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When dissecting his philosophical orientation, Yuan Mei (1716–1798), a literary celebrity of the mid-Qing, made the following remarks: “If one asks me about the sources of my thinking, three parts [of it] come from Confucius and the Duke of Zhou, the other two parts originate in Zhuangzi.”¹ The complementarity of the two systems in Yuan Mei’s philosophy is generally taken as a common feature of Chinese literati identity, although few have spelt it out so explicitly. Such a phenomenon assumed special prominence in late imperial China when Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism influenced each other in a syncretistic movement, and scholars affiliated with Confucianism by training often turned to Daoism and Buddhism for spiritual inspiration and alternative modes of existence.

The prominence of such philosophical syncretism can be seen in the pervasive use of suffixes, such as daoren 道人 (often in reference to a man with Daoist inclinations²) and jushi 居士 (a lay Buddhist), in Confucian scholars’ courtesy names. Among the most renowned men of letters (ningshi 名士) from the late Ming to mid-Qing one can find few without such a suffix attached to their courtesy names. Thus, we have Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) as Qingyuan daoren, Fu Shan (1607–1684) as Zhuyi daoren, Zheng Xie (1693–1765) as Banqiao daoren, and

² Despite its general reference to a Daoist, this term may also refer to a Buddhist adept from the Six Dynasties (222–589) to the Ming-Qing period (1368–1911). See Lin Guanfu’s discussion in Honglou meng zongheng tan, pp. 109–11. In chapter 39 of The Journey to the West, this term is used in reference to a Buddhist acolyte; see Wu Cheng’en, Xiyou ji, p. 350.
Gong Zizhen (1792–1841) as Dingan daoren; just as we have Tang Yin (1470–1523) as Liuru jushi, Li Zhi (1527–1602) as Wenling jushi, Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) as Kongkong jushi, and Yuan Mei as Cangshan jushi. The list is endless. Even the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–1735), followed this trend, choosing Yuanming jushi as his courtesy name, whereas his younger brother Yunxi (1711–1758) chose Ziqiongya daoren. While a man’s name in imperial China was given by his parents at birth, his courtesy name was self-chosen often late in his life to reflect his political stand and ideological leaning; it was a kind of badge of self-identity. The prevalence of daoren and jushi in literati’s courtesy names, therefore, testifies to the pervasive influence of Daoism and Buddhism on their outlooks.

Although jushi is generally taken to mean a lay Buddhist, all the jushi listed above, Tang Yin, Li Zhi, Yuan Hongdao, and Yuan Mei, showed strong Daoist inclinations. Moreover, the kind of Buddhism that appealed to most jushi during this period was the highly Sinicized Chan Buddhism. In its assimilation to Chinese culture, Chan incorporated many terminologies and concepts from Daoist philosophy. Small wonder scholars have repeatedly indicated that, philosophically, “Chan can hardly be distinguished from Daoism,” and that it is “no more than Daoism in Buddhist garb.” Consequently, just like the wide use of daoren in literati courtesy names, the frequent adoption of jushi also reflects Daoist (as well as Chan Buddhist) influence on scholars’ mentality.

What is relevant to the discussion of The Story of the Stone (hereafter referred to as “the Stone”) is that these suffixes also appear in the courtesy and pen names of the two key figures related to the production of this masterpiece. Cao Xueqin (?–1763), to whom most scholars attribute the authorship of the Stone, took the courtesy name of Qinqi jushi according to Zhang Yiquan’s poetry collection Chunliutang shigao

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3 For discussion of the Daoist impact on the development of Chinese Chan Buddhism and the affinity between these two philosophies, see Li Xia, Daojia yu chanzong; Xu Xiaoyue, Chan yu Lao-Zhuang; Wu Yi, Chan yu Lao-Zhuang.
4 Wu Yi, Chan yu Lao-Zhuang, p. 117.
5 Brook Ziporyn, The Penumbra Unbound: the Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang, p. 3.
Cao Yin (1658–1712), generally believed to be Cao Xueqin’s grandfather, whom most scholars believe to be a source of inspiration for the novelist, assumed the sobriquets of Mianhua daoren and Liushan jushi respectively on two different occasions. The adoption of daoren and jushi suffixes in the courtesy and pen names of Cao Yin and his grandson reveals their affinity to Daoist philosophy and Chan; this justifies the current study.

The Stone, also known as Dream of the Red Chamber, is generally acknowledged as the greatest classic novel in Chinese history. It presents a moving love story within a religious framework. Its encyclopedic richness has led scholars to look at it from various intellectual and theoretical perspectives, engendering quite a number of monographs in the West. Lucien Miller explores the structural symbolism of the narrative; Andrew Plaks studies its archetypes and allegory; Jing Wang investigates the intertextual associations of the stone image; Louise Edwards scrutinizes it from the feminist perspective; Anthony Yu probes its intellectual foundations; Dore Levy delves into its poetry and medical conditions; and Xiao Chi examines its garden culture.

6 There has been an ongoing debate on whether the Cao Xueqin mentioned in Zhang’s poetry collection refers to the author of the Stone; some scholars believe that it stands for a namesake living in the 19th century. I align myself here with the more popular position that accepts their identification. For glimpses of this debate, see Cai Yijiang, Zhuizong shitou: Cai Yijiang lun Honglou meng, pp. 417–50; Ouyang Jian, “Zunshou lunbian guize, qieshi tantao xueshu: ping Cai Yijiang xiansheng Chunliutang shigao shi yi,” Ming Qing xiaoshuo yanjiu 4 (2000): 81–97.

7 Cao Yin signed Mianhua daoren after he wrote an inscription on a portrait of a friend, Yao Houtao; see Yang Zhongxi’s (1865–1939) collection of historical anecdotes, Xueqiao shi hua san ji, p. 108. Cao Yin chose the pen name Liushan jushi for a drama that he composed, Taiping leshi; see Zhuang Yifu, Gudian xiju cunmu huikao, v. 2, p. 694.

this growing body of Western scholarship this book adds a new
dimension by examining its Daoist implications. As such, I hope to
strike a balance in the current field of Honglou meng studies in the
West, which tends to emphasize its Buddhist dimensions. Probably
because of the Buddhist framework of the narrative and its pervasive
use of Buddhist terminology, Western critical attention has been
largely directed to its Buddhist intimations. In Chinese scholarship,
likewise, at least three books have been written on the subject of
Buddhism and the Stone.

The novel’s affinity to Daoist philosophy, however, was observed
by Zhiyanzhai, one of its earliest commentators. Zhiyanzhai not only
indicates its stylistic kinship to the Zhuangzi (ZLHB, 84), but also points
out its incorporation of concepts, terminologies, and even sentence
structures from the Daoist classic (ZLHB, 196, 520, 521). Tracing the
novel’s origins in Chinese literary tradition, Yu Pingbo (1900–1990), a
pioneer of Chinese Honglou meng studies, also remarks that “Dream of
the Red Chamber, first of all, is indebted to the Zhuangzi.” While a fair
amount of Chinese scholarship has been produced on the novel’s rela-
tionship with Daoist philosophy, no substantial and comprehensive
inquiry against the cultural background of late imperial China has
emerged. In the West, Yu Yingshi indicated Cao Xueqin’s affinity to
Zhuangzi and the Neo-Daoist scholar Ruan Ji (210–265) more than
three decades ago. Since then, only a few have ventured beyond his
sketchy, though influential, essay in researching this subject further.

Much remains unexplored.

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9 See Qiancheng Li, Fictions of Enlightenment, pp. 110–64; Anthony Yu, “The Quest
of Brother Amour: Buddhist Intimations in The Story of the Stone,” HJAS 49, no. 1
(June 1989): 55–92; Lene Bech, “Flowers in the Mirror, Moonlight on the Water:

10 Zhang Bilai, Honglou foying; Yuan Xiang, Honglou meng yu chan; Li Zheliang,
Honglou chanhua.


zhexue yu Honglou meng de sibian meili,” HLMXK 1 (1993): 197–215; Gao
Huaisheng, “Cong Honglou meng kan Ruan Ji, Xi Kang, Tao Yuanming dui Cao


14 See Zuyan Zhou, “Chaos and the Gourd in The Dream of the Red Chamber,” T'oung
The current study is undertaken to fill this academic gap with the goal to explore how the pervasive Daoist sensibilities latent in literati, traced above and below, contribute to formulating the literati culture of late imperial China and informing the ideological structure and philosophical foundation of the *Stone*. This study will take the existing scholarship as a point of departure. To distinguish my book from most scholarship in China, I will select new angles to look at the narrative and embed my discussion of the novel more deeply in the Ming-Qing cultural context. I will examine how the encounter of Daoist philosophy with Ming-Qing culture, or the evolution of the philosophy during the late imperial period, impacts the novel. Some key terms and images found in the Daoist classics *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* recur in the narrative, but do they carry the same implications? If not, how did these traditional Daoist concepts evolve in the late imperial period? And how did such evolution and ramifications inscribe new meanings in the narrative? Some of the underlying values of the novel may not ostensibly be in accordance with the ascetic doctrines preached in the *Zhuangzi*, but can they be associated with Daoist philosophy in the specific cultural ambience of the mid-Qing when scholars adapted it to their lives? Such an exploration, I hope, will shed new light both on the novel and the literati culture that nurtured the novel.

My study of the Daoist dimensions of the novel is not meant to eclipse its Confucian and Buddhist interpretations. Composed in an age of philosophical syncretism, the *Stone* is inevitably a hybrid product. Even though I may argue for the narrative valorization of certain Daoist notions over their Confucian and Buddhist counterparts, it should not lead to the simple conclusion that the novel favors the Daoist philosophy over the other two discourses. The author’s veneration for certain Confucian values such as filial piety is evident, as shown in his hero Jia Baoyu’s characterization; so is his interest in Buddhist concepts, such as reincarnation, which underlies the religious backgrounds of his protagonists (*H*, 1:5), and Chan practice,

which is playfully employed in the game of courtship (H, 22:186; 91:762). Like most mid-Qing scholars, the author of the *Stone* must have been eclectic in his philosophical orientation.

Because of the ongoing debate on the authorship of the *Stone* and the authenticity of its various editions, a word about my stand on these issues is in order. The last 40 chapters of the novel, often called the “sequel,” have been taken by many scholars as the work of a different hand. Although Cheng Weiyuan (ca. 1745–1819) and Gao E (ca. 1763–ca. 1815), the two scholars responsible for the circulation of the current 120-chapter version of the novel, claimed that they did only minor editing and compilation for the last 40 chapters after they collected them from various sources and attached them to its main body for publication in 1791, the authenticity of their edition has been constantly questioned over the last hundred years. In the early 20th century, the discovery of the Zhiyanzhai commentary in the earlier scripts of the novel suggests different plot lines from the current version in the final part of the work. Although there is still no consensus among scholars on the authentic ending of this novel, the familiarity with the author’s life as revealed in the Zhiyanzhai commentary convincingly shows most scholars of its composition by the author’s close kin and friends, thus strengthening the two-author theory. While I will refrain from elevating Zhiyanzhai to the status of the author, I will treat it as a source of intimate reactions to the novel from the very cultural milieu wherein it was born and cite it frequently along with the insightful observations of many other Qing commentators. While some Western scholars limit their discussion on the first 80 chapters when they relate the novel with Cao Xueqin,15 in this study I take a somewhat eclectic approach to edition selection. I do so in consideration of the fact that the 120-chapter edition has been the only version in circulation, and it will most likely remain so permanently. To make this book more useful to future readers of the novel as well as to enrich my own discussion, I will incorporate some parts of the last 40 chapters when they do not deviate from the prolepses revealed in

15 See Xiao, *The Chinese Garden as Lyric Enclave*, p. xi; Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*, p. 150.
the divine register in chapter 5 that foreshadow later events in the novel (H, 5:46–54)—in other words, when they do not in my judgment violate the authorial intention.

The authorship of the novel has also been a knotty issue over which scholars have spilled much ink. Zhiyanzhai attributes the novel to Cao Xueqin, and the same view appears in the writings of several other Qing literati scholars. While counterarguments have emerged every so often against Cao Xueqin’s authorship, critics have unanimously agreed that the book was composed by Cao Yin’s descendents; and most modern scholars starting from Hu Shi (1891–1962) tend to accept Cao Xueqin as the author. In the following discussion, I will align myself with this general consensus. Despite some clouds still hovering over the matter, Cao apparently played a significant role in the production of the novel as his editing and revising of the work are explicitly mentioned in the Stone (H, 1:4). Cao Xueqin and his close circle, therefore, will be brought in constantly in my discussion.

Aside from the questions of authorship and edition selection of the novel, the subject matter of this study, Daoist philosophy, also calls for some clarification. Nearly every study on Daoism in the West starts with the question, “What is Daoism?” With its kinship to a highly sophisticated form of ancient Chinese philosophy and its various associations with the magic capacity to summon the wind and the rain, with the superhuman potential for longevity, with popular yoga practice, or even with the hippies’ movement in the West, Daoism is a slippery term notoriously difficult to define. No wonder John Blofeld made the following observation: “Perhaps there is not and never has

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16 One of the most recent counterarguments comes from Xu Naiwei who presents, among others, the following reasons against Cao Xueqin’s authorship. First, the manuscripts of the novel were discovered circulating as early as 1743. If Cao Xueqin spent ten years in composing the novel, he would have been a teenager, or even below ten when he wrote the novel, given his generally accepted year of birth in 1715 or 1724 and the time needed for circulation. Second, Cao Xueqin’s role as an editor and reviser of the manuscript is indicated in the text of the Stone itself. Third, Cao Xueqin lacked the life experience to portray the aristocracy; his family went bankrupt too early for him to have experienced that kind of life. See Xu Naiwei, Honglou san lun, pp. 3–6.

17 Daoism is also believed to have impacted the development of science in ancient
been anyone able to define it [Daoism] with authority.”

Any fruitful and meaningful discussion of Daoism, therefore, as Livia Kohn and Harold Roth indicate, “must first of all do away with the futile endeavor to find permanence and solidarity in the tradition. . . . Rather than focusing on one, single static item, it must study the dynamics of identity in various areas of sacralization and specific situations—historical periods, schools, and local communities.” Such a historical approach will be adopted in this study, although Daoist philosophy, rather than Daoist religion (as in Kohn and Ruth’s book), will be the focus of my examination.

Yet, the kaleidoscopic associations of Daoism do not have to obscure its meanings in our discussion. Despite its multiple dimensions, Daoism in Chinese history essentially refers to the doctrines, thinking, and practices derived from the writings of the ancient philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi, although these derivatives shifted and mutated over time. Once we place it in the specific historical and cultural contexts of the late Ming through mid-Qing which shaped the production of the Stone, it is possible to circumscribe the parameters of Daoism relevant to our discussion. The Daoist philosophy that appears in the title of this book mainly refers to the outlooks and mentalities nurtured and embraced by the liberal-minded literati scholars who adapted the Lao-Zhuang philosophy to their personal needs, thus giving rise to an influential literati culture to be delineated in Chapter Two.

While claiming the Daoist associations with the Ming-Qing literati culture, I do not mean, however, to lump every aspect of that culture under the name of Daoism. It is generally accepted among Chinese scholastic communities that, particularly in premodern Chinese culture, the Lao-Zhuang philosophy exerted a pervasive impact on the construction of scholars’ identity. Chen Guying, an influential scholar of Chinese philosophy, goes so far as to assert the mainstream status of the Daoist School in the realm of Chinese

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philosophy; he locates Confucianism in the superficial structure of traditional Chinese culture and discerns Daoist connections to its deep roots. Since traditional Chinese literature, such as the *Stone*, was largely penned by literati scholars who were alienated from the power center and estranged from the orthodox and who tended to seek inspiration from Lao-Zhuang philosophy in fashioning their antithorthodox stances, Daoist influence on their writings can, therefore, never be overstated. It is probably not an exaggeration to rate Daoism even above Confucianism in terms of its influence. The close examination of the Daoist imagery, rhetoric, and concepts in Ming-Qing literati writings in Chapter Two will demonstrate the profound impact of Daoist philosophy on scholars’ identity.

Despite its multifarious identity in general perception, Daoism in Chinese culture, as generally known, is largely bifurcated into two separate yet interrelated fields: Daoist philosophy and Daoist religion. The Daoist religion is comprised of a mixture of ideas and practices generally believed to have developed from ancient forms of witchcraft, superstitions, and cults of immortality, while incorporating ideas from Confucianism, Mohism and, later, from Buddhism. Although it also seeks inspiration from the Lao-Zhuang philosophy and even enshrines Laozi as a god, it gives religious interpretations to many philosophical concepts, thus deviating from their original meanings in Lao-Zhuang. While Daoist philosophy refers to an outlook on life derived from the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, later adherents often appropriated and transformed the meanings in Lao-Zhuang texts when they adapted the texts to their personal lives (see the discussion in Chapter Two), thus triggering a similar deviation, though often moving in a different direction, from the original teachings of the Daoist masters.

In English writings, a “Daoist” often refers to a person who practices the Daoist religion, someone either in possession of magic powers or adept in the art of longevity. This study, however, focuses on the philosophical aspects of Daoism because of my personal belief that Daoist philosophy, in its mutated form of the late imperial period, had a greater impact on the *Stone*. But can a literati scholar with a strong

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affinity to Lao-Zhuang thinking and yet living a layman’s life be legiti-
mately called a “Daoist” without violating the semantic field of the
term? What kind of a “Daoist” is he if he is granted such a label? In his
recent study of the mid-Ming scholar Wang Dao (1487–1547), the
Japanese scholar Mabuchi Masaya questions the traditional paradigms
in classifying a scholar’s philosophical affiliation as either Confucian,
Daoist, or Buddhist. Wang Dao received Confucian training and
served intermittently in officialdom, and yet he held Laozi’s thoughts
in high regard, wrote a commentary on the Laozi, and followed the
master’s thinking substantially in his own conceptions. Facing diffi-
culty in pigeonholing Wang Dao into any of the traditional ideological
categories, Masaya launches a lengthy inquiry into how to designate a
Daoist identity in traditional China and calls for more research into
Wang Dao’s influence on late Ming thinking. In their response to
Masaya’s study, Livia Kohn and Harold Roth designate the identity of
scholars such as Wang Dao as “literati Daoist,” and they observe that
Wang Dao, in his own way, “contributed to the later development and
expansion of the Daoist tradition.”

The expanded and developed tradition of the Daoist philosophy
during the late Ming and mid-Qing that Wang Dao and other mid-
Ming scholars initiated will be the major field of investigation in this
study, for, in my opinion, they fermented the cultural milieu that begat the Stone. Like Wang Dao, many literati scholars received Confucian
training or even dabbled in officialdom for a while, yet their ultimate
dissillusionment with orthodoxy, either out of frustration in their offi-
cial careers or alienation from the received values, often led them to
espouse Daoist philosophy. It is not surprising that their writings
 teemed with Daoist imagery, rhetoric, and concepts. There is no doubt
that a literati association with Daoism may belie, to a certain extent, a
motive to elevate one’s public self-image, for in premodern Chinese
culture a Daoist gesture, such as seclusion or eccentricity, was often
taken as a sign of spiritual loftiness. Yet, the anticonventional behavior

23 Ibid., p. 15.
of the literati writers examined below suggests that it was more than a pretense and may often have been charged with the intention of resorting to ancient philosophy to combat the cultural decadence and ideological suppression of their time. This can be more distinctly seen in the text of the *Stone*, as shown in my detailed discussion of the novel from Chapter Three to Chapter Five.

While this study will largely trace the inscriptions of Daoist philosophy rather than religious Daoism in the *Stone*, the novel is apparently structured around a religious framework. The Daoist priest and the Buddhist monk who shuffle between the celestial sphere and the mundane realm obviously embody certain religious values that are not transparent to casual readers. Therefore, I will deem it incomplete if I do not also delve into the religious parts of the novel and seek to unearth the relation between the embedded values of the Daoist religion with the underlying associations of Daoist philosophy that lies at the core of its ideological structure.

Although the two major branches of Daoism part hands on some issues, such as the attitude to the limit of human life and the belief in supernatural power, with a common origin in the Lao-Zhuang thinking, they maintain many common grounds and share many values, such as aloofness from the court and unconventionality of lifestyle. Between them, therefore, there exists a complex relationship. Consequently, in scholars’ writings in premodern period, including the *Stone*, the distinction between the religious and philosophical associations is often obscure when Daoist imagery is conjured up. The neat division between them will not become distinct until the phrases of *Daojia* 道家 and *Daojiao* 道教 acquire general acceptance as their respective designations in the writings of the modern academy.24

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24 Although it is now a generally accepted convention that *Daojia* refers to the Daoist philosophy and *Daojiao* designates the Daoist religion, such a division has never been strictly observed. During the Song dynasty, for instance, the term *Daojia* was often used in reference to the Daoist religion. See Qing Xitai, *Zhongguo daojiao shi*, v. 2, p. 706. Similarly, Chen Yuan, a contemporary scholar, uses the term *Daojia* in the title of his collection of stone inscriptions about Daoist priests. See Ren Jiyu, “Daojia yu daojiao,” in Wenshi zhishi bianjibu, ed., *Daojiao yu chuantong wenhua*, p. 6.
These two aspects of Daoism, as I will demonstrate below, impact the conception of the Stone in separate ways: while the Daoist religion informs the religious framework of the novel, the Daoist philosophy forms the ideological foundation of the narrative once the story moves from the supernatural to the mundane realm. Yet, even in the parts that describe the quotidian life which Daoist philosophy often governs, religious components may be intricately woven in as references to a different set of values. The two dimensions of Daoism occasionally reinforce each other in presenting protagonists’ spiritual growth; at other times, however, they clash beneath the surface because of the conflicting values they respectively embody in late imperial Chinese culture. For an understanding of the embedded Daoist philosophy, therefore, it is indispensable to examine the religious import of the novel. In this study, therefore, I will first turn to explore the religious undercurrents in the Stone in the context of the status of the Daoist religion during the Qing as an overture to the discussion of its philosophical influence.

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This book is divided into seven chapters, and their contents are sketched below.

Chapter One explores the inscriptions of Quanzhen values in the religious structure of the novel in a search for the novel’s ties with the Quanzhen Daoism that flourished at the time of its composition. By tracing parallels between the Stone and Quanzhen canons, hagiographies, and legends in their uses of images, plots, characterization, conversion modes, religious pedagogy, and patterns of spiritual cultivation, it seeks conceptual links between the novel and the Quanzhen persuasion and argues that the latter was the major source of inspiration in constructing the religious components of the novel. The study of the Quanzhen impact on the novel is meant to offer readers a glimpse at the religious side of the picture before we turn to look at the philosophical aspects of Daoism and how its mutated version ideologically informs literati writings of late imperial China and the Stone.

Chapter Two examines late imperial culture and literati writings with a focus on the transformation of the Daoist philosophy from its
Introduction

origins in the Warring State to the Ming-Qing period. Unearthing evidence from literati scholars’ lives and personal writings, it demonstrates the immense popularity of the Lao-Zhuang philosophy as a major ideological buttress in their reaction to the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy. It further demonstrates that as scholars turned to Daoist philosophy to combat the decadence of their age, they often adapted it to their personal needs, thus expanding the original meanings of Daoist concepts and rhetoric. The chapter explores this process through three traditional Daoist concepts and the iconic image of Tao Yuanming (376–427) in literati writings, which ideologically fostered the subversive stance of the *Stone*. The plots of the *Stone* are regularly brought into the discussion both to complement the discussion and to serve as fictional expressions of the cultural milieu that is introduced as a prelude to the detailed study of the novel in the next three chapters.

Chapter Three investigates the inscriptions in the *Stone* of the concept of chaos and the image of the gourd, which are constant symbols of Dao in Daoist classics. It first explores the extended associations of the concept of chaos in Ming-Qing scholars’ writings in reference to the melting down of established orders by the fire of liberal thinking. Jia Baoyu’s characterization is then scrutinized from this new perspective to establish him as the very personification of this evolved principle of chaos. The chapter traces the implication of the gourd image that is related to the starting point (Bottle Gourd Temple) and final destination (a bottle gourd-shaped shed) of two characters, Zhen Shiyin’s and Jia Yucun’s spiritual journeys. The discussion of chaos and the gourd reveals a kindred link between them, as signifiers of Dao, in their respective associations to Jia Yucun’s and Jia Baoyu’s identical pattern of life journey: both characters start their spiritual journeys from a point intrinsically linked with the Dao, the cosmic chaos, and Bottle Gourd Temple; and both move back to destinations that are again symbolically associated with chaos (the cosmic wildness) and the gourd (the gourd-shaped shed), the symbolic Dao.

Chapter Four explores the function of a set of favorable Daoist images, fish and bird, in the symbolic structure of the narrative. It first examines early Chinese classics to distinguish their symbolic meanings between Confucian and Daoist traditions. It then traces a gradual
shift from the moral import inherent in the Confucian usage of the bird-fish imagery toward the Daoist association of spiritual freedom in literati writing, which gained a strong momentum in the late Ming and mid-Qing, triggering empathy between men and animals and even a trend to release confined animals by Daoist-inclined scholars in real life. Against this background of the literati’s growing spiritual identification with these symbolic animals, the chapter launches a trifocal examination of bird-fish imagery in the *Stone* as quintessential signifiers of liberal sentiments: its function in the overall structure of the narrative and its significance, respectively, in the hero Jia Baoyu’s and heroine Lin Daiyu’s characterizations.

Chapter Five takes the approach of philosophical analysis to tackle the issue of purity in the narrative. It first traces the original meanings of purity in the classics of China’s three philosophical discourses; it then explores their ramifications in the Ming-Qing period before examining their reifications in the *Stone*. Through close reading of relevant plots in their cultural contexts, it concludes that the *Stone* reveals disillusionment with the Confucian value of purity in its presentation of rampant corruption in the official world. The Neo-Confucian value of purity in the form of widow chastity receives mild critique in Li Wan’s characterization. The narrative attitude to the Buddhist conception of purity in the renunciation of sexual desire is no less critical, as seen in the satirical touches in Miaoyu’s and Xichun’s characterization. The only version of purity that is celebrated in the novel belongs to the Daoist tradition. The preservation of spiritual essence as defined in the *Zhuangzi* as a Daoist perception of purity was developed in mid-Qing literati writings to incorporate the affirmation of one’s natural impulses, including sexual desires. The chapter demonstrates that this contemporary Daoist notion of purity is embodied largely in Baoyu’s, Daiyu’s, and partly, also, Miaoyu’s characters; it functions as a philosophical buttress of the celebration of qing 情 (affection, emotion, sentiment) in the *Stone*.

Chapter Six briefly sums up the arguments presented in this volume, and offers my own reflection on the significance of the cultural investigation and literary exploration undertaken in this book. In light of the pervasive inscriptions of Daoist values in literati
scholars’ writings traced in this study, it ventures to designate the late Ming and mid-Qing literati culture as an expression of a second wave of Neo-Daoism in Chinese intellectual history. The chapter further explores the life experience and historical period of Cao Xueqin in search of historical and ideological factors that may contribute to the novelist’s Daoist leanings as well as the Daoist dimensions of the Stone.