



UNIVERSITY of
HAWAII
PRESS

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Chung-yung* by Tu Wei-ming

Review by: Daniel K. Gardner

Source: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Sinological Torque (Apr., 1978), pp. 227-229

Published by: University of Hawai'i Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1397747>

Accessed: 13-05-2019 06:59 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Hawai'i Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Philosophy East and West*

Book Reviews

Centrality and commonality: An essay on Chung-yung, by Tu Wei-ming. Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, No. 3. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976. Pp. 194. \$5.00. Paper.

The formal canonization of the Confucian classics began with the establishment of the “Erudites of the Five Classics” (*wu-ching po-shih*^a) during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty. By the mid-ninth century, the original canon of five—*I ching*, *Shu ching*, *Shih ching*, *Li chi*, and *Ch’un-ch’iu*—had grown to twelve, to which *Meng-tzu* was added a few centuries later. The Thirteen Classics, particularly the core five, served until the early Sung as the educational foundation of the Confucian literati class. During the Sung period, however, the situation gradually changed. Certain texts were singled out: *Lun-yu* and *Meng-tzu* (two of the Thirteen Classics) together with *Ta-hsüeh* and *Chung-yung* (two chapters from *Li chi*) found a wide and enthusiastic readership among the Confucian intelligentsia of the day. Influenced by Buddhism, Chinese of the Sung were no longer concerned only with man’s relation to man; they also pondered man’s relation to the universe. This led to philosophical inquiry of a more profoundly ontological or metaphysical nature. Turning to their own canon for investigation, Confucians discovered that the *I ching* and the Four Books—as *Ta-hsüeh*, *Lun-yu*, *Meng-tzu*, and *Chung-yung* became known in the late twelfth century—contained many principles and truths relevant to their inquiry. Thus, by the late Sung, the Four Books had come to be regarded as of fundamental importance; in 1313, under Yuan rule, they were officially recognized as the basic texts for the civil service examinations and they served as such until the abolition of the examination system in the early years of this century.

That men of letters, philosophers, statesmen, and others through the ages drew upon the Confucian classics has never been seriously questioned. Yet the assumption frequently made by scholars, particularly in the West, is that the canon was most often utilized simply to bolster or to legitimize a position—literary, philosophical, political—or that it was studied merely as a means of gaining official position. No doubt the classics at times were so used. But to presume that literati interest in canonical works was always so superficial is to distort the actual situation. During the Han and Sung periods, for example, these texts were regarded as sacred, even revelatory; in them could be found eternal truths, the understanding of which would help bring about a more perfect society.

Because such general misconceptions about the significance of the Confucian canon in the Chinese tradition have had wide currency, much-needed basic research into the meaning of individual classics, into changing interpretations of them through time, and into the role they played in premodern intellectual history has been neglected. But progress is being made. *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Chung-yung* is a systematic attempt by a major scholar to extract and explain the underlying themes of a philosophically difficult text. Tu Wei-ming takes the position that *Chung-yung*, as a work of central importance in a spiritual tradition, is likely to possess an “organismic unity” of its own. Such an approach is to be lauded, for all too often texts within the canon (especially *Chung-yung*, *Ta-hsüeh*, and *Lun-yu*) are treated as collections of unrelated statements or aphorisms, having neither unified structure nor philosophical sophistication.

After a short preface, Tu presents the reader with an informative introductory chapter

on the text of *Chung-yung*. Here he divides the problems confronting any reader of the text into three areas: the mode of expression of the work (that is, the method of presentation found in *Chung-yung*), its general conceptualization, and the genesis of the text. The final category includes issues of particular interest to the more sinologically or historically minded: authorship of the work, its place in the Chinese philosophical tradition, the organization of the text, and problems concerning terminology.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, Tu turns to an investigation of three conceptual categories which, in his view, are broad enough to include almost all of the material in *Chung-yung*. These are, namely, the “profound person,” the “fiduciary community,” and the “moral metaphysics.” Through an analysis of these topics, he hopes “to show how the seemingly unconnected aphoristic statements in *Chung-yung* make sense as integral parts of a coherent thesis on personality, society, and religion” (preface). Related to this purpose is his determination to demonstrate that the tensions between self and society and ethics and religion, familiar themes in contemporary discussions on Chinese philosophy and intellectual history, are not to be found in *Chung-yung* and, indeed, are alien to its spiritual orientation.

The three underlying concepts Tu Wei-ming finds in *Chung-yung* can be briefly summarized as follows. First, the “profound person.” Man is endowed with human nature by Heaven; this ontological connection serves to unify man with Heaven. The *chün-tzu*, or profound person, is one who recognizes that a potential for unification with Heaven is inherent in all human nature and who possesses the inner strength to actualize fully his human nature, thereby realizing that potential. The quest for such self-realization centers upon rigorous internal examination, and may be characterized as “a process toward an ever-deepening subjectivity” (p. 32). But at the same time, the profound person in the Confucian tradition never isolates himself from the rest of the community; like others, he is a man among men, enmeshed in a network of social relationships. Thus, the Way of the profound person entails not only inner conscientiousness (*chung*^b), that is, total seriousness about self-cultivation, but altruism (*shu*^c) as well.

Second, the “fiduciary community.” Politics (*cheng*^d) in the Confucian tradition means “rectification” (*cheng*^e). Conceived as such, politics is not only concerned with the usual maintenance of law and order; more importantly, it is concerned with the establishment through moral persuasion of a society based on mutual trust—a fiduciary community. Thus, politics becomes an ethical endeavor, and the governing process “a manifestation of the art of moral persuasion” (p. 69). If such a process is to succeed, it is imperative that the ruler begin with his own moral rectification. Only then may his inner sageliness become outwardly manifest and infuse all levels of government and, subsequently, society at large. The ruler’s deep commitment to “human-relatedness” as an integral part of his moral posture will aid in evolving a fiduciary community, as opposed to “an adversary system consisting of pressure groups” (p. 67).

Third, the “moral metaphysics.” This final concept is said to provide the basis for achieving self-perfection and establishing the fiduciary community. Man and Heaven share the same ontological reality; however, because of his existential situation, man errs and thereby obscures his nature and obstructs the union with Heaven. It is only through an arduous process of self-perfection that man is able to recover his true nature and actualize that union. In this sense, moral self-cultivation is also ultimately a search

for an understanding of the Way of Heaven. According to *Chung-yung* XXII, by developing fully his own nature, the perfectly sincere man then is able to develop fully the nature of all things and to assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. This passage plays a key role in the author's conclusion about the inter-relatedness of his three major concepts:

The profound person, through a long and unceasing process of delving into his own ground of existence, discovers his true subjectivity not as an isolated selfhood but as a great source of creative transformation. As the inner sincerity of the profound person springs forth an unflagging supply of moral and spiritual nourishment for the people around him, the Confucian ideal of society (the fiduciary community) gradually comes into being (p. 140).

Centrality and Commonality is a thoughtful inquiry into the philosophical articulations of *Chung-yung*. In a brief review it is impossible to do justice to the many stimulating ideas put forward by the author. However, certain of these ideas are complicated, and one might wish they had been presented with greater precision and lucidity. There is a tendency in the essay toward verbosity and idiosyncratic vocabulary (it is not even clear, for example, what "centrality and commonality" means) which at times obfuscates otherwise valid and intelligent argumentation. Were the style tighter and repetition avoided, the reader could reap the many benefits of the work with much less effort.

Tu Wei-ming's professed aim is to combine analytical inquiry with his own personal appreciation of the text (p. 12); in this he is quite successful. But what results is an ahistorical approach to *Chung-yung* that cannot but disappoint the intellectual historian in its failure to give a sense of the tremendous importance the Chinese tradition attached to it. Tu has made almost no reference to the standard interpretations of the text by Cheng Hsüan^f, K'ung Ying-ta^g, or Chu Hsi, nor has he made any attempt to demonstrate that the Chinese of different periods understood the text in quite different ways. A comparative reading of the various traditional commentaries reveals that in spirit Tu adheres largely to Chu Hsi's understanding of the classic; yet he neither touches upon that Sung thinker's views of *Chung-yung* nor places them in the larger context of his thought.

I do not wish, however, to understate the author's contribution. Tu Wei-ming has interpreted the text of *Chung-yung* in a most suggestive manner and has redirected our attention to a work of fundamental importance in the Confucian canon.

^a 五經博士

^b 忠

^c 恕

^d 政

^e 正

^f 鄭玄

^g 孔穎達

Daniel K. Gardner

HARVARD UNIVERSITY