Review
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Tu Wei-ming. *Humanity and Self-Cultivation.* Boston: Cheng and Tsui Company, 1998. XXIX, xiv–xxii, 364 pp. Paperback $24.95, ISBN 0–88727–317–3.

Robert Cummings Neville. *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-modern World.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. xxxv, 258 pp. Paperback $23.95, ISBN 0–7914–4718–9.

The reissue of Tu Wei-ming's *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* twenty years after its first publication in 1978 was long overdue. In the intervening two decades, the book had become a classic, a must-read for any serious student of Confucianism.

The twelve essays and three reviews in the collection were written over a dozen years, the last in 1975. Ranging from discussions of classical Confucian ideas to reflections on Neo-Confucian modes of thinking and arguments for the continuing relevance of Confucianism in the modern world, they represent "part and parcel of a unified effort to explore the rich symbolic resources of the Confucian tradition" (p. xx).

In rendering the core values of Confucian humanism comprehensible and meaningful to an English-speaking audience from different philosophical traditions, these seminal works meet the challenge of showing "how, beyond ethnic identity, Confucian humanism can meaningfully contribute to the cultivation of cultural competence, ethical intelligence and spiritual values of young people East and West" (p. xxvii).

The first essay, "Creative Tension between *Jen* and *Li*," establishes the primacy of the concept of *ren* 仁 (goodness, humanity) in Confucian philosophy and contrasts it with the concept of *li* 禮. It argues that the Confucian process of becoming human proceeds via a tension between the two, which are interdependent. The process brings together the ethical and the religious, the universal and the particular, self-discipline and activism, individual inwardness and social manifestation. Although *li* is characterized in this chapter as the "externalization of *jen* in a specific social context" (p. 10), the next chapter, "*Li* as Process of Humanization," problematizes the inner-outer divide by examining the relationship between self and other in Confucian self-cultivation. Contrary to other spiritual traditions that require a transcending of human relationships to arrive at a level of self-awareness qualitatively different from social consciousness, Confucianism views human-relatedness as an integral part of one's quest for self-realization.

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Tu argues that this is seen in the otherness that is inherent in the structure of *li*, which, however, does not reduce *li* to a form of collective social sanction.

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Li is a "concrete way whereby one enters into communion with others" that is rooted in "the feeling of modesty and complaisance" (p. 24). Authentic human-relatedness involves the "inner" person. "Sociality is a constituent aspect of the authentic self" (p. 25). Self-cultivation is an integrative process of transformation, an extension of self beyond the physical individual to "the embodiment of the universe as a whole" (p. 25). *Li* provides the concrete forms for this process of universal inclusion.

Learning to be human is a lifelong process for Confucians. In this scheme of things, Confucian adulthood, the subject of the third essay, is not an attainment but a process of becoming a person that is comprised of the three inseparable dimensions of youth, manhood, and old age. Tu draws illuminating connections among various passages in the *Analects* and adds the perspectives of the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Book of Rites* to paint a detailed and nuanced picture of a person's journey from youth to old age, a picture enlivened by a moving analysis of the example of Confucius' own life journey, as summarized in *Analects* 2.4, that is meaningful and inspiring even to a modern audience.

Tu's perspective on classical Confucianism is explicitly Mencian. He concludes his exploration of the core values of classical Confucianism with a discussion centered on the process of self-cultivation titled "Mencian Perception of Moral Development." He points out that Mencius was acutely aware of environmental influences on human moral development. But in Mencian thinking there is also something unique in human beings that is beyond external control that makes moral good an ever-present possibility.

The perfectibility of humanity through self-effort, an idea that is central to the Mencian perception of moral development, is a defining characteristic of Confucian humanism. To Tu, it is also the real strength of the Neo-Confucian concept of humanity. Part 2, on Neo-Confucian modes of thinking, begins with a brief survey of this concept in the thought of the Song dynasty Neo-Confucians Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Zhangzai 張載, Cheng Hao 程顥, Cheng Yi 程頤, Zhu Xi 朱熹, Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵, and, in the Ming dynasty, Wang Yangming 王陽明, revealing tension and conflict but also an agreement in the tradition: "man is a moral being who through self-effort extends his human sensitivity to all the beings of the universe so as to realize himself in the midst of the world and as an integral part of it, in the sense that his self-perfection necessarily embodies the perfection of the universe as a whole" (p. 79).

Two book reviews contained in this collection—of Mou Zongsan's 牟宗三 *Substance of the Mind and Substance of Nature* (*Xingti yu xingti* 心體與性體) and Qian Mu's 錢穆 *New Records of Master Chu* (*Xin Zhuzi xue an* 新朱子學案)—indirectly explore Zhu Xi's philosophy. While these cannot match the essays on Wang Yangming in creativity and inspiration, they do fill in the context of Wang's philosophy. They are also interesting exercises in engagement

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with contemporary scholars that introduce important works in Confucianism not available in English even now.

Wang Yangming figures prominently in Tu's multifaceted discussions of Neo-Confucian modes of thinking. "An Inquiry into Wang Yangming's Four-Sentence Teaching" examines the Buddhist influence on Wang's philosophy through a detailed study of his students' interpretations of his last teachings. It presents *liangzhi* 良知 (innate knowledge, conscientious wisdom, intuitive knowledge of the good, or simply good conscience) as "both a substantial being and a transforming activity," highlighting the internality of the source of self-transformation as well as its being an integral part of a cosmic holism.

The "twofold interpretation of the mind as both an ontological reality and an existential process," adopted to make sense of the Mencian position, receives further elaboration in Tu's detailed examination of Wang's thought, "Subjectivity and Ontological Reality." An emphasis on subjectivity extendable to embrace the entire cosmos is evident in the analysis of Wang's "learning of body and mind" doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action, his precept of "preserving heaven's principle, extirpating human desires," and *liangzhi*. Such subjectivity is not to be confused with solipsistic subjectivism; instead it is the path to an ontological reality in which the self "forms one body" with the rest of the cosmos. This ontological reality of the "unity of heaven and man" is a basic tenet shared by all Neo-Confucians.

The emphasis on subjectivity, which gives credence to Robert Neville's characterization of Tu's interpretation as existential Confucianism, is sustained in the discussion of "inner experience" as the "basis of creativity in Neo-Confucian thinking" in the essay "The Unity of Knowing and Acting—From a Neo-Confucian Perspective." This "inner experience" constitutes self-cultivation, which begins with an act of personal commitment, a conscious choice to establish one's spiritual identity (p. 89), followed by a long, arduous existential process of transformation that is both cognitive and affective. Such experience is not in the least solipsistic. Tu shows how complete self-realization requires transcending our anthropological, not to say egoistic, structure in his exposition of the value of sincerity in the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

Tu repeatedly draws our attention to the Confucian stance that thinking cannot be detached from living, and learning proceeds in concrete experience. Philosophy feeds on and in turn feeds our lived experience. This forms the framework of "Yen Yuan: From Inner Experience to Lived Concreteness," which ends part 2. Here we find a perceptive discussion of the seventeenth-century scholar Yan (Yen) Yuan's 顏元 views on and experience with ritual practice and its role in Confucian self-cultivation, as well as reflections on Yan Yuan's famous criticism of Neo-Confucianism and his so-called "pragmatism."

Contrary to those who tried to promote Yan Yuan's thinking as a weapon

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against Confucianism, Tu argues that Yan is very much part of the Confucian tradition in his insistence that thought must be rooted in lived concreteness, and the inner experience of self-cultivation must be manifested in activities with impact on the world, of which each human being is an inseparable part.

While the content is different, the study of Xiong Shili (Hsiung Shih-li) 熊十力, which begins the concluding part 3, is very much in the same tenor as the study of Yan Yuan. Yan "attacked the influential Ch'eng-Chu tradition to revitalize the true Confucian approach to self-cultivation" (p. 210); Xiong was fighting against much greater odds three centuries later, with the collapse of imperial China and in a climate of cultural iconoclasm dominated by various "fads" that attempted the facile appropriation of Western thinking aimed at acquiring power and wealth. Xiong was committed "to live authentically as a Confucian thinker amidst the depersonalizing forces in contemporary China" (p. 226).

In trying to make China's past relevant to its present, Xiong systematically questioned the deepest insights in Confucianism, and attempted to construct an ontology that could transform reality at both the individual and the community levels. Tu's study shows that despite Buddhist influence and a cautious respect for Western ideas, Xiong's philosophy remains faithful to the Confucian tradition in its method of "experiential comprehension" and its contents premised on the core Confucian ideas of unity of self and community, of acting and knowing.

Tu's concluding essay argues against Joseph Levenson's verdict that "the fate of Confucianism in modern China" is that of a historical relic in a museum without walls. It examines the ambivalence of the anti-Confucian campaigns of the twentieth century, especially during the Cultural Revolution in China. Cultural iconoclasm could be an affirmation of the continued relevance of Confucian culture. Tu draws attention to "the diversity and richness of the Confucian heritage," which makes it accommodating and adaptable but at the risk of losing its inner identity. He suggests that although Confucian symbolism has been "attacked from without and corrupted from within," Confucian ideas remain pertinent to issues emerging in China.

One could take issue with some of Tu's uncritical adoption of certain Western philosophical terms or his occasional glossing over issues that surely deserve more discussion. But that would be to miss the point. One could look for more detailed treatment of the more complex issues in Tu's other works or in the several works that have been inspired by him or are critical of his position. Getting overly bogged down with details could distract readers from the larger goals of the collection.

If Tu has not quite presented Confucianism as "a total and integrated value system" (p. 291), he has at least contributed significantly to excavating the raison d'être of Confucianism and provides a refreshing antidote to the blindness induced by overexposure to the "dark side" of Confucian culture, a blindness to

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the rich possibilities of Confucian ideas as distinct from the tradition's historical failures.

One might apply Tu's description of Mou Zongsan to Tu's own efforts: *Humanity and Self-Cultivation* "is more than an intellectual exercise; it symbolizes a series of experiential 'dialogues' with those great historical masters who made his own way of thinking meaningful" (p. 118). The conversation is not limited to Confucian masters of the past; Tu is a recognized leader of a conversation about Confucianism that has gained global status.

It is thanks in part to Tu's efforts that Robert Neville is able to declare, in his foreword to Tu's volume, that "For the first time in history, it is possible for any self-conscious participant in a world-wide philosophical culture to speak of Confucianism in the same breath with Platonism and Aristotelianism, phenomenology and analytic philosophy, as a philosophy from which to learn and perhaps to inhabit and extend" (p. I).

Neville expands on his theme of Confucianism's candidacy as a world philosophy in *Boston Confucianism*. In this work, for which Tu wrote the foreword, we see a continuation of the dialogue between the two. Most of Neville's foreword to Tu's work reappears in Neville's own work, especially chapter 5 on "Tu Wei-ming's Confucianism."

The two volumes are complementary in many ways, even though Tu and Neville disagree on some key issues. One of these is the question of grace. Neville believes that to remain true to its existential emphasis Tu's Confucianism must confront the radical nature of conversion to avoid reducing Confucian sagehood to blandness. Neville also proposes that more attention should be paid to Xunzi, especially his account of ritual propriety and its role in self-cultivation, to balance Tu's Mencian leanings.

Although clearly the most important dialogue partner, Tu is not the only one whom Neville himself engages in conversation. In chapter 3, "Confucianism in the Contemporary Situation," Neville summarizes and comments on the findings of scholars working on Confucianism in the United States, including Wing-tsit Chan, Theodore de Bary, Roger Ames and David Hall, Chung-ying Cheng, Kuang-ming Wu, and others.

Their works and Neville's own *Boston Confucianism* bring Confucianism into the world philosophic conversation by showing "that Confucianism is not limited to East Asian ethnic application and can in fact be transported to a larger non–East Asian environment," and that it "has something genuinely interesting and helpful to bring to contemporary philosophical discussions" (p. 1).

Both Tu and Neville stress the spirituality, even religiousness, of Confucianism. Tu calls Confucianism a "religiophilosophy" (p. 84). While he refers to the use of "religion" and "religiousness" by W. C. Smith, Clifford Geertz, and

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Robert Bellah (p. 15 n. 16), Tu does not undertake any extensive discussion of the concept of religiousness. In contrast, Neville approaches the comparison of Western and Eastern spiritualities more directly in his chapter 4 on "Confucian Spirituality."

Examining the relation between philosophy and religion through the views of various Western thinkers, both ancient and contemporary, Neville offers us this definition of religion: the ritual life, the mythic, cosmological, and philosophic conceptions, and the spiritual practices, both corporate and individual, by means of which people relate to what they take to be the ultimate (p. 61). Most of *Boston Confucianism* is a comparative exploration of these religious aspects of Confucian and Western traditions.

The religious ritual life is part of a broader Confucian notion of ritual propriety. A central concern of Neville's book is how ritual propriety creates culture, is conventional, and is a peculiar kind of harmony. Neville uses pragmatic semiotics to interpret ritual propriety, emphasizing the continuity, spontaneity, and aesthetic experience in both. In Neville's account, signs create culture out of, and over and above, nature. Signs are conventional, and signs of high culture constitute the harmonious interactions of which the virtues of high culture consist.

Neville generalizes the Confucian theory of ritual propriety to "include the entire pyramid of signs or of organic and social habits" (p. 14). Using this notion of ritual propriety, he develops a Confucian critique of Boston, arguing that Boston society needs to develop certain of the meaningful significatory forms that shape social habits, that is, rituals, to improve its family, working, social, and civic life.

Against a brief survey of Chinese philosophical approaches to culture, Neville argues that Confucianism contributes to a contemporary philosophy of culture "the semiotics of ethics, the aesthetics of culture, the personal competence of civilization, and the irony of convention" (p. 38). Societies formed by the technologies and economies of late modernity need an ethics of rituals—meaningful forms of behavior shaping personal and social habits. The Confucian insistence that the purpose of culture is to harmonize human life with the *dao* in the cosmos, in society, and in other people provides an aesthetic supplement and correction to the Western preoccupation with the instrumentalities of culture, prompting a reconception of the problem of instrumentalism.

People are not born civilized, and they need to acquire personal competence in civilization by appropriating their culture's civilizing forms. The Confucian ideal of sagehood, requiring effort but open to all, contrasts with both the egalitarian glorification of popular culture and the heroic ideals, requiring extraordinary efforts, that are restricted to a few. China's long preoccupation with ritual and its obvious temptations for abuse create a consciousness that conventions, although very important for civilizations, are not singularly authoritative.

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In addressing the philosophic issues raised by the conditions of modernity that reflect a Western origin through certain thought-forms of Confucianism, Neville eschews the comparison of traditions via generalizations, and instead proposes an alternative analysis of motifs: "a motif is an idea enshrined in a core text that is subject to implicit or explicit commentary by subsequent thinkers in the tradition" (p. 109). While this may not solve all the inherent methodological problems of comparative philosophy, Neville's explanation of the method and his justification of his preference offer some very perceptive analyses of these problems. Even those who disagree with his method would have to admire his sensitivity to all the potential pitfalls of comparing complex cultural and philosophical traditions.

In Neville's opinion, for Confucianism to enter the world philosophic conversation, it must "address fundamental Western metaphysical questions such as the nature of being and value" (p. 129). Not everyone will be convinced that "those problems are real and that all cultures have to face up to what is real, differing in their responses by differences among their basic motifs and other aspects of their imagination" (p. 129). But Neville refines what might have been a crass ethnocentrism into a meaningful comparison by elaborating on how we could, and why we should, ask whether other philosophic cultures "have the signs or systems for engaging what the West engages with the signs of the dialectic of being" (p. 133).

Neville argues that Asian traditions, including Confucianism, have parallels to the Western dialectic of being. The Confucian parallel is found in the conception of nature, the relation of being and nonbeing, and a sense of generativity. Neville acknowledges that the historical argument he offers in support of this position is fragmentary and imagistic. The support he seeks is weakened by his uncritical adoption of Wing-tsit Chan's translation of "*you*" 有 and "*wu*" 無 as "being" and "nonbeing," respectively, which already assumes that Chinese texts shared the same ontological-metaphysical concerns implicit in these English terms. There should at least be some detailed arguments as to why these translations are justified, to convince the skeptics.

Neville also tries to find Asian parallels for the Western motifs of transcendence. He criticizes David Hall and Roger Ames' strict definition of transcendence: "a principle A is transcendent with respect to B, which it serves as the principle, if the meaning or import of B cannot be fully analyzed and explained without recourse to A, but the reverse is not true."[1] Opposing them, Neville insists that heaven, earth, and *dao* are all transcendent in this strict sense since "one can say nothing about them apart from their functions in founding the cosmos, just as being, as the ontological ground of mutual contrasts, needs to be indeterminate save insofar as it creates the world" (p. 149).

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Furthermore, he contends that every example by Hall and Ames of a Western transcendent principle cannot be explained in itself; only its function can be given—just as heaven, earth, and *dao* can only be illustrated by their functions in phenomena, and cannot be explained by phenomena or by one another (p. 150). Neville's interpretation of the Western traditions in question is different from what Hall and Ames are criticizing in their work. The crux of their disagreement is not which are the better or more accurate interpretations, but which are more prevalent in Western cultures, thereby affecting any comparison with Confucianism.

According to Neville, Hall and Ames' definition fails to capture several other closely related senses of transcendence. Neville's general definition of transcendence is "that to which reference can be made, in any sense of reference, only by denying that the referent lies within the boundaries of a specifiable domain, whatever else is supposed or said about the referent" (p. 151). Neville's own definition may not appreciate sufficiently the interpenetration of "domains" in Chinese correlative thinking, although his detailed textual discussions for the most part avoid the kind of dualism that Hall and Ames have criticized.

Neville employs this definition to investigate transcendence as it defines the self in Confucianism. He locates transcendence in the concept of equilibrium/center (*zhong* 中) in the *Doctrine of the Mean*: "the center of all nature, including human nature is heaven's dao of proper ordering" (p. 154). This is linked with *ren* (humanity, love), which, in Neo-Confucianism, is transformed into a metaphysical principle describing the character of what heaven imparts. For Neo-Confucians, the self is continuous, in its definite positions and activities, with the origin of all things that transcends even the distinction between good and evil (p. 156).

Neville expands on the Confucian conception of selfhood via an examination of "self deception." While his discussion of Western conceptions of the self as contradictory and self-deceived is persuasive, the use of "self-deception" as a comparative category may seem a little forced when applied to Confucianism. How are we deceiving ourselves when our selfishness prevents us from responding to things according to their worth? Or when we have inadequate signs and habits for achieving our professed goals? Or when a lack of humanity or love renders the exercising of civilizing signs and habits dysfunctional?

In his comparison, Neville recognizes fundamental differences in Confucian and Western approaches to the problems of self. Unlike Western conceptions, Confucian conceptions do not involve "the doubling back of self-reference so as to mean the containment within the self of the contradictions of intent and performance, of self and other" (p. 179). In view of this, his use of Western categories such as "self-deception" is not a procrustean fitting of Confucianism into

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Western molds; it is an attempt to reconstruct these Western categories themselves, to enrich our understanding of them for solving contemporary problems by subjecting them to the transforming reality of different cultural contexts.

In the concluding chapter, Neville portrays filial piety as a holy duty, and analyzes ritual propriety as it relates to Christian morality, to demonstrate the possibility of being both Christian and Confucian in contemporary society. He balances the differences and similarities with dexterity while arguing that there are extraordinary parallels in the two traditions "so long as filial piety does not necessarily mean one's particular parents, and so long as the model of ancient heavenly established virtue is not necessarily Jesus" (p. 201), and, less convincingly, that "Confucianism and Christianity are in perfect agreement that the fall from original perfection consists in forgetting and neglecting the rituals of high civilization, and that sageliness or sanctification consists in their reestablishment and practice" (p. 204).

Neville's work is an attempt to bring together Western (Christian) and Confucian traditions to contribute to a "multiple religious identity." Throughout the book, he is very aware of the challenges that his project must meet—and the persisting difficulties. This awareness and the effort to address the problems in depth while recognizing that no final or full answers have been reached render *Boston Confucianism* a thoughtful and thought-provoking work.

Together with Tu's *Humanity and Self-cultivation, Boston Confucianism* shows how far Confucianism has traveled in the last few decades to participate in global philosophic encounters and contribute to cross-cultural discussions of contemporary problems.

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NOTE

1. David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 13.

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