



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)
by Tu Wei-ming

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the Chinese “middle ages.”

The first volume of *Gumyōshū kenkyū* contains a facsimile of the Korean edition kept at the Zōjōji in Tokyo. The need for this has been partially obviated by the recent republication of the *Tripitaka Koreana* (K. no 1080, 33.143c-284a). Variorum notes based upon half a dozen other editions dating from the Sung on are also provided. Volumes two and three are a complete translation of the *Hung-ming chi* together with an extremely useful index of significant terms and phrases in it. In spite of the title, there are no critical and historical essays such as were presented in *Joron kenkyū* and *Eon kenkyū*. The translations are generally quite accurate and are accompanied by copious and detailed annotations. While there still remain many unsolved problems, the editors have been careful to identify such passages and to suggest various, possible solutions. This is a most valuable contribution to the study of early Buddhist thought in China.

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Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472—1509). By TU WEI-MING. Pp. xvi + 222. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS. 1976. \$10.00.

It is a rare event when, amidst the profusion of sinological publications, one finds a work which sheds light upon areas other than those which are its central concern. Tu Wei-ming's examination of Wang Yang-ming's youth is such a work. It is a near archaeological piece of research on the mind and background of one of the most creative individuals of the Ming dynasty. Although the focus of this study is of specialized interest, Tu's approach to Yang-ming infuses it with wider significance: It is a case study in the process of education and creativity.

The success of this endeavor can be attributed to Tu's method—critical historical research tempered by insights apparently stemming from social psychology and personality theory. We say ‘apparently’ noting the marked psychoanalytic concerns and the paucity of references which might give any indication as to the methodological pedigree. For instance, the attention given to Yang-ming's father Wang Hua bears Freudian earmarks and the usage of terms such as “traumatic,” “ultimate commitment,” and “existential choice” point to psychological and theological influences.¹

This is not to say that we have yet another psychobiography. Tu does not put Yang-ming on the couch. If

anything, one is struck by the almost traditional aura about the book. Our attention is focused on Yang-ming's genealogy, on formulaic and precocious childhood incidents, etc., all of which are familiar elements in traditional Confucian biographies. Tu draws heavily on the chronological biography (*nien-p'u*) of Yang-ming's disciple Ch'ien Te-hung, much of which was labeled as hagiography by the textual critics among the Ch'ing scholars, and would be put aside as unreliable by modern historians.² Tu makes note of the “symbolic suggestiveness” of this material and employs it as a guide to the then current social norms and expectations.

The milieu of the mid-Ming was dominated by three ideological options: the Confucian orthodoxy viewed through the prism of Chu Hsi (1130—1200), Buddhist practice, and the Taoist longevity cults. Tu takes seriously Yang-ming's assertion that he is part of the Confucian lineage, not a Taoist or a practitioner of Ch'an. Though the latter two options caught the young Yang-ming's interest, they were to act more as leavening agents to his lifelong preoccupation with the Confucian view of reality than as primary ingredients.

Yang-ming's abilities were shaped by his immersion in the Confucian tradition. Tu underscores the influence of a strong genealogical tradition as a force in the education of the mid-Ming elites as he unearths from the Wang family genealogy traces of moral and social models which reflect societal and familial expectations. Studded as it is with exemplars such as Wang Hsi-chih (321—379) the great statesman, artist, and calligrapher, and worthy Confucian recluses such as Wang Yü-chun, “the old man in escape among the rocks,” Yang-ming could not but be moved to emulation. Moreover, his father Wang Hua had taken first in the metropolitan examinations of 1481 and was later charged with part of the responsibility for the education of the heir apparent. It was precisely Yang-ming's repeated attempts to emulate these models of virtue and to put into action high standards of behavior that would lead to frustration, suffering, and a creative reinterpretation of Neo-Confucian thought.

When he was twenty-two years old Yang-ming attempted to follow Chu Hsi's advice on discerning the ‘principles of things’ by ‘quietly sitting’ in front of some bamboo. He fell ill and was disappointed. He took his failure in the prescribed method of sagely insight as an indication that he lacked the makings of a sage. Moreover, this young man, well known for his literary abilities, did not pass his *chin-shih* examination until his third attempt in 1492. Disgruntled by these two setbacks and the realities of bureaucratic life Yang-ming, then thirty years old, petitioned to retire and left official life to take up Taoist practices and to pursue his interests in Buddhism.

After several months and a certain amount of (reputed) success in Taoist cultivation Yang-ming was faced with the choice between total withdrawal to follow the Taoist model of life or returning to follow the Confucian path. As he examined his feelings towards his family it became clear that to deny these deep ties would be to deny what was human in himself. He resolved to return to public life, if not to pursue sagehood, then as a statesman and Confucian teacher.

Yang-ming might have passed into obscurity had not his staunch and enthusiastic attitude brought down upon him the wrath of Liu Chin, the eunuch who held the real power behind the throne. Jailed and flogged, he was then exiled to the frontier province of Kweichow. Any dogmatic faith he might have had in one view of reality had by this time been softened by his experiments with Taoism and Buddhism. Now, in an environment in which the social ideals that he cherished did not exist, he found his Confucian world-view (as it then stood) irrelevant. Yang-ming's resolution of this crisis was the basis on which his mature thought was to rest. For it he drew on his experiences with Taoism and Buddhism, using these, as Tu shows, as a leaven which helped reinterpret Confucian ideology into more universal lines. His doctrines of the identity of *Hsin* (mind-heart) and *Li* (the objective principle of right in the universe), and of *Chih-hsing ho-i* (knowledge and action are one) were one man's creative reinterpretation of old cultural models for a new world.

Tu's work reads smoothly and is sprinkled with translations, as well as some nice work exegeting difficult poetry (Yang-ming's poem composed on a hexagram of the *I ching*, for example; pp. 100 ff.) and it is a fine addition to the already burgeoning corpus of secondary works on Yang-ming.³ Methodologically, it is a contribution of even greater magnitude. Let us hope for another volume covering the years after 1509.

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¹ The words "ultimate commitment" strongly suggest the work of the theologian Paul Tillich. See Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers), 1958). Tu does include one work by Erik Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964).

² Ch'ien Te-hung, "Nien-p'u," in *Yang-ming ch'üan-shu*, 32-36 (edited by Lu Fei-k'uei et al.; reprint, Taipei, 1970). For his official biography see *Ming-shih*, 195.

³ Another recent and excellent contribution, including extensive translations of Yang-ming's poetry is Julia Ching,

To Acquire Wisdom, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976). For a bibliography of works on Yang-ming see Wing-tsit Chan, "Wang Yang-ming; Western Studies: An annotated Bibliography," *Philosophy East and West*, 22.1 (1972).

The Sage and Society: The Life and Thought of Ho Hsin-yin. By RONAND G. DIMBERG. Pp. [vi] + 175. Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, no. 1. Honolulu: THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII. 1974. \$4.75 paper.

Ho Hsin-yin^a was one of the most fascinating individuals of the mid-Ming era. In his first 42 years, he was a prominent scholar in his native region of Kiangsi. A reformer of clan institutions, he tried to knit the Liang clan (his original name was Liang Ju-yüan^b) into a tighter economic unit in which clan solidarity was one aim. Another was the restraint of rapacious local government intermediaries whose livelihoods depended on existing (corrupt) tax collecting procedures. In 1560, Ho left his native region after narrowly escaping punishment by the authorities. He went to Peking. There his outspoken personality earned him the enmity of the Grand Secretary Yen Sung^c and the rising politico Chang Chü-cheng.^d Fleeing the capital, he changed his name to Ho Hsin-yin to avoid arrest. From then on, much at odds with official society, Ho Hsin-yin led an itinerant life. He lectured widely, at risk to his personal safety, and carried on the steadfast activism of the T'ai-chou School.

Throughout his life Ho Hsin-yin remained an outspoken individual, unwilling or unable to "play the game" of politics. Yet as a devoted interpreter of the sage Confucius, Ho had to reconcile his rejection of government service with Confucian insistence that the *chün-tzu*, or superior being, dedicate himself to serving society. Just as his life history can be divided into two major parts, so his resolution of this basic question took two forms. During his years in Kiangsi, "Liang Ju-yüan" dedicated himself to clan reform; during his years away from home as "Ho Hsin-yin" (a choice of words that cries out for analysis), he dedicated himself to the task of educating others.

Professor Dimberg's book, which is based in part on his Columbia dissertation, addresses this central problem in Ho's life in three sections: I, The Sage and Society: The Traditional View; II, The Sage and Society: The Life of Ho Hsin-yin; and III, The Sage and Society: The Thought of Ho Hsin-yin. Dimberg argues that Ho "alter[ed] the Confucian value system in a substantial way to make Confucianism answer to the changing needs of the