

Chu Hsi: Life and Thought, by Wing-tsit Chan. Hong Kong and New York: The Chinese University Press and St. Martin's Press, 1987. xii + 212 pp. Index.

This book is not a biography of Chu Hsi (1130-1200), as the title might suggest, but it does contain a wealth of biographical detail that will delight anyone seriously interested in the Sung period or in the history of Neo-Confucianism. The first half of the book contains Professor Chan's 1984 Ch'ien Mu Lectures at the Chinese University of Hong Kong: "The New Fortune of Chu Hsi," "What is New in Chu Hsi?" and "Chu Hsi and World Philosophy." The last three chapters are important articles published elsewhere but not easily obtainable, including the often-cited "Chu Hsi's Completion of Neo-Confucianism" (1973) and two more recent ones, "Chu Hsi's Religious Life" (1983) and "Chu Hsi and the Academies" (1984). The public lectures are for the most part based on material found elsewhere in Professor Chan's writings, resulting in some duplication even within the present volume. For example, we read three times (pp. 12, 159, 166) about Hu Hung's (c.s. 1163) resentment at being offered brown rice, with no chicken and wine, when he visited Chu Hsi at Wu-i Mountain. But this example also suggests the kind of intimate detail with which the lectures are spiced. Professor Chan's ability to draw on an astonishingly vast body of reading adds a valuable new dimension even to something he has said before.

For the specialist, particularly one familiar with Professor Chan's writings, the strongest part of this book is the second half, containing the three pieces written as scholarly articles. The last two of these are especially useful, since they have not been easily available before. "Chu Hsi's Religious Life" fleshes out those aspects of Chu's life that fall under the rubric of religion in a rather narrow sense, e.g. prayer, ritual, and ancestor worship. No attempt is made to construct a broader definition of religion that would include the Confucian tradition *per se* by identifying its fundamental nature as inherently religious.¹ This latter approach, of course, would be highly significant both for scholars of Confucianism and for scholars of religion in general. Nevertheless, Professor Chan's approach shows not only that Chu Hsi was a religious man by anyone's definition, but also that much of his religious practice was essentially Confucian. His devotion to ritual, for example, involved not only writing the manual of Family Rites (*Chia-li*) and advising the Court on ritual matters, but also regular worship of his own ancestors and frequent sacrifices to Confucius (the ancestor of the *literati*). In his written "reports" (*kao*) to Confucius he demonstrates a highly personal bond to the Sage as his moral teacher, and a commitment to the tradition as the embodiment of the Way. Chu's conduct of public prayer meetings for relief from droughts, etc., was apparently motivated by sincere belief in their efficacy. Such activities by the arch-"rationalist" of the Confucian tradition demonstrates the extent to which Confucianism, and Chinese thought in general, eludes simple categorization in Western terms.

¹ For purposes of this discussion I am leaving aside the question (which one does not need to be Buddhist to raise) whether any tradition has such a thing as a fundamental nature.

In "Chu Hsi and the Academies" Professor Chan discusses Chu's considerable work establishing retreats (ching-she) and academies (shu-yüan).² He concludes that this work was a crucial precursor to the official institutionalization of Chu's version of tao-hsüeh (Learning of the Way) as the basis of the civil service examinations in 1313. Institutionalization at the grass roots, so to speak, had to precede governmental recognition. This is a very solid piece, enlivened further by Professor Chan's accounts of his own visits to some of the sites. Historical studies of Neo-Confucian education, such as this chapter and the articles in Neo-Confucian Education, edited by W.T. de Bary and John Chaffee (University of California Press, 1989), are beginning to fill a significant gap in Neo-Confucian studies, a field that has largely been dominated by philosophical approaches.

"Chu Hsi's Completion of Neo-Confucianism" is an influential article outlining three areas in which Chu Hsi's work established the basic direction of what was to become the orthodox tao-hsüeh tradition. In philosophy he focused attention on the concepts of li (principle), ch'i (material force), t'ai-chi (Great Ultimate), and jen (humanity). Secondly, he defined the "tradition of the Way" (tao-t'ung), i.e. the line of sages whose teachings contributed to Chu's own system based on li. This section is especially valuable, having become a seminal discussion of a topic still being studied by others. Finally, Chu's publication of the Four Books in 1190 established the core curriculum of higher education and the civil service examination system, which was to remain in effect until the twentieth century.

The choice of the word "completion" to describe what Chu Hsi did with the Neo-Confucian tradition has aroused controversy, to which Professor Chan responds in his Preface and in "What is New in Chu Hsi?".³ He has used the word advisedly, he says, not meaning to imply that Chu's system was perfect. His intention has been to refute the notion that Chu merely combined or "synthesized" the ideas of his predecessors into a unified system without adding anything new. This notion, while not as widely-held as it once was (thanks in part to Professor Chan), still has adherents. But Professor Chan's objection to the word "synthesis" may

² Chan prefers to leave ching-she (literally "abode of refinement") untranslated, because by Chu Hsi's time the term had acquired considerable ambiguity. Its original meaning was "a Confucian place for lectures and discussions" (p.164), and Buddhists used the term "to translate vihara, a Buddhist retreat" (ibid.). Chu Hsi's first ching-she was a cottage beside his mother's grave, where he and Lü Tsu-ch'ien worked on the Chin-ssu lu (ibid.). Thus "retreat" accurately conveys the original Confucian meaning of the term. However, ching-she and shu-yüan were sometimes used interchangeably, and in some cases shu-yüan referred to a particular part of a ching-she, namely "the central hall where books were stored and formal lectures and discussions took place" (p.170). One telling distinction is that ching-she were always private, while shu-yüan could be either private or public.

³ See also Wing-tsit Chan, ed., Chu Hsi and Neo-Confucianism (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), p.1.

be misplaced, leading him to over-estimate the extent of the above notion. "To synthesize" can, to be sure, mean simply "to combine" (chi). But it also means to bring simpler elements together into a more complex whole, creating a higher-order system. This usage is common enough to justify our applying it to Chu Hsi in such a way as to be consistent with Professor Chan's theory of Chu's innovative qualities. For example, in chemistry, to synthesize a compound is to create an entirely new substance out of simpler ones. In philosophy, a synthetic proposition or judgment is one that adds something to the meaning of the subject. And of course there is the Hegelian sense of synthesis as the higher-order result of the contradiction of thesis and antithesis. Thus the use of the word "synthesis" does not necessarily imply absence of anything new.

In fact I think the word is quite apt in reference to Chu Hsi, with the qualification that the elements he worked with were carefully and deliberately selected from among the varieties of Sung thought. He "creatively" excluded nearly as much Confucian thought from the Sung as he did from the Han and T'ang. This and certain later developments (such as the category tao-hsüeh being limited to the Ch'eng/Chu school in the Sung Dynastic History) has resulted in considerable inconsistency among contemporary scholars in the usage of the terms tao-hsüeh and Neo-Confucianism. As Hoyt Tillman has shown, tao-hsüeh before the end of the twelfth century included more than the Ch'eng/Chu school.⁴ In any case, it is important to avoid the implication that Chu Hsi's version of Neo-Confucianism is exhaustive and normative, despite its mantle of orthodoxy in China from 1313 to 1905.

Professor Chan's use of the term "completion" does suggest finality or perfection, at least to me. It implies that Chu brought Neo-Confucianism to its ultimate condition, beyond which nothing has been or could be added; he made it complete. But Chu Hsi's system was not, of course, the final stage of Neo-Confucian development (Wang Yang-ming, for one, certainly added something new), and this is not the meaning that Professor Chan intends. Nor, as he says, does he intend to imply perfection. But that impression is conveyed nonetheless.

The public lecture format of the first half of the book probably accounts, in part, for a troublesome tendency toward overstatement, especially concerning the historical uniqueness of Chu Hsi. For example, in "What is New in Chu Hsi?" we read of Chu's "record breaking" achievements in volume of writing, number of pupils, establishment of and involvement in retreats and academies, length of written memorials, number of calligraphic remains, and number of surviving portraits (p. 40). Many of these are indeed impressive achievements, although the last two, it will be noticed, are partly due to accidents of history. But with the possible exception of Chu's involvement in retreats and academies, I cannot see how such facts support Professor Chan's claim that "this is sufficient to show the innovative character of the man"

⁴ Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch'en Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). See also his This Tao of Ours: Tao-hsüeh Confucians during the Southern Sung, forthcoming.

(ibid.). Chu's creativity can be demonstrated in more substantial ways, as Professor Chan in fact does elsewhere. Another example of overstatement is found in "The New Fortune of Chu Hsi," where we read that the biography (hsing-chuang) of Chu written by his pupil and son-in-law, Huang Kan (1152-1221), "represents the final opinion of history" and "is the final post-mortem opinion of the Chinese people on Chu Hsi" (pp. 18, 19). Would it not be preferable to say that Huang Kan's biography, written in consultation with a number of Chu's former students and published twenty-one years after Chu's death, merely reflects a consensus of Chu's surviving pupils? Here what may have been a certain amount of dramatic flourish in the public lecture does not translate well into the book format.

In "The New Fortune of Chu Hsi" Professor Chan also reviews the history of Chu's relations with other scholars and the treatment of his legacy by later generations, from the Sung to the present day. Like the other lectures, the purpose of this is not to break new ground but to present some familiar material in a new way. There is a great deal of historical detail here that fleshes out some fairly well-known episodes in Chu Hsi's life, such as the meeting with Lu Hsiang-shan (1139-1193) at Goose Lake Temple. We are also treated to many fascinating personal glimpses of Chu, such as the fact that he "loved to burst into songs after some cups of wine," and that Chang Shih (1133-1180) criticized him for it (p. 3). Professor Chan also reviews the debate over Chu's alleged remark on the death of Lu Hsiang-shan: "It is regrettable that Kao Tzu [the rival of Mencius] has passed away." Later scholars have had difficulty with the remark, assuming that its intention was to denigrate Lu, who was Chu's philosophical rival but respected nonetheless. Some have argued that the remark was not actually uttered by Chu, while others, including Professor Chan, have tried to explain it by comparing Lu's ideas with Kao Tzu's (pp. 9-10, 157-158). But is it not possible that Chu might have seen Kao Tzu not as a bitter opponent of Mencius, but rather as a valued interlocutor, a colleague in philosophical dialogue, just as Lu was to Chu?

"Chu Hsi and World Philosophy" includes some duplication of a 1976 article, "The Study of Chu Hsi in the West," but also contains some useful speculation on the value of Chinese thought in today's world. After critically reviewing several contributors to the debate over the absence of Western-style science in traditional China (primarily Joseph Needham), Chan concludes that Confucianism's most significant role might be found in the model it provides and the questions it raises for the integration of natural philosophy (or science in the West) with moral philosophy and cultivation.

In terms of book production, the only flaw in Chu Hsi: Life and Thought is a rather large number of minor syntactical errors that should have been caught by an editor. The paper and printing are of excellent quality, footnotes are at the bottom of the page, and Chinese characters are found throughout the text and notes. The index, as usual in Professor Chan's books, is excellent. Despite the difficulties partly attributable to the juxtaposition of public lectures and scholarly articles in one volume, this book has a great deal to offer anyone interested in Chu Hsi or Sung intellectual history.

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