ABSTRACT

_Huainanzi_, a work accomplished during the Han, has up to the Ming been neglected by scholars. Since then, there has been renewed interest in the study of _Huainanzi_, even in the West. One of the concerns of modern scholarship is the classification of _Huainanzi_ under the category of the Eclectic School (Za Jia, 杂家) in Ban Gu’s _Han Shu_ bibliography. This lead scholars to hold differing opinions on the _Huainanzi_ as to whether it is an eclectic and disorderly mixture of the philosophies of different schools; or that it is a syncretic and unified work.

Xiong Tie Ji (熊铁基) is of the opinion that what Si Ma Tan and Si Ma Qian, and to a larger extent the Han people, call the _Dao Jia_ is actually the syncretic _Huang Lao Dao Jia_, which is different from pre-Han _Dao Jia_. He called the _Huang Lao_, which was one of the most important philosophical schools of early Han, “Qin Han Xin Dao Jia” (秦汉新道家). Xiong views Huainanzi as a notable _Xin Dao Jia_ work. Agreeing with Xiong’s view on Huainanzi, the aim of my thesis is then to prove that the _Huainanzi_ is syncretic, rather than eclectic, and thereby revealed the inappropriateness of the assessment of Huainanzi as Za Jia.

I shall first discuss the origins and nature of the _Huainanzi_, which in turn is intricately linked to the problem of its authorship. The conclusion that _Huainanzi_ is a work of collaborative effort with Liu An, King of Huai-nan, as probably the overall editor or director of the project, provides further support to the view that the Huainanzi is syncretic in nature, and therefore is to be regarded as a work of _Huang Lao Dao Jia_.

Next, I attempt to study how the _Huainanzi_, building upon the basis of Daoist cosmogony, combine with the idea of qi (气), and the idea of an alternating principle of change through the Yin and Yang (阴阳), to construct its cosmological theory. This shows convincingly that in the philosophy of _Huainanzi_, the ideas of qi and the teachings of the School of Yin-Yang, are blended systematically with Daoist conceptions such as _Dao_ (道), _wu wei_ (无为) and _zi ran_ (自然).
Finally, I probed how the Huainanzi, in logically combining Daoist philosophy with ideas of qi and Yin-Yang thinking again, developed its thoughts on correlative thinking and on Gan Ying (resonance, 感应). This analysis shows that the Huainanzi’s thoughts on correlative thinking and Gan Ying, are actually linked to its cosmological theories. Indeed, it is better for us to understand them not as three distinctive thoughts, but as three interconnecting and overlapping parts of a highly sophisticated system of philosophy.

After detailed and comprehensive studies from different approaches, I am able to conclude confidently that the Huainanzi successfully employed a Daoist framework in logically and coherently integrating thoughts from other schools, and therefore is essentially not eclectic, but syncretic. It is precisely so that makes Huainanzi an important Xin Dao Jia work.