his “lonely quest”. Moreover, he asserted that Fang Yizhi leveraged traditional Chinese medicine’s preparation method, the “no appropriation” (wuizi, 无扵) notion in Prajñāpāramitā (banre, 業若) studies, and the Tiantai school’s (天台宗) “thought of original and derivative” (benji siwei, 本跡思維) to interpret Zhuangzi and thus developed its unique interpretative characteristics (Han 2021). Subsequently, he researched the background and cultural implications of Fang Yizhi’s meeting with Monk Jiexian (戒顯和尚) at Qingyuan Mountain (Han 2024). However, Jiang (2019) argued that Fang Yizhi’s view that “there is no such thing as large or small, the large promotes itself and disparages the small” was obtained by leveraging the essence-function (wuzhi, 无扵) theory and the “thinking of stopping loudness” with Chan. Zhao and Ding (2024) argued that Fang Yizhi’s work Yi Yu systematically uses the theoretical structure of the four realms of dharma (四法界), highlighting the close relationship between Fang’s philosophy and Huayan Buddhism.

Internationally, early studies were mainly centered on Fang’s work Bits of Cognition on the Principles of Things (Wuli xiaoshi, 物理小識). For example, Saë (1968) introduced ideas of “material investigation” (zhice, 質測) and “comprehending seminal force” (tongji, 通幾). After the 1970s, some scholars have discussed the implications and value of Fang Yizhi’s ideas from the perspective of social or cognition changes during the Ming dynasty. For example, Peterson (1979) detailed young Fang Yizhi’s spiritual journey and his thought’s historical development, following those topics by discussing his thought’s transformative effect on neo-Confucianism in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Compared with Fang’s later Buddhist thought, Peterson (2011) paid greater attention to young Fang Yizhi’s attitude shift from indifference toward Western learning to acceptance. Mair and Foster (2017) included excerpts from Bits of Cognition on the Principles of Things into the Hawaii Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture. Presently, only limited studies have been conducted on Yaodi Pao Zhuang. For example, starting from splicing and intertextuality, Williams (2022) analyzed Fang Yizhi’s comments on the allusion to “Zhuangzi’s transformation to a butterfly” in Yaodi Pao Zhuang, asserting that Fang expressed his thought by citing others’ arguments.

Despite various academic achievements in Fang Yizhi’s Zen Buddhism in China, international counterpart studies remain scarce. Scholars have paid limited attention to Yaodi Pao Zhuang’s implications for Buddhism in China and its value to the three teachings’ interactions during the Ming dynasty. First, the research mainly focuses on Fang Yizhi’s Yi studies and Zen Buddhism, and there is little research on his consciousness-only doctrine. Second, the study of how to use the Yi studies and Zhuangzi to transform the consciousness-only doctrine needs to be further studied. Third, it is less combined with the turbulent background of the late Ming Dynasty to analyze the significance of the treatment of interpenetration of the consciousness-only doctrine and Zhuangzi. Thus, these questions are the focus of this study.

The book Yaodi Pao Zhuang systematically summarized the notes to Zhuangzi by a group of scholars, including the Fang family of Tongcheng, including the Zen master Jue-lang Daosheng (1592–1659), which is of great value to the study of Zhuang studies and the thought of the relics in the late Ming Dynasty. “Pao” (炮) refers to the concocting of traditional Chinese medicine, that is, through a series of traditional Chinese medicine processing procedures, to remove the toxic side effects of traditional Chinese medicine so that it can maximize its efficacy. Fang Yizi concocted Zhuangzi with various academic thoughts in order to transform Zhuangzi into a medicine to cure the disease of the human mind in
reality, which makes this book also become an important document to study Fang Yizi’s thought and the trend of the unification of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in the late Ming Dynasty.

In *Yaodi Pao Zhuang*, Fang uses Yi studies to resolve the contradiction between “purity” (*suddha*, 淨) and “defilement” (*samklesa*, 染) in “storehouse consciousness” (*alaya-vijnana*, 阿賴耶識). He redemonstrated Zhuangzi’s view that the Tao is in all things (道在萬物) with both “purity” and “defilement” in *alaya-vijnana*. In addition, he reinterpreted “transforming consciousness to cognition” (轉識成智) by using Yi studies to make up for Zhuangzi’s cognitive tendency to value Tao over things. Finally, he transferred the change of the consciousness-only doctrine “the seed characteristics” (種子義) to Zhuangzi, which strengthened Zhuangzi’s view of the unity of Tao and things, and took it as a good medicine to cure people’s ideological ills. This paper analyzes the characteristics of Fang Yizhi’s consciousness-only doctrine by comparing the traditional consciousness-only doctrine classics, consciousness-only doctrine scholars’ works of the Ming Dynasty, and Fang Yizhi’s treatises on consciousness-only doctrine. By comparing the traditional consciousness-only doctrine with the classic *Compilation of Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-Only*, the views of the scholars of the consciousness-only doctrine in the Ming Dynasty, and Fang Yizhi’s exposition of the consciousness-only doctrine in the Ming Dynasty, and Fang Yizhi’s approach to addressing the contradiction between purity and defilement with a focus on Fang Yizhi’s approach to addressing the contradiction and unfolding developmental changes in the consciousness-only doctrine in China. Section 2 reveals that Fang Yizhi took the opportunity of annotating *Zhuangzi* to highlight the Ming dynasty’s interactions between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism by drawing on interpenetration among the consciousness-only doctrine, Confucianism, and studies of *Zhuangzi*. Section 3 explains interpenetration’s possibility among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism from the perspective of changes in the consciousness-only doctrine’s “seed characteristics” (種子義). Section 4 further explores such interactions’ value and implications for relieving Ming-dynasty intellectuals’ cognitive shortcomings caused by an essence–function separation in cognition. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the implications of Fang Yizhi’s approach to interactions among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism for addressing contemporary multicultural conflicts.

Since Fang adopted a unique writing style, namely, expressing his ideas by splicing others’ arguments; this paper regards cited arguments in *Yaodi Pao Zhuang* that he did not explicitly oppose as accepted. In addition, some online resources’ authenticity, including their translations, is difficult to determine. Therefore, despite drawing on published literature during the translation process, this paper attempts to re-translate the majority of concepts in *Yaodi Pao Zhuang* and, when necessary, interpret them from Fang Yizhi’s point of view.

2. From “Alaya-Vijnana” to “Spontaneous Transformation of Taiji”

*Alaya-vijnana*, transliterated from Sanskrit and known as the “consciousness containing all seeds” (一切種子識), or “consciousness resultant of maturation” (異熟識), is the overarching consciousness that the consciousness-only doctrine assumed for the proposition “all phenomena are nothing but the creation of the mind” (萬法唯心造). Despite the incomprehension of this consciousness’s origin, the consciousness-only doctrine still manages to interpret human perception of self and the world according to this defiled consciousness (*Waldron 2003*). The defiled *alaya-vijnana* gives rise to attachment (執著), in turn causing pain. Comparatively, pure *tathagatagarbha* consciousness (如來藏識) dispels attachment to self, thereby eliminating pain. On the one hand, in *Yaodi Pao Zhuang*,

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Fang Yizhi used Yi studies to interpenetrate the mind (心) with *alaya-vijnana* and *tathagatagarbha* consciousnesses, making it simultaneously bear defilement and purity. On the other hand, he used the view of “spontaneous transformation of Taiji” to interpret the function of *alaya-vijnana* as giving rise to all phenomena (生起萬法), drawing on the transformation (化生) spirit of Yi and clearing up the derogatory sense of *alaya-vijnana* that gives rise to all phenomena due to the attachment to consciousness with intellectual enquiries of Chinese Yi studies. Thus, it provides a bridge for the consciousness-only doctrine to interpenetrate Zhuangzi.

2.1. The Transformation of “Alaya-Vijnana”

*Alaya-vijnana* is the basis of defilement, while *tathagatagarbha* consciousness is the basis of purity. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the Tiantai and Huiyan schools gradually developed their respective theoretical systems amid interactions with Confucianism and Daoism. Along with the Ming dynasty’s revival of the consciousness-only doctrine came the increasing trend to integrate *alaya-vijnana* and *tathagatagarbha* consciousness.

Consider Fang Yizhi as an example. In *Yaodi Pao Zhuang*, he saw *alaya-vijnana* and *tathagatagarbha* consciousness as consistent. In the comments of *Ying Diwang of Yaodi Pao Zhuang* (藥地炮莊·應帝王), he extended the classical allusion of “chiseling orifices for Hun-dun” (混沌鑿竅) as a criticism of distinguishing the consciousness-only doctrine’s names into “the cognition of self-cognition” (證自證分), “immaculate consciousness” (白淨識) (the ninth consciousness), “discriminating consciousness” (分別識) (the sixth consciousness), and “assessing consciousness” (思量識) (the seventh consciousness), deeming that doing so weakens the functions and significance of *alaya-vijnana* (the eighth consciousness). To his mind, *alaya-vijnana* and *tathagatagarbha* consciousness were actually the same thing.

Guangshen Mijing (廣深密經) mentions the cognition of self-cognition as the ninth consciousness and the immaculate consciousness as the eighth, while the five roots (五根) belong to the three subtleties (於三細): the discriminating consciousness, the assessing consciousness, and the all-ground consciousness. Hence, these are results of deliberately cutting and chiseling; actually, all belong to the mind. The overarching ones are *alaya-vijnana* and *tathāgatagarbha*. Earth, water, fire, and wind transform into emptiness, but when applied to the function of consciousness, they all correspond to a quality of matter and spiritual awareness. The sage understands this principle amid *hunpi* (混辟), reality and falsehood (虛實), and the physical and spiritual (形神). With an understanding of their interconnection, the quality is transformed and extinguished in appropriateness (中節).

No Guangshen Mijing exists in consciousness-only classics. As per its content, “Guangshen Mijing” should be a misspelling of the *Jiemi Shenjing* (Wisdom of the Buddha Sutra, 解深密經). The saying that “earth, water, fire, and wind transform to emptiness, while applied to the function of consciousness, they all correspond to a quality of matter and spiritual awareness” is seen in the *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only* (成唯識論). The difference lies in that *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only* leverages “earth, water, fire, and wind” to illustrate that their qualities are derived from the contact of bodily faculty (身根) and faculty of sight (眼根). In other words, “firm, wet, warm, and moving” are self-natureless, and thus the form (相) of earth, water, fire, and wind is untrue (Xuanzang 1998). Fang Yizhi, on the other hand, starts from the thinking mode of unity of opposites in Yi studies and thinks that since *alaya-vijnana* and *tathagatagarbha* consciousness are opposites, the opposites contain their unity, that is, both of them
are unified in the mind. From the point of view of Yi studies, the form of earth, water, fire, and wind is untrue, but it does not prevent the distinction between the quality of matter and spiritual awareness from the function of consciousness, which in fact affirms the role of alaya-vijnana that gives rise to all phenomena through the standpoint of Yi studies. According to the consciousness-only doctrine, although “hunpi, reality and falsehood, and the physical and spiritual” are all products of alaya-vijnana; hence, they all carry the quality of defilement. Starting from Yi studies suggesting that opposites can be transformed into each other, Fang Yizhi believes that the “sage” could reveal the principle (理) of purity without leaving “hunpi, reality and falsehood, and the physical and spiritual”. Here, the principle is tathagatagarbha consciousness. Since principle cannot exist independently of forms such as “hunpi, reality and falsehood, and the physical and spiritual”, then there must be pure tathagatagarbha consciousness in defiled alaya-vijnana.

Fang not only considered alaya-vijnana and tathagatagarbha consciousness of the same essence but also argued that the meaning of tathagatagarbha consciousness should be reflected in alaya-vijnana. This Yi studies viewpoint differs from both the consciousness-only doctrine, which establishes tathagatagarbha consciousness atop alaya-vijnana, and the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith (大乘起信論) that asserts “one mind opens two aspects” (一心開二門). In his Xing Gu (性故), Fang further distilled this view.

Question: Is the nature referred to by the essential teaching fixed? Does it regard non-doing as the essence? Is there any governing essence? Answer: The consciousness-only doctrine speaks of good nature, evil nature, and morally indeterminate nature; that is, nature is divided into three categories; it further divides the mind into two categories of mental factors and mind-king, and then three categories of direct valid cognition, reasoning, and mistaken perception; then it speaks of immaculate consciousness that lies in alaya-vijnana. How unfixed it is!

問：宗教之言性也，定乎？其以無為宗乎？但執總乎？曰：唯識論言善性、惡性、無記性，分之為三，又分心所與心王為二，又分現量、比量、非量為三，又言有白淨識，在阿賴耶識之中。何其不定也！（Fang 2018）

To illustrate how Buddhism explains the origin of human nature, Fang Yizhi conducted an analysis from a consciousness-only perspective. In his understanding of the consciousness-only doctrine, he considered the immaculate consciousness (tathagatagarbha consciousness) to lie within alaya-vijnana. To Fang Yizhi, despite the distinction between immaculate (tathagatagarba) consciousness and alaya-vijnana, their relationship is neither prior and subsequent nor contradictory, but alaya-vijnana contains immaculate (tathagatagarba) consciousness. If immaculate consciousness is seen as truth and alaya-vijnana as falsity, then truth lies in falsity. In combination with Yaodi Pao Zhuang, Fang regards alaya-vijnana and tathagatagarbha consciousness as opposites but complementary wholes, making the mind bear both defilement and purity and contain purity without departing from defilement.

As such, Fang advocated mixing alaya-vijnana and tathagatagarbha consciousness into the mind. By emphasizing purity’s existence in defilement, he not only diluted the consciousness-only doctrine’s Indian characteristic but also weakened alaya-vijnana’s defilement characteristic. This is also the result of his new interpretation of alaya-vijnana with Yi studies.

2.2. “Spontaneous Transformation of Taiji” Interpenetrate “Alaya-Vijnana” and Zhuangzi

Fang Yizhi’s reinterpretation of alaya-vijnana in Yaodi Pao Zhuang is a reflection of Yi studies. He used Yi studies to express the role of the mind in the creation of all phenomena. Thus opened the interpenetration of the consciousness-only doctrine and Zhuangzi.

In “The Equality of Things” (齊物論) of Yaodi Pao Zhuang, Zhuangzi attempted to reveal the relativity of right and wrong through criticism of the Confucian–Mohist dispute over right and wrong, proposing that things should be judged by the great way (大道)
In the annotations, however, Fang reinterpreted this argument’s meaning by interpenetrating Yi with *A Straightforward Explanation of Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (大乘起信論直解, X.766) in which Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623) writes the following:

“The mark of extinction of the ceasing mind is not the extinction of the essence of mind; the extinction of mind folly is not the extinction of cognition”. There is no need to abandon waves to pursue water to understand that they cannot be mixed. Aliveness comes after great death, and then the function is attached. To tentatively prove it with Yi, heaven and earth exist spontaneously while Taiji is hidden. So, what is the principle governing earth and heaven’s operation? Why is the image on the front and back of a painting not the same? These are only my direct explanations.

《起信論解》曰：“滅心滅相，非滅心體；滅心癡，非滅智也。”不必舍波求水，確然混之不得。大死活來，方許用得著。試以《易》證，自有天地，而太極隱矣。彼方圓對待，流行者，是何物耶？畫前畫後，何不一照？直下自盡而已，必無兩層。 (Fang 2017)

Hanshan Deqing’s statement quoted above should be Fang’s summary of his view of “indestructible intelligence” (智性不壞), which is an extension of “relying on wisdom and not on the ordinary mind” (依智不依識) in the *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only*. Although the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* discusses “one mind opens two aspects”, it actually focuses on the transformation of the “arising and ceasing aspect” (生滅門) to the “thusness aspect” (真如門). Although Hanshan Deqing regarded wisdom and mind as having an essence–function relationship due to the Zen school’s influence, he still followed the principle of relying on wisdom, not on the ordinary mind, to disparage the significance of the arising and ceasing aspect. Fang Yizhi believes that Hanshan Deqing’s view attaches importance to “wisdom” (智) and ignores the “ordinary mind” (識), which not only breaks the wholeness between “noumenon” and “phenomenon”, but also denies the possibility of unity between “wisdom” and “ordinary mind”. Starting from the wholeness of “noumenon” and “phenomenon”, Fang Yizhi believes that the “ordinary mind” is the manifestation of “wisdom”, and “wisdom” cannot be obtained without an “ordinary mind”. In order to prove this point, he proposed that “the heaven and earth are self-existent while the Taiji is hidden” based on the concept of constant operations of the universe (大化流行) in Yi. Moreover, he argued that the 64 hexagrams, including heaven and earth, are products of evolution from the way of one yin and one yang, stemming from the Taiji that lies within all hexagrams in heaven and earth and advances all phenomena arising and ceasing. Thus, one must try to understand the constant Taiji from all phenomena arising and ceasing instead of pursuing them in their absence (Wu 2022). In the same vein, the “thusness aspect” governed by the mind is not an existence higher than the arising and ceasing aspect but coexists with and cannot reveal itself without the latter. Here, the arising and ceasing aspect is the defiled world arising from alaya-vijnana’s impregnation. Fang Yizhi asserted that the transformation from the defiled arising and ceasing aspect into pure thusness aspect does not mean that one has to abandon the defiled thusness aspect; instead, one should understand that the arising and ceasing aspect is the thusness aspect and defilement is purity.

As such, alaya-vijnana’s function to give rise to all phenomena is no longer just a constant defilement process but also a constantly purifying process. By introducing the “spontaneous transformation of Taiji”, Fang Yizhi gives alaya-vijnanathat that gives rise to all phenomena in the process of interpenetrating Zhuangzi.

3. From “Transforming Consciousness to Cognition” to “Consciousness Is Cognition”

Starting from the view of the “spontaneous transformation of Taiji”, Fang Yizhi argued that consciousness and cognition are inseparable and that relying on cognition while abandoning consciousness (依智舍識) is impossible. Thus, he managed to interpenetrate
Zhuangzi through the replacement of “transforming consciousness to cognition” with “consciousness is cognition”.

3.1. The Transformation of “Transforming Consciousness to Cognition”

The “transforming consciousness to cognition” of the consciousness-only doctrine means the process of changing from defilement (alaya-vijnana) to purity (tathagatagarbha consciousness). Fa-sang-sect (法相宗) believes that through specific practice, one can gradually realize the principle, and this process will transform the eight senses with leakage (有漏) into the eight senses without leakage (無漏) to obtain the four kinds of wisdom to achieve enlightenment.

In *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only*, influenced by the view of “spontaneous transformation of Taiji”, Fang Yizhi transformed “relying on cognition while abandoning consciousness” to “consciousness is cognition”.

The basis of consciousness-only transforming consciousness to cognition lies in the “nature of dependent arising” (依他起性), the “nature of existence produced from attachment to all-pervasive discrimination” (起計執性), and the “perfectly accomplished nature of reality” (圓成實性). In “The Equality of Things” in *Yaodi Pao Zhuang*, Fang quoted Qian Shisheng’s comment (1574–1652) to provide an entirely new interpretation of transforming consciousness to cognition:

Dai Yuan was originally a robber, but he later became a good minister. Did he become something else? The change from a robber to a good minister was actually a transformation from consciousness to cognition. They were actually the same thing, that is, consciousness is cognition. (Fang 2017).

戴淵，盗也，一變為良臣，豈二物乎？謂其轉盗為良，則曰轉識為智。謂其實是一物，則識即是智。(Fang 2017).

Dai Yuan was originally a robber, but he later became a military general in the Eastern Jin dynasty. Despite being the same person, his identity and role had both changed. Using the example, Fang vividly illustrated how consciousness is transformed from the defiled “nature of existence produced from attachment to all-pervasive discrimination” to cognition with a pure “perfectly accomplished nature of reality” on the basis of the “nature of dependent arising”.

Here, “they were actually the same thing, that is, consciousness is cognition”, differs from “causing sentient beings to rely on cognition while abandoning consciousness” in *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only* (Xuanzang 1998). In terms of *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only*, if one “relies on consciousness”, he is still in the “nature of existence produced from attachment to all-pervasive discrimination” instead of “transforming consciousness to cognition”. Following the transformation of consciousness, “cognition is stronger and consciousness is weak” in the “perfectly accomplished nature of reality”. Hence, “relying on cognition while abandoning consciousness” is advocated (Xuanzang 1998). Fang adheres to the hermeneutic framework of the view of the “spontaneous transformation of Taiji”. To his mind, as cognition has a pure essence, it does not affect the defiled function of consciousness, and cognition can only be seen from consciousness. Thus, cognition and consciousness are inseparable.

In fact, in addition to the factors of Yi studies, the reason why Fang Yizhi interpenetrated the consciousness-only doctrine and *Zhuangzi* are possible is also due to the influence of the “The Equality of Things” thought in *Zhuangzi*. As asserted by Fang (2012), the equality characteristic in “The Equality of Things” significantly influenced the Huayan view of “non-obstruction between individual phenomena” (事事無礙). Therefore, Fang’s consciousness is cognition was not an aimless proposition but evidence that the influence of the Sinicization of Buddhism extends to his understanding of the theory of the consciousness-only doctrine and goes back to the interpretation of *Zhuangzi’s* “The Equality of Things”.

3.2. “Consciousness Is Cognition” Interpenetrate “Transforming Consciousness to Cognition” and Zhuangzi

Based on consciousness is cognition, Fang Yizhi achieved Confucianism and Buddhism’s interpenetration to concoct Zhuangzi, thereby compensating for its tendency to a metaphysical-physical cognitive disintegration while pursuing the “great way”.

From Yaodi Pao Zhuang’s Renjian Shi (人間世), Fang quoted Wu Yingbin’s (1564–1635) argument to propose a “circular association between benevolence and cognition” (仁智交圓).

Zheng said: Goodness can distinguish the supreme righteousness (第一義) and stays immovable—isn’t that like treating a dead horse? Not ignoring benevolence of the same essence and discriminating cognition with the function of goodness is called the circular association between benevolence and cognition, that is, transforming consciousness to cognition.

正曰: 善分別於第一義而不動, 豈必墮黜作死馬醫乎? 不昧同體之仁以善用差別之智, 是謂仁智交圓, 即是轉識成智。（Fang 2017）

“Zheng” (正) refers to the opinion put forward by Wu Yingbin and approved by Fang Yizhi. Faced with the complicated interpretation of various terms of the traditional consciousness-only doctrine, Fang Yizhi adopted Wu Yingbin’s advice. He takes the approach of bypassing the explanation of the “three own-natures” (三自性), “eight consciousnesses” (八識), and “seeds” (種子) directly to interpret transforming consciousness to cognition as “not ignoring benevolence of the same essence and discriminating cognition with the function of goodness”. The key to Zhuangzi’s proposed mind-fasting (心齋) is being unoccupied (虛); “Dao gathers and presents itself in an unoccupied and peaceful mind” (唯道集虛) describes a state in which the mind matches the realm of a great way, and one can “hear through qi” and “wait for things to come in an unoccupied state”. What is being unoccupied? How does one wait for things to come in an unoccupied state? Zhuangzi left these questions unanswered, offering room for Fang’s interpretation. The so-called supreme truth (第一義) was originally the middle way (中道), which Ji Zang (549–623) obtained by the double negation method, which is neither separated from nor falls into existence and non-existence (有無) (Er Di Yi 二諦義, T.1854). To Wu Yingbin’s mind, seeing supreme truth as an immovable essence is like treating a dead horse. He argued that “benevolence of the same essence” (同體之仁) is not an immovable essence but good cognition appearing from discriminated functions. Fang agreed, arguing that cognition does not obstruct the “benevolence of the same essence” but also flexibly transforms the consciousness “good at utilizing differences”.

Supreme truth and benevolence of the same essence have the same common point that they have the nature of an original source that is not static but flexibly reveals their functions’ existence from the difference between existence and non-existence. Such flexible, unobstructed transformation between consciousness and cognition advocated by Fang Yizhi is exactly the true meaning of the circular association between benevolence and cognition.

4. Relieving the Three Teachings’ Drawbacks through the Interpenetration of the Schools of the Dharma Facies and the Dharma Nature in Buddhism (佛教性相二宗)

Originally, the consciousness-only doctrine was revived to compensate for the “only emptiness” (頑空) drawback of the essential nature school (mainly referring to the Zen school) during the Ming dynasty. With growing attention to the relationship among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism from Zen masters such as Hanshan Deqing and Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655), some consciousness-only concepts were also incorporated into such relationships’ discussions. Hence, Fang uses the Yi studies as the medium to communicate the consciousness-only doctrine and the Zhuangzi in Yaodi Pao Zhuang. He took the Yi studies as the “prescription”, the consciousness-only doctrine and Zhuangzi as the “medicine”, and started the attempt to cure the malpractice of the social mind in the late Ming Dynasty.
4.1. The Transformation of “Seed Characteristics”

Until the Ming Dynasty, the seed characteristics of the consciousness-only doctrine changed. This change happened to be the fruit of a scholarly effort to interpret the consciousness-only doctrine with the Chinese philosophy of inter-identicalness between essence and function. In the Ming Dynasty, it also provided an opportunity to interpenetrate the schools of the dharma facies and the dharma nature in Buddhism.

Since its emergence in India, the consciousness-only doctrine has been troubled by the problem of how “tainted” seeds were transformed into “pure” ones. Influenced by the Indian Vedantic philosophy’s substance concept, the consciousness-only doctrine sees two types of seeds. Pure seeds cannot be tainted. On the contrary, if pure seeds are contained in tainted seeds, the tainted can be spontaneously purified under the pure seeds’ effect. Thus, pure seeds’ origin has become a major problem for the Indian consciousness-only doctrine (Waldron 2003). Eventually, Xuanzang (602–664) introduced the problem to China. Since the Song dynasty, the logic of the unification of essence and function of Yi studies has been implied in both traditional Confucianism and Daoism, and the notion of one mind opens two doors in the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith. This also influenced, intentionally or unintentionally, how Zen practitioners and scholars interpret the consciousness-only doctrine, prompting a transformation in the nature of seeds.

What is a seed? “It refers to the difference between the spontaneous birth and own effect in the base consciousness (本識)” (Xuanzang 1998). Seeds are engendering active functions such as material and mind phenomena hidden in the alaya-vijnana. Fundamental to the consciousness-only doctrine, seeds actively constitute the eight consciousnesses and all phenomena. The consciousness-only doctrine includes six conditions for seeds’ existence, namely, momentariness (刹那滅), simultaneous existence with the effect (果具有), continuity in flux (根隨轉), determined transmission of moral characteristics (性決定), dependence on multiple conditions (待眾緣), and fruition of its own effect (引自果) (Xuanzang 1998). Specifically, “determined transmission of moral characteristics refers to causal power (因力), which produces determinant functions such as good and evil as a condition for seed” (Xuanzang 1998). Seeds of morally indeterminate quality that determine good and evil can produce only corresponding activities, and their functions are fixed. Hence, the contradictions between pure, untainted seeds and defiled, tainted seeds arise. On the one hand, tainted seeds in defiled alaya-vijnana can never transform into untainted seeds, given that determined transmission of moral characteristics and transforming consciousness to cognition can be feasible only by creating untainted seeds beyond the alaya-vijnana; however, this contradicts alaya-vijnana’s “base consciousness” position. On the other hand, based on moral characteristics’ determined transmission, if alaya-vijnana originally contains tainted seeds, its defilement nature does not hold as soon as the activity is produced, which is contradictory to the alaya-vijnana’s defiled position.

These contradictions were present from the consciousness-only doctrine’s creation in India until Xuanzang’s establishment of the Faxiang school. However, over Buddhism’s long Sinolization process among various schools, inter-identicalness between essence and function affected scholars’ views on consciousness-only seeds. Furthermore, under the influence of one mind opens two doors in Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith, scholars began to interpret alaya-vijnana as having purity as its essence and defilement as its function while attempting to explain the possibility of transforming consciousness into cognition under a Chinese philosophical framework. Ouyi Zhixu was a representative of this transformation. “The interpenetration between the ‘essential nature and characteristic’ schools realized by Zhixu was in line with Buddhism’s fundamental purpose and highlighted the interpenetrative nature of Chinese Buddhism” (Gong 2013). An interpenetrative nature was a precondition for the replacement of moral characteristics’ determined transmission of seeds through inter-identicalness between essence and function. This elevated the consciousness-only school to Sinolized sects such as the Tiantai, Huyan, and Zen schools and provided an opportunity for integration of essential nature and characteristic schools.
4.2. “Seed Characteristics” Interpenetrate “Essential Nature and Characteristic”

In the Ming dynasty, the consciousness-only doctrine differed from that in the Tang dynasty mainly in two aspects: First, consciousness-only scholars were not dedicated just to studying the consciousness-only doctrine. Second, most scholars explained consciousness-only doctrine by drawing on the Tiantai and Huyan schools.

First, during the Ming dynasty, the consciousness-only doctrine’s revival occurred because most consciousness-only advocates were Zen practitioners instead of dedicated scholars—a distinct characteristic at the time. Despite their extensive research of the consciousness-only doctrine, Zen monks and scholars, for instance, Ouyi Zhixu, Gaoyuan Mingyu (1614–?), and Wang Kentang (c. 1552–1638), were not as specialized as those of the Fa-sang-sect during the Tang dynasty. For example, Ouyi Zhixu was not only the Pure Land Tradition’s 9th Patriarch Great Master (浄土九祖) but also a renowned master of the Tiantai school. Gaoyuan Mingyu was also the 25th incarnation of Avatamsaka despite being a skillful interpreter of the consciousness-only doctrine. As a lay Buddhist, Wang Kentang had deep prowess in the consciousness-only doctrine, but he was most skilled at traditional Chinese medicine. Additionally, in different Buddhist schools, advocates’ research of the consciousness-only doctrine did not follow a dedicated course established by the Tang dynasty’s Faxiang school. Instead, they incorporated ideas from the Tiantai, Huayan, and Zen schools—a second characteristic of the Ming dynasty’s consciousness-only studies. Indeed, these characteristics indicate that Zen practitioners and scholars’ purpose in researching the consciousness-only doctrine was not truly to revive its cumbersome concepts of names and forms but to treat drawbacks arising from the Zen school’s emphasis on essential nature (法性) by exploiting the consciousness-only doctrine’s “characteristic school” (相宗):

The Xiang school had made multiple fleeting appearances in China’s Buddhist history. However, its impact should not be overlooked, as it served a role, either explicitly or implicitly, as an opposite of the mainstream Zen school, thus making it a force to contain the dominant ideas and expressive styles of Chinese Buddhism.

相宗在中國佛教史上多次扮演匆匆過客的角色。其影響之所以仍不可小覷,乃是因為這個角色多半是禪宗主流的或隱或顯的對立面,成為對在中國佛教中占主導地位的思想方法與表述風格的一種牽制和收斂的力。(Ni 2015)

Indeed, Buddhism’s history has been rife with disputes between the characteristic school represented by the consciousness-only doctrine and the essential nature school represented by the Tiantai, Huyan, and Zen schools, with the characteristic school emphasizing differentiated ways of being among all dharmas and the latter emphasizing the characteristic interconnection among them (Gong 2013). During the Ming dynasty, the revival of the consciousness-only, Tiantai, and Huyan schools resulted from efforts of Zen practitioners such as Ouyi Zhixu to resolve the dispute between the characteristic school and the essential nature school through an interpenetration approach. Gong (2019) comments on Ouyi Zhixu as follows:

Leveraging the interpenetration approach, Zhixu was actually also doing the selective work. That is, he selected things both from the “essential nature” and “characteristic” schools, or things from Tiantai, Ci’en, Zen, Jing and Lv schools, for the purpose of interpenetration.

故借著融通會合，智旭事實上同時在做著揀擇別裁的工作。揀擇性宗相宗兩邊某些東西，或天臺、慈恩、禪、淨、律各宗的某些東西出來，予以會通。

4.3. Relieving the Three Teachings’ Drawbacks

The Confucian non-metaphysical impulse and attention to remaining in society (入世) had prompted a scholarly emphasis on social norms such as rituals and filial piety, highlighting the reality-based ideals of true man by opposing materialistic longings (Weber
In China’s history, such attention to the real world has caused both long-term conflicts and integration between Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Upon his arrival in China, Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) was amazed by the Chinese literati’s efforts to integrate Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Ricci (2014) opposed this trend, arguing that their teachings and nature contained nothing to integrate; hence, deliberately integrating them would be meaningless. However, he underestimated Confucianism’s great inclusiveness, exhibited by its concern for reality; this was even a precondition for Yangming post-school scholars to accept Ricci and realize the Christian–Confucian Dialogue (Xie 2023). Similarly, Confucianism’s great inclusiveness bound Daoism and Buddhism, constantly transforming the three teachings’ conflicts into integration and thus driving the development of the Zen school, neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming dynasties, and Inner Elixir theory.

Zen practitioners’ effort to relieve the Zen school’s “only emptiness” of using the consciousness-only doctrine as medicine was further developed by Fang Yizhi in Yaodi Pao Zhuang in which he applied the consciousness-only doctrine as the prescription to concoct Zhuangzi to treat Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism’s drawbacks:

Qingliang said: “Confucianism is only given six consciousnesses, Laozi and Zhuangzi (Daoism) is given seven consciousnesses, and Buddhism changes the mind into eight consciousnesses”. Does the void space refute the eighth consciousness? Treating void space as a doctrine is non-Buddhist. Is there any doubt about this? This argument distills the mind into gold and helps children to carry forward the ambitions of their fathers and the authority to govern its subjects, bringing fruits in terms of wealth and education. Changing and utilizing consciousnesses leads to harmonized ways between the monarch and his subjects. The deeds of parents will bear results affecting their children. There is only one single reality. Why bother to argue about life and death or whether it has branches?

清涼言: “儒止見及六識，老、莊見及七識，佛始破八識也。將以虛空破八識乎？以空為宗，佛雲外道。有疑者否？此論銷礦成金，繼父必孝，可信政府宰君民，財成收化育。破識用識，君臣道合，所貴家督，全在兒孫。止有一實，何更嘵嘵生死，有無枝蔓哉？ (Fang 2017)

As proposed by the Tang dynasty’s Cheng Guan (738–839) and quoted by Fang Yizhi in “Huanglin Helu” (黃林合錄) of Yaodi Pao Zhuang, this quotation concerns how the consciousness-only doctrine’s eighth consciousness can be used to interpenetrate Confucianism and Daoism’s realms. Fang provided rhetorical questions regarding whether void space refutes the eighth consciousness, concluding that “refuting the cognitive functioning consciousness leads to harmonized ways between the monarch and his subjects”. Moreover, his Xing Gu reflects this perspective (Fang 2018). In combination with Yaodi Pao Zhuang, to Fang’s mind, although Cheng Guan’s notion that “Buddhism changes the mind into eight consciousnesses” indeed improved Buddhism’s position among the three teachings, it also entailed the danger of putting Buddhism in the void space. Furthermore, the consciousnesses are an entirety, including alaya-vijnana (the eighth), manas-vijnana (the seventh), and the first six consciousnesses. Thus, to achieve transformation of consciousness to cognition through interpenetration among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism’s realms, the Confucian, Laozi and Zhuangzi’s, and the Buddhist views that change the mind into 6–8 consciousnesses, respectively, are inevitably included for changing consciousnesses to be possible. Meanwhile, changing and using consciousnesses is impossible without Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism’s consciousnesses. Harmonized ways between the monarch and his subjects can be achieved only by seeing cognition without distinction from the three teachings’ distinct consciousnesses. Indeed, the practice of interpenetrating Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism with the consciousness-only doctrine was not invented by Yaodi Pao Zhuang; it was also reflected in Hanshan’s (2005) The Discussion on Lao Zhuang’s Influence (觀老莊影響論):

As per the perspective of “the three realms are only mind, and all things are consciousness”, the three teachings follow one principle, and not one thing or
phenomenon is not established by this mind. According to the equality of reality Realms, not only do the three sages belong to one essence but also not one man or thing is not reflected by the Vairocana ocean reflection **samādi**.

若以三界唯心，萬法為識而觀，不獨三教本來一理，無有一事一法，不從此心所建立；若以平等法界而觀，不獨三聖本來一體，無有一人一物，不見毗盧遮那海印三昧威神所現。（Hanshan 2005）

However, differing from Hanshan Deqing’s approach to discriminating Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism’s equality from the “consciousness giving rise to all things” perspective, Fang Yizhi took a further step to discuss the three teachings’ differentiated applications in transforming consciousness, emphasizing that consciousness is cognition. He attached much importance to the transformation of consciousness because he saw the Zen school’s drawbacks and clearly understood that such drawbacks were not just problems of the Zen school or the continuity of Buddhism:

What I feel painful about and strive to address are the two extremes: craziness and counterfeit. What should be refuted today is not the Yang-Mo teachings but the counterfeit Confucianism that disturbs authentic Confucianism; what should be avoided is not Buddhism or Daoism but the prevalence of crazy Confucianism and crazy Chan.

所痛疾力挽者，則在狂、偽二端。今日當拒者不在楊墨，而在偽儒之亂真儒；當辟者，不在佛老，而在狂儒之濫狂禪。（Fang 2017）

Indeed, during the late Ming dynasty, the two extremes of craziness and counterfeit had already become the era’s sickness, with counterfeit Confucianism, crazy Confucianism, and crazy Zen as symptoms. To treat such a sickness, in *Yao Pao Zhuang*, Fang further interpenetrated the consciousness-only doctrine and *Zhuangzi*. The great change of dynasties forced scholars to reflect. For conservatives such as Gu Yanwu (1613–1682), Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), and others, the downfall of the Ming Dynasty was caused by the Zen of the mind of Yang Ming, so they began to eliminate the influence of Buddhism and Taoism from within Confucianism. For Zen masters such as Ouyi Zhixu and Juelang Daosheng, the drawbacks of Zen forced them to introduce Confucianism and Taoism to rectify them. In the late Ming Dynasty, the trend of the unification of the three religions developed in the contradiction of exclusion and absorption. In Fang Yizhi’s view, the sickness of the human mind in the middle and late Ming dynasty caused social turmoil and the replacement of the dynasty, and the sickness of the human mind was caused by the attachment to the “noumenon” or “phenomenon”. Therefore, it is necessary to be inclusive to correct people’s paranoia, and the carefree and generous nature of *Zhuangzi* is the best medicine to dissolve this obsession, but medicine needs concocting to play the effect. The rise of the consciousness-only doctrine provides a unique perspective different from traditional Confucianism, Taoism, and even other schools of Buddhism to eliminate the ills of the human mind. Starting from the *alaya-vijnana* of defilement, it internalizes the analysis of the human mind to the innermost depths of the individual and avoids the appearance of duality by treating the thinking and action of the individual as the function of consciousness. The development of the consciousness-only doctrine of “transforming consciousness to cognition” is also the self-transformation of *alaya-vijnana*, which affirms the dynamic role of the human mind and prevents the separation of consciousness and behavior. Therefore, scholars in the Ming Dynasty tried to cure the defects of Zen by changing seed characteristics to strengthen alaya-vijnana with both purity and defilement. For Fang, the change of seed characteristics enables the consciousness-only doctrine to make up for *Zhuangzi’s* regret of neglecting things left by pursuing Tao and to provide a balance between limited life and unlimited knowledge. In this regard, Fang, with wisdom and Yi studies as the medium, tried to eliminate the tedious knowledge of the consciousness-only doctrine and integrate it into the interpenetration of *Zhuangzi* so as to eliminate the helplessness of individuals in external restrictions and find opportunities for development in the collision of cultures. In addition, by bridging the gap between consciousness and cognition and eliminating the
contradiction between entering society and leaving society in his mind, he also tried to find a spiritual retreat for himself and many of his followers and to relieve the depression of not being able to enter society.

5. Conclusions

Cultural conflicts arose between the consciousness-only doctrine of the Tang dynasty, which strictly followed the Indian tradition and Confucianism and Daoism. Consequently, the consciousness-only doctrine could only be forgotten in Chinese civilization’s long history. Since the Ming dynasty, Zen monks and scholars represented by Fang Yizhi began integration among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism to transform the consciousness-only doctrine. Thus, they unintentionally addressed the doctrine’s innate drawbacks through the cultural integration model. On the one hand, Fang Yizhi interpenetrated alaya-vijnana and tathagatagarba consciousness with the Yi studies, making the mind simultaneously bear defilement and purity. By drawing on the “spontaneous transformation of Taiji”, he further affirmed the function of alaya-vijnana in giving rise to all phenomena. On the other hand, under the influence of inter-identicalness between essence and function, Fang Yizhi replaced “relying on knowledge while abandoning consciousness” with “consciousness is knowledge”. Accordingly, he concocted Zhuangzi by inter-penetrating Confucianism and Buddhism with “consciousness is knowledge”, thereby elevating Confucian attention to the real world at the metaphysical level. Actually, Fang Yizhi’s effort to concoct Zhuangzi with the consciousness-only doctrine was inspired by the Zen school’s practice of addressing its “only emptiness” disadvantage by drawing on the consciousness-only doctrine’s revival during the Ming dynasty. Scholars’ initial interpretation of the consciousness-only seed characteristics using inter-identicalness between essence and function provided an opportunity for integration of essential nature and characteristic schools and inspired Fang Yizhi’s attempt to treat the drawbacks of people’s minds by using the consciousness-only doctrine as a prescription and Zhuangzi as medicine. Moreover, Fang Yizhi’s consciousness-only interpretation of Zhuangzi reflects Confucianism’s development model in the mid and late Ming dynasty, that is, correcting its developmental problems through exchanges with Daoism and Buddhism. Notably, this model of Confucianism, as well as its attention to reality and the future, still serves as the main approach to China’s economic and even cultural development (Harrison 2017). As such, Fang’s consciousness-only interpretation of Zhuangzi provided a new perspective on how to integrate different cultures into the Chinese people’s ideological world in the late Ming dynasty and offered implications for fulfilling Confucianism’s “binder” effect of modern multicultural conflicts.

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Abbreviations

T Taishō Tripiṭaka 大正新脩大藏経
X Manji Shinsan Dainihon Zokuzōkyō 卍新纂大日本續藏経
Notes

1. Born to a family of officials, during his youth, Fang Yizhi was an active member of the political association *Fushe* (護社), advocating against eunuchs meddling in imperial politics. After the Ming dynasty's collapse, from an anti-Qing sentiment, he became a monk, using the pseudonym Yaodi Monk during his vagrant life in Jiangxi (Xing 2019).

2. In reaction to changing dynasties, certain loyalist literati refused to serve the Qing dynasty by seeking refuge in Buddhism. Fang Yizhi was one of their most representative members (Qian 2008). In his later years, the Qing dynasty arrested Fang Yizhi for his involvement in an inscription case, and he died mysteriously while being escorted to Guangzhou. Whether he died of illness or suicide remains a topic of academic controversy. According to the literature, some scholars believe he committed more rational and logical that he committed suicide by jumping into a river (Xing 2019).

3. Fang Yizhi was a prolific writer. However, whether he wrote *Yaodi Pao Zhuang* has been an issue of academic debate. Successive discoveries of other literature have determined that Fang Yizhi annotated *Zhuangzi* for the book (Xing 2018). *Yaodi Pao Zhuang* includes annotations of *Zhuangzi* across different dynasties and encompasses comments of former-dynasty loyalist scholars represented by Zen Master Juelang Daosheng (1592–1659). Hence, the book is of great value for researching *Zhuangzi* and the ideology of the Ming dynasty loyalists.

4. For purposes of religious promotion, Chinese Buddhism in its early period actively adopted *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi’s* language styles for sutra interpretation. After the Tang dynasty, many monks deliberately introduced Confucian classics to interpret sutra. For example, Chengguan quoted Confucian classics extensively when annotating the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (華嚴經) (Hamar 2024). While deepening Confucianism and Daoism, such a practice also prompted Indian Buddhism’s Sinolization process. Since the Ming dynasty, increasingly Sinolized Buddhism also caused a distinction between the Ming and Tang consciousness-only doctrines.

5. In *A Straightforward Explanation of Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, Hanshan Deqing used “ocean water” and “wave” as metaphors for the relationship between consciousness and cognition. Waves are caused by wind while afflicting cognition arises from ignorance. Without wind, waves turn into peaceful ocean water. In the same vein, once consciousness breaks ignorance, it will transform into pure cognition.

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