

On the premise that the integrity of Wang Yang-ming's teaching was based on "life-experience" rather than the "objectifiable structure of propositions," Tu Wei-ming attempts to account for "the unity of knowledge and action" by close examination of significant events in the philosopher's life. That is not a simple exercise in biography. A rational analysis of intellectual choice must find meaning as well in the unusual psychology of Wang's intense and restless behavior.

The famous "five falls", in which Wang Yang-ming is alleged to have given himself intensely but without gratification to martial, literary, and religious pursuits ended finally in a new commitment to Confucian value. The insights were hard-won. His affective confirmation of Confucian filiality arrived unexpectedly during a convalescence in 1502, ending a frustrating search for religious deliverance. The crucial "enlightenment" of 1508—"my own nature is sufficient to attain sagehood"—sprang forth in the humiliation of a public flogging and banishment to Kuei-chou.

We are accustomed to understand "mad ardor" as a cultural style in Ming. But Tu's account clearly shows an obsessive personality here, oscillating between the animation of total commitment and the depression of mental exhaustion. Was Wang really looking for something in his early restlessness, or, quite differently, responding to things in a psychological pattern beyond his will? Was it really the discovery of a Confucian truth which relieved his torment in middle age, or an unusual psychological transformation which enhanced the stability of his commitments and the growth of a mature philosophy and teaching career?

Tu Wei-ming treats these problems as part of a "spiritual quest", trying to contain the necessary psychologizing within a credible range of traditional Chinese responses. He suggests that Wang was agitated by a compulsive need for "personal authenticity": as his external circumstances and intellectual objectives changes, he required a fundamental inner transformation to substantiate new meaning. We read about "ethico-religious commitment", "spiritual crises" and the "dynamics of inner life", the role of trauma in "the inner decision for sagehood", etc. The religious dimension of this analysis my trouble some, but it is not without theoretical foundation. The language tends to inform Tu's broader writing about both classical and historical Confucianism, and is instrumental in his general reconsideration of the meaning of sagehood in Confucian experience.

It was consistently the challenge of Chu Hsi, rather than the more compatible idealism of Lu Chiu-yüan, which supplied the significant fodder for Wang's excruciating ruminations. He spent an immense time trying to reconcile the stubborn externality of Chu Hsi's formula for "investigating things" with his own need for inner experiential confirmation. Unwilling to reject the Sung master, Wang finally concluded that the precept was a program for "self-realization", not an epistemological exercise. The dichotomy between inner and outer dissolved when one accepted the existential priority of "resolve"—willing the self-transformation of person with which sagehood must begin. Here is perhaps the new sense which Wang imparted to "the unity of knowledge and action": not just that no knowledge is "true" without

experiential affirmation, but that no action is "worthy" unless informed by a profound "ethico-religious commitment".

The year 1509 may after all be an awkward place to stop the illumination of this particular precept. The agony is replete, but the idea is conceptually unfinished. Wang had difficulty communicating the proposition to his disciples. It is said to have been morally ambiguous and weak in motive until he hypothesized "the extension of innate goodness" after 1521. The precept had developed then in the play of critical argument, and other interpretations soon went beyond Wang's own sensibility. Referring again to the author's premise above, an "objectifiable structure of propositions" acquires a life of its own in public discourse, a philosophical meaning of no less integrity than a "life-experience". The round implications of an idea are not likely contained by the circumstances of its origin; nor can the exploration of Wang Yang-ming's mind remain usefully beyond a vigorous intellectuality.

Anthologies of committee scholarship have offered some memorable insights into Chinese modes of thinking, though not much in the way of thematic coherence. The present collection is more ambitious in the latter respect. The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism is primarily a book about 17th century Chinese thought; but both in the separate contributions and in two long generalizing essays by the editor, an attempt is made to account for its topical matter in terms of a thousand years of Neo-Confucian experience.

DeBary's writing over the years has been markedly synthetic, wanting to reveal the unity of Chinese thought and the subtle way in which apparent opposites nurture one another in a process of organic development from "root to branch". So we read here about a tradition which is constant yet dynamically responsive to changing human needs, secular in conception yet highly religious in personal meaning, committed to classical orthodoxy yet casual in constructive borrowings from Taoism and Buddhism, pragmatic in means while intensely idealistic in the search for authenticity and purity, equally given to empiricity, intellectuality, and spirituality, etc. There is a firm sense of teleology here—polarities possible to the structure must, apparently, be realized. In that dialectic lies the historical dynamism of the movement, allowing it to be always in transformation without loss of continuity. The intellectual symmetry achieved in this way serves primarily to hold the integrity of an organism called "Neo-Confucianism". That is interesting in itself, perhaps, but not necessarily the same thing as an historical understanding of the transitional period.

Ming thought is succinctly recalled as a movement in which "the intellectual was in certain ways progressively subordinated to the moral, and the moral focus itself increasingly adjusted on the individual in society" (McMorran). No comparable generalization is advanced to characterize early Ch'ing thought, however. We look perhaps for an understanding of such themes as empiricism, materialism, philology and historicism, wanting to know why the balance tipped here as emphatically as it did, what a dominant configuration of these themes might mean for a new Confucian conceptualization. These developments are discussed only in terms of their Ming origins, without consideration for their consequences in Ch'ing, as if the branch were to be known by description of the root. We learn that the apparent transition from "idealism" to "materialism" in the 17th century had already been accomplished within the "school of mind" in the 16th century. Empiricism is referred to Wang Yang-ming's praxis, and materialism to his monism of mind and matter. The new "vitalism" of mind and "naturalism" of human nature had been well advanced by the T'ai-chou school of radical idealism, assisted even by the Ch'eng-Chu school of the