

‘Emotion’, ‘nature-emotion’, and ‘nature-sensibility’: the development of some important concepts in the critical works of the late-Ming elite

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Received: 24 October 2015 / Revised: 9 November 2015 / Accepted: 10 November 2015 /
Published online: 18 March 2016

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2016

Abstract This paper intends to provide a historical analysis of the concepts of “emotion” (情), “nature-emotion” (性情), “nature-sensibility” (性灵), and their inherent variations during the late-Ming Dynasty. So I will first pay attention to the meaning of the above three concepts before the establishment of the Ming, as well as to what extent the notion of “nature-emotion” laid a foundation for the mode of narration, hereby becoming an authoritative discourse till the advent of Neo-Confucianism. After that, the paper illustrates how the notion of “emotion” was originally advocated by the Former Seven Masters (前七子) in the mid-Ming period, mainly in opposition to the theory of “nature-emotion”. From the Latter Seven Masters (后七子), however, the idea of “nature-sensibility” gradually came into being (nature-sensibility I). If, on one hand, this idea is based on an individualistic principle; on the other, it has been strongly influenced by the revival of Buddhism and Taoism. “Nature-sensibility I” therefore reflects the inclination to resist or control the “emotion” in order to transcend it. Later, a new explanation of “nature-sensibility” (nature-sensibility II), formulated by the Gong’an school (公安派), appeared in the mid-Wanli era. This renewed concept of “nature-sensibility” (sensibility II) integrated the meaning of “emotion” with “sensibility I”, which not only reduced the tension between the two, but also settled the cultural conflict between elite and lower class, spirit and secular.

Keywords Emotion · Nature-emotion · Nature-sensibility · The Former Seven Masters · The Latter Seven Masters · The Gong’an school

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The introduction of an issue

Since the May 4th Movement, the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ (性灵) has been viewed as a key symbol in the trend of anti-tradition and pro-individualism during late-Ming dynasty in China. This was followed by later scholars who made a large number of investigations and elaborations on the concept. Admittedly, whether a certain concept can represent the general trend of thought during a given time should also be considered in a broader historical context, which can be verified by the difference between the history of concepts (概念史) and the history of ideas (观念史). More specifically, the history of concepts refers to the course of using a certain concept or term. The history of ideas, whereas, covers a larger area and refers to the more extensive intellectual and ideological movements in a given period. If these two are in agreement, the specific concept will definitely represent the main current of thought and the cultural trend at the time. If not, the representation of the concept should be taken with a grain of salt, and its appearance would be only viewed as accidental or held by a limited group of individuals.

Since to many scholars the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ is closely correlated to general criticism and humanistic thought, it could definitely be seen as a symbol of evolution of thought during late-Ming dynasty. Yet the co-existence of some other important concepts during this period shows a multi-level expansion in the history of concepts. Therefore, emphasis on the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’, technically speaking, needs the necessary restrictions as well.

The aim of this paper is not to simply restate the previous research on this topic, but to put the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ in a framework that includes several other important related concepts in that day, in order to confirm its meaning and complicated signifying function within ‘a group of concepts’. Hence, there are at least two other concepts related to ‘nature-sensibility’ that need to be discussed in depth in this paper, namely, ‘emotion’ (情) and ‘nature-emotion’ (性情). Together these three concepts are different explanations of man’s mind (or heart, 心) and/or man’s mental state.¹ It is undoubted that the simultaneous presence of these three concepts, in a broad historical period, together with their interactions and conflicts, is the key to understanding the elaboration of thought during the late-Ming dynasty. The concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ is put forward and operated on the premise of interacting with other concepts. Our view, of course, is that this discussion should go further back in history in order to carry out a more in-depth study, because these three concepts did not originate in the late-Ming dynasty; a large amount of discussion and elaboration in relation to these concepts had already appeared much earlier. The development of these concepts had taken place over a long period of history, which, to certain extent, exerted influence on the way of presenting their new supplementary meanings. Thus, tracking their source does not only help to establish a broader explicatory background of the change in general thought during late-Ming dynasty, but also to find the special condition that gave rise to the appearance of ‘nature-sensibility under the light of historical comparison.

¹ The slight difference between 心 in Chinese and “mind, heart” in English can be referred to Schwartz (1985, pp. 184–185).

An overview of the development of the history of concepts

The terms ‘emotion’ and ‘nature’ can be found in the earliest Chinese texts. Later, these two terms were combined to form the new concept of ‘nature-emotion’. But before discussing it further, I believe the history of these concepts needs to be examined more closely.

In itself, ‘emotion’ is a neutral word, but it can take on many different meanings from the point of view of morality. (For the sake of clarity this will be addressed later on.) The interpretation of ‘nature, human nature’, however, undergoes a process of change when it is applied to signify humans’ basic psychological attributes.² The earliest recorded reference to ‘nature, human nature’ dates back to Confucius. ‘Nature’ appears twice in *The Analects of Confucius*: the first is from Zi Gong’s 子贡 saying: “His discourses about man’s nature, and the way of Heaven, cannot be heard.” (*Gong-Ye Zhang* 公冶长); the other is “By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart” (*Yang Huo* 阳货).³ Because Confucius did not mention ‘nature’ very often, the concept of ‘nature’ is rarely found in *The Analects of Confucius*. Although the core of the Confucian teaching is ‘humanity’ (仁), it is only a concept ‘demonstration’, in other words, emphasis is on realising perfect human nature rather than assuming that humanity (virtue) originates from human nature. Therefore, Confucius believed that ‘humanity’ can be achieved through continuous self-improvement and self-cultivation through the efforts in education and learning. This course of action can help one to acquire humanity and become a man of perfect virtue. Hence, the concept Confucius used in “By nature, men are nearly alike” is close to the original meaning of ‘nature’, that is, “Life is what we call nature” (生之为性).

“Life is what we call nature” was a very influential idea in ancient China.⁴ For example, the *Shang Shu* 尚书 states, “This will regulate their perverted nature, and they will make daily advancement.” (*The Mandate of Shao* 召诰) and “He is practicing what is not good as if his nature from birth were so constituted.” (“兹乃不义, 习与性成”, Tai-jia 太甲). They refer to innate natural instincts. The most typical example is that Gaozi 告子 said “Life is what we call nature” and “Man’s nature is like water whirling round in a corner. Open a passage for it to the east, and it will flow to the east; open a passage for it to the west, and it will flow to the west. Man’s nature is indifferent to good and evil, just as the water is indifferent to the east and west.” (“性犹湍水也, 决诸东方则东流, 决诸西方则西流 人性之无分于善于不善也, 犹如水之无分于东西也.”, *Mencius, Gaozi*, Part I 孟子 告子上). Even in *The Book of Rites*, later

² Some scholars like Roger T. Ames think it is not accurate enough to translate “性” into “nature, human nature”, with reference to Ames (1991). For the convenience of English readers, I am adopting the early traditional translation.

³ The English version of some paragraphs from *The Analects of Confucius* 论语, *The Great Learning* 大学, *The Doctrine of the Mean* 中庸, *Shang Shu* 尚书, *The Book of Mencius* 孟子, and *The Book of Xunzi*, “That Nature is Evil” 荀子·性恶篇 is grounded on Legge 理雅各’ s translation, without other references (Legge 1984).

⁴ The study of the primitive character ‘nature’ here refers to Ouyang 欧阳祯人 (2005, pp. 61–67). It is the author’s opinion that almost all examples of the Chinese character ‘性’ with radicals ‘生’ and ‘目’ found in the unearthed literature are written as ‘眚’. Later writers believe putting the radical ‘心’ with ‘性’ was probably due to the influence of Confucian thinkers.

edited, we can find the following statement: “The people possess five ‘natures’, delight, anger, desire, fear and worry.” (“民有五性，喜怒欲惧忧郁也”，*King Wen’s Officer* 大戴礼记 文王官人) and “People have the nature of vigor, temper and perception, but there is no constancy of sorrow, joy, delight and anger.” (“民有血气心知之性，而无哀乐喜怒之常”，*Records of Music* 乐记). They refer to a kind of natural existence which lacks moral code and is full of ‘original defects’. “Human Nature Comes via Mandate” (性自命出), one of the *Bamboo Texts of Guodian* (郭店楚简), is believed to have been written later than Confucius but earlier than Mencius and shares a very similar view:

Generally speaking, even though all humans have a nature, they have no settled will in their minds. It requires the things; only thereafter can it rise. It requires delight; only thereafter can it evolve. It requires repetitive practice; only thereafter can it settle. (凡人虽有性，心无定志，待物而后作，待悦而后行，待习而后定。)

Emotions such as delight, anger, sorrow and sadness are human nature. (喜怒哀悲之气，性也)

To love and to hate is human nature. That which one loves and hates are the things [in the world]. Good and evil are also human nature. (好恶，性也 所好所恶，物也 善不善，性也)

Learning makes a good man. (学或使之)

Teaching makes a full man. (教使然也)⁵

The emphasis on promoting virtue and morality through education is advocated because it is assumed that human’s innate nature is prone to moral uncertainty. Following the same idea, the next influential thinker to discuss man’s inborn nature was Xunzi 荀子. He maintained that man’s inborn nature has plenty of defects, therefore, outside forces, namely, ‘rites’, education, and conscious activity should be adopted to counteract man’s inborn negative tendencies. In Xunzi’s view, the function of ‘conscious activity’ is of special importance.⁶

Nevertheless, the standardised description of man’s ‘nature’ from the standpoint of ‘goodness’ and ‘anti-naturalism’, with an inherent moral tendency, can be found in *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸). It expounds: “What Heaven has conferred is called ‘The Nature’; an accordance with this nature is called the ‘Path of Duty’” (天命之谓性，率性之为道) in which man’s good nature is believed to originate from the Heaven, be universally rooted in the sages, the superior men and common people. Therefore, if it is observed, man can easily step into the ‘right way’ (从容中道) under the conditions of ‘non-effort’ (不勉) and ‘non-thought’ (不思). Meanwhile, Mencius, cutting a new way in interpreting human nature based on this concept, applied the principles of good (four virtuous principles of our nature,

⁵ The English version of some paragraphs partly see Meyer (2012, p. 312). Other translation and explanation of the text, also see Cook (2013). This newly discovered text partly proves Fu Si-nian’s 傅斯年 inference of the pre-Qin classics that “‘nature’ (性), mentioned in earlier Chinese texts, holds the meaning of ‘life’ (生). This must be affirmed before understanding the idea in earlier times” (Fu 2002, p. 309).

⁶ Fu Si-nian believes Xunzi is closer to Confucius compared to Mencius in terms of this discussion. See Fu (2002).

四端说) to understand human nature. Although Angus C. Graham believed there had existed more than four ways to discuss 'nature' before Mencius⁷ and later scholars also gave a lot of explanations on it, generally speaking, all these opinions regarding the pre-Qin Period can be categorised into two kinds: one is "Life is what we call nature", a naturalist tendency, while the other is "the nature is good", a moral tendency. Both contend that human nature is bequeathed in the starting condition, but their definitions tending towards either *naturalism* or *culturalism* is the difference.

How, then, can these two concepts of 'nature' and 'emotion' be discussed together? There are two paths to follow: the history of concepts and the history of ideas. But most previous research confuses these two methodologies, which yield both advantages and disadvantages, technically speaking. According to the methodology based on the history of concepts, the first discussion linking 'nature' to 'emotion' can be found in *Human Nature Comes via Mandate* in which "Emotions such as delight, anger, sorrow and sadness are human nature" is followed by "the Way originates in emotion, emotion is born from nature" (道始于情, 情生于性). That is to say, nature is considered as a potentiality in an internal hidden state of 'no stirrings' (未发), and 'emotion' is a manifestation of one's nature and a state of 'have stirred' (已发). The way to control overflowing 'nature-emotion' and incorporate it with 'humanity' lies in the orientation of 'heart'. Xunzi almost agreed with *Human Nature Comes via Mandate*, in his *On The Correct Use of Names* (正名篇), he wrote: "What characterizes a man from birth is called his 'nature', the feelings of liking and dislike, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our nature are called 'emotion'."⁸ Also, there are a lot of discussions about the relation between 'nature' and 'emotion' in his *That Nature is Evil* (性恶篇). As the two concepts share the same basic attributes, they are often combined into one concept: 'nature-emotion' or 'emotion-nature'. I will not present further examples in this paper, for most readers are already familiar with this theory. At this point, the compound word 'nature-emotion', with its widespread use especially in Confucianism, becomes the most important expression to set moral premises and promote ethic practices.

The concept of 'nature-sensibility' began to enjoy prevalence during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. He Shang-zhi 何尚之 (AD 382–460) mentioned: "Fan Tai 范泰, Xie Ling-yun 谢灵运 often said: the six Confucian classics are designed to govern the society. So, if you want to explore the secret of human nature-sensibility, how can you break away with the direction of Buddhist sutras?" (*Some Stories Praising Buddhism in the Yuanjia Period* 列叙元嘉赞扬佛教事).⁹ This is the first case of the concept of 'nature-sensibility' being used by men of letters, and it was believed that the Buddhist principle (义理) was more profound than that of Confucianism. Thus, the concept of 'nature-sensibility' tends to be used to interpret the nature of the mind instead of the concept of 'nature-emotion'. It can be noticed that the appearance of 'nature-sensibility' is closely associated with the introduction of Buddhism to China. After that, many scholars like Yan Yan-zhi

⁷ Graham (1967).

⁸ The English version of these paragraphs are from Knoblock (1988).

⁹ Yan (1985, p. 2590).

颜延之, Zhang Rong 张融, Tao Hong-jing 陶弘景, Jiang Yan 江淹, Xu Mian 徐勉, Liu Xie 刘勰, Zhong Rong 钟嵘, Liu Jun 刘峻, Sima Yun 司马筠, Xiao Gang 萧纲, and Xiao Yi 萧绎 began to use the term ‘nature-sensibility’ in their writings. They were also deeply involved with Buddhism and literature.¹⁰ Other contemporary scholars believe that the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ was also inspired by Taoism.¹¹

By understanding human nature from ontological premises, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism all considered ‘nature’ their theoretical foundation, even though they held different understandings of what ‘nature’ was. However, the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ indicated there had been a number of changes in the understanding of human nature among men of letters during the Southern Period. Although various scholars still held different opinions on the definition of ‘nature’ (or mixed their conception of it with Confucianian thought), it was generally redefined as having these three characteristics: sensibility, emptiness–stillness, and individuality. Thus, the Confucian concept of ‘nature-emotion’, with its goal of governing society, had been challenged and weakened. Meanwhile, also ‘nature-emotion’ (or ‘emotion-nature’) was occasionally given the meanings of ‘nature-sensibility’ in literary criticism of the time, which, for example, can be found in works of literary criticism written by Liu Xie 刘勰, Zhong Rong 钟嵘, and others.

Starting from the Tang dynasty, Neo-Confucian philosophy stepped onto the historical stage and gradually developed into the most influential of the schools. In particular, the views on ‘nature-emotion’ of Li Ao 李翱 (AD 772–841), an important Neo-Confucian scholar, laid a foundation for later discussions. First of all, he accepted the belief in ‘good nature’ from *The Doctrine of the Mean* and Mencius, believing ‘goodness’ is man’s inborn nature. Also, he seemed to share the assessment given in the text *Human Nature Comes via Mandate* and Xunzi, stating that ‘nature’ and ‘emotion’ were interdependent and inseparable, as Li Ao mentions that “Emotion originates from nature. It is not self-produced, but made by nature; nature is not self-produced either, but is improved by emotion.”¹² Next (and more importantly), under the influence of Buddhism, he proposed “nature is good but emotion is dark”, clearly setting ‘nature’ in opposition to ‘emotion’, and advocated “eliminate emotion and restore nature”. There is obvious incoherence in Li Ao’s logic, which makes interpretations of ‘nature’ very complicated, and triggers a more profound and detailed discussion on it. ‘Nature-emotion’ again became the main topic of discussion amongst many scholars during the Song dynasty. Finally, Zhang Zai 张载 (AD 1020–1077) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (AD 1130–1200) put forward the idea that “heart dominates nature and emotion” (心统性情), which is logically coherent and clear, and it soon became an authoritative statement. In Zhu Xi’s explanation, ‘emotion’, denied by Li Ao, is seen as closely related to ‘nature’ once again. But it is also separated. The moral emotion dominated by a perfect ‘nature’ is viewed as good, but the remaining part is evil. ‘Nature’ is believed to be controlled by ‘moral principle’, so Zhu Xi’s way of interpretation was called the study of ‘nature-

¹⁰ See Gong (2008, pp. 70–72).

¹¹ See Wang (2007, pp. 216–219).

¹² “A Letter about Restoring Nature”, in *The Li Wengong Collection*, Vol. III.

principle’(性理).¹³ As for the correlated historical events of this period, others have already put forth detailed explanations and dissertations, so I will not discuss it further in this paper. After this period, Confucianism regained a dominant position in the ideological field, hence the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ was quickly abandoned even as theoretical decoration.

Due to the reception of scholars in the English-speaking world, the translation of these critical concepts needs further explanation. In fact, it is acceptable to translate ‘情’ into neutral words like ‘emotion’ or ‘feeling’, but there are variations in meaning. Sometimes it can be translated into ‘affection’, ‘passion’, ‘desire’, etc. depending on the context, but this should not be seen as the standard.

As for the English version of ‘性’, early missionaries translated it as ‘natura’.¹⁴ James Legge, a British sinologist of the nineteenth century, translated it into ‘nature’, which was taken as the standard version by most later scholars. This English version is basically close to its original Chinese meaning. However, there is no agreement for the English translation of the term ‘性情’. Other than the Chinese phonetic transcription, James Legge translated both ‘性情’ and ‘情性’ from the article “That Nature is Evil” in *The Book of Xunzi*¹⁵ into ‘nature and feelings’, ‘feelings of nature’, or ‘feeling and nature’, ‘natural feeling’. John Knoblock translated ‘性情’ or ‘情性’ from the *Xunzi* into ‘inborn and essential natures’, or ‘inborn nature’, ‘inborn nature and true feelings’, etc.¹⁶ Stephen Owen translated “雕琢性情” from *Its Source in the Way* (原道), written by Liu Xie, into “sculpt human nature”¹⁷; ‘性情’ from (“吐纳英华, 莫非性情”) in *Nature and Form* (体性) into ‘affections and nature’¹⁸; (“则知文质附乎性情”) from *The Affections and Coloration* (情采) into “one’s nature and the state of the affections”.¹⁹ Wong Siu-kit translated ‘性情’ in “气之动物, 物之感人, 故摇荡性情, 形诸舞咏”, the first sentence from *Preface to The Poets Systematically Graded* (诗品序), written by Zhong Rong, into “natural attributes and feeling”²⁰; ‘情性’ in “吟咏情性, 反拟《内则》之篇” from *A Letter to the Prince of Xiangdong* (与湘东王书), written by Xiao

¹³ Zhu Xi had many discussions on it; the most typical expression from his work is the following: “commiseration, shame/dislike, approving/disapproving, and reverse/respect (惻隱、羞惡、是非、辭讓) are the manifestation of emotion; benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge (仁、義、禮、智) are the body of nature. Nature only includes benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge. But after being presented, they become commiseration, shame/dislike, approving/disapproving and reverse/respect, which we call emotion of nature.” This is the unity of ‘nature’ and ‘emotion’. They are then separated in “All nature is good, and emotion, originating from the mind, sometimes is not good. But we cannot say the mind is not good. Generally, the body of nature is good, yet the human mind sometimes is not good, because it is involved in external things.” So, ‘nature’ is different from ‘emotion’, but through some procedures ‘emotion’ can meet ‘nature’s requirements’. See *Zhuzi’s Quotation* 朱子语类, p. 92.

¹⁴ For the most representative translation see Couplet et al. 1687).

¹⁵ When James Legge translated *The Book of Mencius*, he also translated “That Nature is Evil” in *The Book of Xunzi* and attached it to the end of *The Book of Mencius*.

¹⁶ Knoblock (1988).

¹⁷ Owen (2003, Chinese version, p. 195).

¹⁸ Owen (2003, Chinese version, p. 220).

¹⁹ Owen (2003, Chinese version, p. 250).

²⁰ Wong (edited and translated) (1983, p. 89).

Gang 萧纲, into ‘feeling’, etc.²¹ I hold the belief that there are no fundamental mistakes in these translations according to their context. But the scholars’ choice of words is based on personal preference and lack the necessary stability. Some translations of literary criticism do not even follow the original concepts closely in terms of their position in conceptual history.

There is a similar problem with the translation of ‘性灵’. For example, Stephen Owen translated “惟人參之，性灵所钟” from *Its Source in the Way*, written by Liu Xie, into “Only the human being, endowed with the divine spark of consciousness”²²; “洞性灵之奥区” from *Revering the Classics* (宗经) into “penetrate the secret recesses of soul”; “性灵熔匠”，also from *Revering the Classics*, into “Which are the formative craftsmen of the [human] spirit”²³; and “若乃综述性灵” from “The Affections and Coloration” into “When it comes to the overall transmission of our spiritual nature”. Wong Siu-kit translated the latter part of “岁月飘忽，性灵不居” from *A Postscript* (序志), written by Liu Xie, into “Man’s sentience does not continue to dwell in ...”²⁴ When it comes to the translation of ‘性灵’ during Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty, Liu translated “大都独抒性灵，不拘格套”，a famous sentence from *The Preface to Xiao-xiu’ Poetry* (叙小修诗), written by Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 into “Most of his works uniquely express his personal nature [...]”²⁵; while Chih-p’ing Chou translated it as “The great majority [of his poems] uniquely express his personality and innate sensibility [...]”²⁶ Besides the translators’ preferred word choice, the limitation of these translations is that they uncover only one layer of meaning embodied in the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’. The historical implication within the concept often evades the readers.

Returning to the issue of lineage in the history of concepts, as has been already discussed, concepts like ‘nature-emotion’ and ‘nature-sensibility’ were shaped by, and thus can be explained by, the step-by-step evolution of their meanings. Therefore, they cannot be separated from their genealogies nor be interpreted according to the whims of scholars. In Chinese, a single character like ‘性’ usually has a basic meaning which extends and changes if combined with another character. But such kind of extension and change is based on its basic meaning, and in this way, the genealogy of meaning is formed. This is also the general feature of Chinese word formation. If this is not taken into account in the translation, the many meanings accumulated into the layers over time will be lost; these words will also become vague symbols and free-floating signifiers, where we cannot trace the meaning of words back to their own discourse genealogy.

However, there are some successful cases, for instance, when translating compound words of ‘风’, an important term in ancient literary criticism: Chia-ying Yeh and Jan W. Walls translated ‘风力’ into ‘wind force’, ‘风神’ into ‘wind spirit’, ‘风骨’ into ‘wind bone’, ‘风采’ into ‘wind coloration’, ‘风调’ into

²¹ Wong (edited and translated) (1983, p. 137).

²² Owen (2003, Chinese version, p. 192).

²³ Owen (2003, Chinese version, p. 199).

²⁴ Wong (edited and translated) (1983, p. 125).

²⁵ Liu (1975), translated by Du (2006, p. 120).

²⁶ Chou (1988, pp. 45–46).

'wind tune' etc.,²⁷ from which readers can identify the same etymology, as well as their inter-referential relations. Although it is hard to find exact equivalent words between English and Chinese, the original limits in meaning and their development during the whole history of concepts still needs to be seen in translation. This is also convenient for international readers to follow. So, taking this in consideration, I suggest translating the Chinese concepts '性情' and '性灵' as 'nature-emotion' and 'nature-sensibility' in English, and making the English version as constant and invariable as possible. Similarly, I translate '心性' into 'mind-nature' and '性理' into 'nature-principle'. The following discussion will investigate how the reconfirmed translation can help readers understand the change in mentality from the overview of the concept as it was after the mid-Ming dynasty.

The turn of criticism: from 'emotion' to 'nature-sensibility'

From the above overview and discussion of the historical development of these three important concepts, we can get a glimpse of the developments in elite culture/literary criticism during the mid-to-late Ming dynasty. The use and usage of these concepts directly shows the changes in critical thought during this time.

It is well known that for over 100 years, from the early to mid-Ming dynasty, Neo-Confucianism, represented by Zhu Xi, was officially recognised as the orthodox ideology. No other schools could compete with it at the time. Moreover, the diffusion of Neo-Confucianism manifested itself in two aspects: with the imperial examination system and its presence at a local level; and the daily compositions of senior official scholars, who were to be viewed as 'spokesmen' of the official orthodoxy. As for the second aspect, the fact that "the royal court controlled all literature" (文归台阁) at the time meant that the works of official scholars—who were schooled in Neo-Confucianism thought—immediately qualified for this criterion. With the popularisation of Neo-Confucianism, the concept of 'nature-emotion', represented by the interpretation of Zhu Xi, was unprecedentedly promoted. It, as a mode of practice, refers to the cultivation of one's inner temperament as defined by the Neo-Confucian school. 'Nature-emotion' was seen as a kind of personality trait that carried the quality of 'medial harmony' and was revealed from the inside to the outside. During the early Ming dynasty, under the growing influence of the bureaucrats, the concept of 'nature-emotion' was also believed to be related to the embodiment of the Confucians' image of "noble and elegant" (春容典雅), and of "proper and leisurely" (平正纾余). Furthermore, 'nature-emotion' referred to a subject and style of writing. For example, when Yang Shiqi 杨士奇 (AD 1365–1444), the leader of official scholars at the time, criticised poetry, he preferred to adopt Zhu Xi's view on 'nature-emotion'. He stated: "Zhu Xi believed nature-emotion should give origin to poetry. People's language and behaviour should be in accordance with the premise that individuals should be cultivated, families should be regulated, and states should be ruled wisely, thus the whole kingdom will achieve tranquility and happiness, and then great poetry can be

²⁷ Yeh and Walls (1978, Vol. I, pp. 43–80).

written.”²⁸ Another famous official scholar Jin Youzi 金幼孜 (AD 1368–1431) stated: “Poetry emerges from emotion, but it should be in accordance with the rites and moral principles. The songs of the ancients conform to the correctness of nature-emotion.”²⁹ Under the influence of official scholars, like Yang Shi-qi, Yang Rong 杨荣, Yang Pu 杨溥, Jin Youzi, and later philosophers, like Xue Xuan 薛瑄, Hu Juren 胡居仁, the fact that ‘nature-emotion’ is in conformity with moral principles, and ‘emotion’ is in an agreement with ‘nature’, was seen as the supreme guiding principle of people’s behaviours and writings. This led the development of literary criticism for almost a century.³⁰

In this historical context, the creativity and spirit of resistance embodied in the writings of the Former Seven Masters 前七子 could be easily seen when they advocated ‘emotion’ during mid-Ming dynasty. The concept of ‘emotion’ was frequently used in their papers, which indicated it was also one main focus of their criticism. The following is the statement of Li Mengyang 李梦阳 (AD 1473–1530), the leader of Former Seven Masters:

Human emotion is moved by external ‘things on earth’. Stirred by external things into movement, emotion arises. Understanding comes from stirred emotion. Also, voice happens when spirit goes into certain depth. All emotion has reliable sources.³¹

These particular principles (殊理) are born in the voice of emotion. Why? It is because principles seem to be general, but they will miraculously change because of their specific qualities. This change is hard to predict... As mentioned by *The Book of Rituals*, “People have the nature of vigor, temper, and perception, but there is no constancy of sorrow, joy, delight and anger. People have emotions as a result of contact with things on earth, then generate certain regular sequences.” Such emotion is real.³²

When Chinese poetry developed during the Tang dynasty, it lost the ancient tongue. Poets living in the Song dynasty, however, preferred principles over tongue. Hence, the language of Tang poetry was also lost. As metaphor and analogy are often found in poetic language, poetry expresses feelings with its way of describing specific aspects of life. The feelings of poets are unpredictable, and their disposition changes. Thus, it is marvelous to detect subtle and unexpected feelings that are hard to put in words directly... Those living in the Song dynasty, however, pay special attention to principles, and no longer know what poetry is.³³

It can be seen from the above quotations that for the Former Seven Masters ‘emotion’ was an important topic to discuss. First of all, this ‘emotion’ is separated off from its previous compound form: ‘nature-emotion’ which belonged to

²⁸ “Preface to Hu Yanping’s Poems” 胡延平诗序, in *The Dong-li Collection*, Vol. IV.

²⁹ “A Record of Yin Shi” 吟室记, in *The Jin Wenjing Collection* 金文靖集, Vol. VIII.

³⁰ Huang (黄卓越) (2001, pp. 39–49).

³¹ “Preface to Meiyue’s Poems” 梅月先生诗序, in *The Kongtong Collection* 空同集, Vol. LI.

³² “Preface to Jie Chang Cao Pu” 结肠操谱序, in *The Kongtong Collection*, Vol. LI.

³³ “Preface to Fou Yin” 缶音序, in *The Kongtong Collection*, Vol. LII.

Confucian ideology. This use of 'emotion' refers to a way of experiencing life, which is free from morality discourse. It is also a key concept affirmed in his argumentation. In Li Mengyang's opinion, all kinds of 'emotion' do not in fact originate from 'nature' or 'principles' or are not governed by them. 'Emotion' initially rises from the contact with 'things on earth', and since this kind of contact is flexible, the occurrence and forms of 'emotion' are diversified as well.

Li Mengyang even interpreted 'nature', mentioned accidentally (in the quotation from *Records of Music*), as natural tendencies, that is, the nature of vigor, temper and perception is beyond moral restrictions and is of great uncertainty, so that people acted differently in accordance to their own experience (and interpretation) of the external world. At this point, Li Mengyang seemed to say if people have 'nature', it is based on secular 'emotion' and is self-revealing. Meanwhile, he denied the pre-ordained, standard and eternally unchanged connotation of 'principles'; instead, he viewed it as a systematic expression of emotion. So it changed miraculously, and progressed ceaselessly. What we knew were only some 'particular principles'.

Hence, Li Mengyang criticised the logic that 'nature' was based on 'principles' and 'emotion' was restricted by 'nature', which had been followed since the Song dynasty. He believed that because the 'nature-principle' and 'moral principle' of Neo-Confucianism had been used to guide writing, the quality of literature had declined. The Former Seven Masters also expanded their discussion on 'emotion' into other fields. For instance, they affirmed emotion could be seen from a popular, rebellious, and personal perspective,³⁴ and hoped to free 'emotion' from the dualistic constraint of 'nature/emotion', which caused 'emotion' to forfeit its attachment to 'nature' and make way for the cultural and literary criticism of the Ming dynasty.

Of course, when the theories of the Former Seven Masters finally prevailed, another hidden trend of thought had already been brewing. It was related to the larger social changes that were taking place, as well as the general transformation of the history of Ideas. This new trend of thought developed into two paths; the first was that of Yangming's Mind school, a new branch of Neo-Confucianism. With their interpretation, 'nature', 'principles', and 'mind', again became the centre of philosophical debate. This theory of the Mind school tends to affirm man's good nature, but as a correction of Neo-Confucianism, it strongly claims the primary entity of the mind, or 'perfect human nature', could unfold and move without obstruction by transcending the operation of all emotions (desires) and principles (knowledge) etc. Confucianism, which was inclined towards social moral practice, was then further transformed into a philosophy aiming at "resting oneself and surrendering to destiny" (安身立命). The Tang-Song school 唐宋派, which appeared in the Jiajing era, was the most influential branch of the Mind School in literary criticism at the time. Although there is no absolute agreement amongst the members of this school, their outlook is still regarded as a type of criticism coming from the Mind School. Their primary concern, therefore, was the confirmation of mental entity, which was called 'authentic nature' (真性)³⁵ or the 'origin of the

³⁴ Huang (2001, pp. 159–164).

³⁵ "A Letter to Wang Zunyan" 答王遵岩, in *Mr. Jing Chuan's Collection* 荆川先生文集, Vol. VI.

mind’(心源),³⁶ etc. by Tang Shunzhi 唐顺之 (AD 1507–1560), a leader of the Tang-Song school; various kinds of disturbances from external factors such as emotion, temperament, passion for literature, attachment to reputation, and the quest for knowledge should be put aside in order to allow one’s ‘authentic nature’ to be rooted in ‘purity’. These disturbances are believed to be harmful to the ‘nature of the mind’. Under this circumstance, Tang Shun-zhi strongly rejected both the rationalism advocated by Neo-Confucianism during the Song dynasty and the emotionalism promoted by the Former Seven Masters.

The second was that of the Latter Seven Masters 后七子. Heirs of the Former Seven Masters, they paid great attention to the nature of the mind as well. This was an influence of Buddhism and Taoism, the two local religions, prevailing in southeast China after the Jiajing era. To be specific, this attention for the nature of the mind began during the later stage of the Former Seven Masters’ movement, represented by Wang Shizhen 王世贞, (AD 1526–1590), Wang Shimao 王世懋 (AD 1536–1588), Tu Long 屠隆 (AD 1542–1605), Feng Mengzhen 冯梦祯 (AD 1548–1605), Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (AD 1525–1593), Li Weizhen 李维桢, (AD 1547–1626) et al. In their writings, the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ can be frequently found. According to historical records, these men showed different degrees of interest in Buddhism and Taoism in the early Wanli era. All of them settled in the southeast of China (including the southern part of Suzhou, the western part of Zhejiang, and Huizhou), which made communication very convenient. Gradually, a social and intellectual circle whose members enjoyed close personal friendships and shared common interests on literature, religion, etc. was created. Among them, scholars like Wang Shi-zhen, Tu Long, Feng Mengzhen, and Wang Daokun were deeply involved in religion. They officiated and participated in religious practices and rituals, and even converted to religion.³⁷ Of course, their religious beliefs were complicated, and were often the mixture of two different religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism, and they did not completely abandon the secular life. Even though they were a generation of literati who had received a formal Confucian education, they were not concerned with making worldly achievements, cultivating society, or writing with the aim of conveying Confucian truths; rather, they were set on dealing with the personal nature of the mind and keeping it immaculate, transcendent and perfect, after abolishing all secular desires. They called this ‘transcendent knowledge’. Their concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ was thus formulated in this background.

In some of his writings Tu Long mentioned the relationship between ‘nature-sensibility’ and Buddhism and Taoism. For example, in his *Preface to Pattra-Leaf Studio Papers*, he described Li Weiyin, one of his friends: “sitting cross legged on a cattail hassock, reading Buddhist sutras and making friends with a Buddhist monk—from this I can see your nature-sensibility”,³⁸ and in *Preface to The Liu Luqiao*

³⁶ “A letter to Huang Shishang” 寄黄土尚, in *Mr. Jing Chuan’s Collection*, Vol. III.

³⁷ The relation between Wang Shizhen and Taoism see Zheng 郑利华 (1993). After the sixth year of the Wanli period, for the relationship between Tu Long, Feng Mengzhen and Buddhism and Taoism see Huang (2005, pp. 226–273). For the relationship between Wang Daokun and Buddhism see Liu (刘彭冰) (2008).

³⁸ “Preface to Pattra-Leaf Studio Papers” 贝叶斋稿序, in *White Elm Collection* 白榆集, Vol. I.

Collection, he wrote, from the point of view of Taoism that “The Tao gives birth to all creations and grants them with sensibility-nature, which is mostly received by Human beings.”³⁹ The concept of ‘sensibility-nature’ (灵性) was also described as ‘emptiness-sensibility’ (虚灵) or ‘sensibility-brightness’ (灵明), which is the synonym or near-synonym of ‘nature-sensibility’, based on the premise of “being set in the realm of quietness and emptiness”. The meaning of ‘nature-sensibility’, applied by the Latter Seven Masters to a different setting, is also different to a certain extent, but the introduction of this category is quite meaningful. This not only reforms the whole Confucian discourse system established during Song dynasty, but it also encourages people to understand the meaning of human nature from a new perspective. Furthermore, it helps rethink the living approach of early Confucians, and leads individuals to devote themselves to the process of reflection. At this point, Wang Shizhen had confessed numerous times that ever since he had started practicing Taoism, he began to realise it was worthless to absorb oneself in emotion, literature, and ambitious pursuits to build up one’s reputation. He also believed that “Doing nothing and only doing spiritual practice is in itself the truth”, while the best way to follow the truth was “being nothing but ‘indifferent’”.⁴⁰ In his letters to his friends, Tu Long often stated that all worldly affairs, such as advancing one’s career, literature, lyricism, etc. were of great harm to one’s nature-sensibility. Healing the soul therefore meant conquering various kinds of emotion and appetites. If one did not want to abandon literature temporarily, he should have at least made his writing express nature-sensibility, displaying his inner nature-sensibility freely and wildly.⁴¹ It can be seen that the ‘nature-sensibility’ advocated by the Latter Seven Masters school is actually a kind of ‘emptiness-sensibility’. If you want to reach ‘emptiness-sensibility’, you have to not only delete all meanings implanted by early naturalism and culturalism, but also delete the connotation of ‘emotion’ imbedded by the Former Seven Masters. To differentiate this interpretation of ‘nature-sensibility’ from others, I will call it ‘nature-sensibility I’.

I named another interpretation of ‘nature-sensibility’ as ‘nature-sensibility II’. It originated from the idea of Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (AD 1568–1610), the leader of Gong’an school 公安派, which appeared later. Although the statement of ‘emotion’ proposed by the Former Seven Masters was doubted and resisted by the Tang-Song school and the Latter Seven Masters, it gained, instead of vanishing, greater influence during late Ming dynasty. The concept of ‘emotion’ was also brought up in the discourses of Yuan Hongdao. Similarly, he applied ‘nature-sensibility’ to push his opinions, yet in most cases he preferred to use ‘nature’ (性). We can still predict what the meaning of ‘nature-sensibility’ is from the statements of Yuan Hongdao. His understanding of ‘nature-sensibility’ shares similarities with that of the Latter Seven Masters. Its key connotation is ‘self-satisfaction’ (自适), which was mentioned in many of his writings. Nevertheless, his way of thinking was very

³⁹ “Preface to The Liu Luqiao Collection” 刘鲁桥先生文集序, in *White Elm Collection* 白榆集, Vol. I.

⁴⁰ “Biography of the Tan Yang Master” 昙阳大师传, in *Yan-zhou Supplementary Manuscript* 弇州续稿, Vol. LXXXVIII.

⁴¹ For the relationship between poetry and nature-sensibility, see Tu Long, “Preface to Pattra-Leaf Studio Papers”, “Preface to Bao Tong Collection” 抱侗集序, in *White Elm Collection* 白榆集, Vol. I, II.

different from that of the Latter Seven Masters. He did not propose to shut out emotion, repress appetite, etc. On the contrary, he believed those should be embraced and the range of 'self-satisfaction' should be extended as wide as possible. According to Yuan Hongdao, both the interpretation of 'nature-emotion' of Neo-Confucianism and the interpretation 'nature-sensibility' of the Latter Seven Masters were limited by their dualistic views of 'division of seeing' (见分). They viewed secular 'emotion' and 'nature' in strict confinement as polar opposites. And through this type of "dual-opposite conceptual thinking", good and bad were compulsively determined: Transcendence was regarded as perfect, and secular emotion as filth, so as to verify one's superiority and exclusivity. In a paper named *A Letter to Zhu Sili*, he put forth a new idea based on the transition of his own state of mind:

I always believed that there were barriers between myself and the secular life. But I have recently began to feel that I can make acquaintance with butchers and peddlers in marketplace, understand the wild deer and the river deer in the mountains, communicate in colloquialism and slang on street corners. Now, I do not think it is wholly inappropriate that I still cannot be totally involved in secular life. Why did I hold onto the idea of self-isolation before? It was because I had a holier-than-thou attitude and was extremely detached from mundane affairs. So that, if was praised as a graceful man, I felt happy and otherwise unhappy. I believed that by staying with graceful men, I would become graceful as well, and conversely, associating with ordinary man, I would become common. However, these days, I have already found there are no barriers between clean and dirty or the demons and the Buddhas. I hope to be thrown into the ocean of the secular world living with all the others.⁴²

Undoubtedly, this statement by Yuan Hongdao is a big breakthrough. It dismisses the view of the opposition of good and evil, superior men and common men, grace and secular, which came from the dualism of traditional philosophy, and abandons the dualistic view of 'nature' and 'emotion'.⁴³ It also left behind all the moral denominations in language, that is, "It is not accessible by the path of language and thinking".⁴⁴ From the ideas of Taoism, "All things are on equal terms"; and from the ideas of Buddhism, "All things have no barriers".⁴⁵ According to Yuan Hongdao's logic, the only thing left is to distinguish truth from non-truth. The true nature of the mind originates from 'nature-sensibility'. It is like a newborn baby who has not received knowledge, and does not know the difference between right and wrong.

⁴² "A Letter to Zhu Si Li" 朱司理, in *A Collation and Note on The Yuan Hongdao Collection* 袁宏道集校笺, Vol. XI.

⁴³ The forsaking of dualistic thought is referred to in many papers of Yuan Hongdao between the twenty-third and twenty-fifth year of the Wanli period during the Ming dynasty. His thought changed afterwards, but this will not be discussed here.

⁴⁴ See "A Letter Zhang You-yu" 张幼于, in *A Collation and Note on The Yuan Hongdao Collection*, Vol. XI.

⁴⁵ The statement of "All things have no barriers" 事事无碍 see Yuan Hongdao, "A Letter to Cao Luchuan" 曹鲁川, "A Letter to Chen Zhihuan" 陈志寰, in *A Collation and Note on The Yuan Hongdao Collection*, Vol. V, VI.

As Jacques Lacan's statement goes, before learning how to distinguish subject from object, the world of babies is in a chaos. So they behave brazenly, spontaneously and effortlessly, and all gestures and manners are filled with 'live' interest.⁴⁶ Outside of this, all other things are artificial and fake. At this point, if there is a demand of self-satisfaction in these two kinds of 'nature-sensibility', 'nature-sensibility I' tends to get it through abandoning emotions and desires, whereas 'nature-sensibility II' believes man's ideological settings and differentiation are the barriers to self-satisfaction. According to this view, people's secular emotions and desires are not the obstacles of freedom; instead, they are the necessary basis for eliminating all kinds of 'man-made' confinements and are essential to realise full self-satisfaction. Hence, 'nature-sensibility II' once again affirms the concept of 'emotion' proposed by the Former Seven Masters by counteracting and exceeding 'nature-sensibility I'.

From the above analysis we can see that these three ideas of elite criticism, appearing in mid-and-late Ming dynasty, had already freed themselves from the powerful moral rules embedded in the concept of 'nature-emotion' of earlier periods and had reached a kind of agreement the moment they joint efforts to resist the interpretation of human nature of Confucianism. However, the three kinds of criticism still hold differing views on many important issues, specifically their attitudes towards secular life and the lower classes. It also includes the cultural elites' standpoint and reactions when they were confronted with huge social transformations that were taking place during mid-to-late Ming dynasty. In fact, their differing views mainly focus on whether it would be wise to continue to preserve the cultural hierarchies and the separation of the elite class from the rest of secular society, or whether to abolish these distinctions and grades and fully appreciate the life and culture of ordinary people and view it as an essential value to reforming the political and cultural environment of the Empire, as well as redefining the self-personality and self-identity of the culture elite.

Statements of the Former Seven Masters prove that the idea they offer of 'emotion' is applied on two levels: one to the general living experiences of individuals, the second is the life, thought, and literature of the lower classes. In regards to the latter, Li Mengyang mentioned numerous times in his writings that his literary criticism was influenced by folk songs that were very popular among common people at the time. He described the features of these folk songs accordingly: "They are songs of the northern nomadic tribes; their thinking is lewd, their sound full of sorrow, their melody decadent."⁴⁷ These folk songs conveyed the spontaneous emotion of the lower classes in an extreme way. They went beyond the strict boundaries put on literature—a requirement of Neo-Confucianism—and broke the consolidated principle that ruled orthodox poetry, in which controlling emotions was required to express and cultivate the nature-emotion of 'medial harmony'. Under the slogan of "returning to the old days", the members of the Former Seven Masters wrote numerous poems about the life and emotions of the lower classes by

⁴⁶ "A Preface to The Chen Zhengfu Collection" 叙陈正甫会心集, in *A Collation and Note on The Yuan Hongdao Collection*, Vol. X.

⁴⁷ "The Author's Preface for An Anthology of Poems", in Huang Zhuoyue (ed.) (2011, p. 272).

imitating the Yuefu 乐府 ballads of the Han and Wei periods.⁴⁸ Admittedly, the theoretical intention of the Former Seven Masters was, in reality, deeper and more extensive than their pursuit of literature; they hoped to change the false, rigid, and normative official ideology by introducing the values of ordinary people into their writings, so as to promote the overall innovation of social ideas.

At this point, the concept of ‘nature-sensibility I’ proposed by the Latter Seven Masters emphasised the meaning of an individualistic life. Most notably, it introduced the issues of ‘life and death’, which reflected a trend that Confucian literati began to follow with a new intention. This also influenced the formation of fashionable ways of life during the late Ming dynasty. However, the new intention can also be seen as an escape from two types of social pressure existing at the time: the first was to escape from the official utilitarianism and the goal of controlling society; the second was to escape from the expanding secularised process. Beginning in Wei and Jin periods and up until now, the value of Chinese traditional elitism had been maintained by reconstructing a defensive discourse strategy. This intention also presented itself in the theories of some branches of the Mind school, whose theoretical basis was transcendentalism, too.

The Gong’an school borrowed the concept of ‘nature-sensibility’ from the Latter Seven Masters. Thus, it can be seen as a continuation of the critical ideas they borrowed. Their emphasis on ‘nature’ shows that they influenced by religious thought and the Mind school, which were very popular at that time. Not only they paid great attention to the meaning of life and the belonging of individuals, they also wanted to respond to social change from a deeper theoretical perspective. However, the Gong’an school, represented by Yuan Hongdao, took the changes that had taken place in secular society into consideration and accepted them rather than trying to escape them. Hence, a new kind of ‘nature-sensibility’ was created in order to bridge the two extremes in their meaning, which have been seen in opposition during this long debate. To be more specific, the two opposing extremes in meaning refer to the good and ontological ‘nature’, and the evil and secular ‘emotion’. In addition, his school sought to defuse the tension between the two extremes and promote the advancement of transformation of the history of ideas as well.

Therefore, scholars such as Yuan Hongdao through his theory and discourses clarified those ways of thinking that could not be distinguished, and like the Former Seven Masters, he affirmed the value of popular literature in literary criticism. They believed that many of popular folk songs, such as Baipo yu (掰破玉), Dui zhu gan (对竹竿), Yin liu si (银柳丝), and Gua zhen'er (挂针儿), revealed the features of current secular life, and that: “The expression of human nature can convey people’s innate pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, addiction and appetite, so they are delightful.”⁴⁹ These popular folk songs were more valuable than aristocratic poems, which simply followed old routines. Obviously we can see in the ideas of Yuan Hongdao that ‘nature’/‘nature-sensibility’ shares certain similarities with secular ‘appetite’. As a result, the understanding of ‘nature-sensibility’ in the late-Ming dynasty should be

⁴⁸ See Huang (2003, pp. 30–44).

⁴⁹ “Preface to Poems of Xiaoxiu” 叙小修诗, in *A Collation and Note on The Yuan Hongdao Collection*, Vol. IV.

put in the context of this new development of the history of concepts, so as to understand these changes on a deeper level. Only in this way, can we avoid reductionism.⁵⁰

Although Yuan Hongdao tended to mix these two concepts together in his writings, 'nature-sensibility' and 'emotion' are of course different concepts. Comparatively speaking, the concept of 'nature-sensibility' is more close to elite discourse, so it must be viewed in terms of its spiritual connotation. It is also different from the view of the Former Seven Masters, which was totally steeped in the secular living experience and emotion. Meanwhile, because this concept emphasises the origin of an innate genius, which cannot be relegated to experience, it takes an evident personal approach, whereas the 'emotion' advocated by the Former Seven Masters tends to refer to a social, empirical, and collective feeling of life. In these two aspects, although both the Former Seven Masters and the Gong'an school tend to use and integrate resources of the lower classes from the perspective of the elite, the 'nature-sensibility II' formulated by the Gong'an school is closer to the general taste of the literati during late-Ming dynasty. A kind of easy-and-graceful culture therefore came into being. Accordingly, other critics also transformed the Confucian concept of 'nature-emotion' into a category of meaning which was connected with 'nature-sensibility' and contained the life experience of the individual. This is what we would call "new wine in an old bottle" in Chinese slang.⁵¹ The idea of 'emotion' proposed by the Former Seven Masters underwent, in other fields, especially in popular literature, some theoretical variation after being transformed by other critics.⁵²

From the above overview we can see that the concept 'emotion' has been requisitioned by and incorporated into the discourses of numerous schools of thought in the Chinese history of concepts, so its meaning is varied and complex. But in elite discourse, especially in the writings of the leading Confucian elite, the secular emotion is brought into a suppressed formula of dualism: the term 'nature/emotion', since its first appearance and early usage, was used to define a kind of inferior or harmful tendency of the mind. To some extent, this was also because emotion was usually seen as representing the mental experience of the lower strata, groups, and classes. Only through the guidance and instruction of the more advanced culture of the elite could the majority gain insight into their own 'self-nature' and enter a well-designed, perfect cultural order (the early Chinese words are *wen* 文 and *wenming* 文明). This situation began to change during the mid-to-

⁵⁰ Please note that my description of the nature-sensibility of Yuan Hongdao mainly concerns the perspective of the history of ideas. It is Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 who used the concept of "nature-sensibility" frequently to discuss the criticism of the Gong'an school and its meaning changed in his later life. See Yuan Zhongdao, *The Kexue Zhai Collection*. 珂雪斋集.

⁵¹ After the Gong'an School, the meaning of 'nature-emotion' undergoes some changes: its meaning is more ambiguous or is equivalent to 'nature-sensibility'. See the statements of Zhong Xing (钟惺) and Tan Yuanchun (谭元春), the leaders of the Jingling school (竟陵派). Schmidt also found: "The expression *xingqing* ('nature and feeling') sounds similar to, and is, in fact, nearly identical in meaning with *xingling* ('nature and inspiration')" in the statement of Yuan Mei 袁枚, critic of the Qing dynasty. See Schmidt (2003, p. 181).

⁵² For the research about it during later periods see Santangelo, translated by Lin et al. (2009, pp. 184–204).

late Ming dynasty. The Former Seven Masters and the Gong'an school could reach an agreement on some ideas because both schools viewed the 'emotion' stemming from the lower classes as the origin of a new value and meaning for it. They contend that the control of puritan morality can be resisted thanks to it and that the enriching, daily experience of the mind can be fully and freely expressed. However, as to whether 'nature' should be kept in their frame of discourse, they hold different opinions which leads to a final theoretical departure on the same thesis.

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