Madness, or *kuang* in Chinese, constitutes an important phenomenon and metaphor in modern Chinese culture and society. The renowned twentieth-century Chinese writer Lu Xun's influential novel, *A Madman's Diary* (1918), provides an alternative portrait of madness. Other than being labeled as a person out of their mind, the "madman" is characterized by a distinct consciousness of cannibalism, in both metaphysical and physical senses, as the cornerstone of the feudal hierarchy in Chinese society. In other words, "being mad" means unveiling the illusion and understanding the reality of the world. The dialects of madness and mindfulness in Chinese culture contrast with the classic definition of "being mad" in the West.

Concerned with the intellectual and epistemological origins of the alternative perception of madness in early China, philosopher Alexus McLeod's latest monograph, *The Dao of Madness: Mental Illness and Self-Cultivation in Early Chinese Philosophy and Medicine*, traces the history of madness in China back to the Warring States period. The chapters structure the book into three unlabeled sections. They respectively explore the intellectual infrastructure contributing to the conception of madness in early China's philosophy; a comparison and contrast between Confucianism and Zhuangism, the two major schools of philosophy in Warring State China, in their assessment of madness on the ground of personhood and appropriation in advocacy for self-cultivation; and the ways the convergence of these schools led to the medicalization of madness in the Han dynasty. This book concludes with reflections on what contemporary American readers can take from ancient Asian philosophical thinking about madness.

While focusing on the meaning of madness in early Chinese society, McLeod does not begin the book by directly answering the question of "what is madness" but instead outlines conceptions of "mind," "agency," and other important related categories in Chinese philosophy. He argues that "these views inform the ways early Chinese thinkers approach mental illness, as well as the role they see it playing in self-cultivation as a whole (whether they view it as problematic or beneficial, for example)" (p. 14). The second chapter shifts to the communal meanings of illness and disorder in early Chinese philosophy, which constitute the framework for a further discussion about how to situate "madness" in Confucian and Zhuangist philosophies.
The subsequent two chapters explore case studies of different schools of philosophers. Chapter 3 delves into the Confucianist interpretation of madness as a reasonable response to political injustice and bad government; here feigned madness is revealed as cynical behaviors and the violation of social norms in response to bad governance. Different from Confucian philosophers, their Zhuangist counterparts, examined in chapter 4, “justified” madness in their advocacy for rejecting social norms and returning to nature.

Chapter 5 turns to the emergence of the medical definition of madness in the Han dynasty. As a consequence of the convergence of Confucianism, Zhuangism, and other Warring States schools of philosophical thoughts about madness, the emergent synthetic school of philosophy evolved into the pathologization of madness in the medical classic *Huangdi Neijing* and its communal definition of madness. Madness was viewed as an illness that dominated the definition of mental illness throughout the remainder of Chinese history.

The last part of the book reflects on early Chinese philosophers’ reckoning with madness and its resonance with modern conceptions of madness and mental illness in contemporary American society. McLeod encourages his readers to explore the potential of the Chinese communal definition of madness. The uniqueness of the Chinese culture’s comprehension of madness on philosophical and moral grounds may suggest alternative means of treatment.

Situating his work in the growing academic research regarding mental illness and madness in Chinese history in the last decades, McLeod contributes to the philosophical interpretation of madness beyond its diagnostic definition; he succeeds in presenting the early Chinese epistemological and metaphysical use of madness among Confucian and Zhuangist philosophers. He also contributes discursive research of the classical definition of madness encapsulated in *Huangdi Neijing*, casting light on the comprehension of the human body, agency, and other fundamental conceptions of ancient Chinese political culture and moral moderation, which is exceptionally embodied in his analysis of the Confucian comprehension of feigned madness as a “reasonable” articulation of political dissent.

Overall, MacLeod’s insightful and thought-provoking study may inspire sinologists to explore the changing meaning of madness in early China. For researchers of madness and its history in the West, this masterful book may further their knowledge of the diverse ways of “being mad” in different social and historical contexts.
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