Understanding Confucian Philosophy_ Classical and Sung-Ming (review)
Chenyang Li, Nanyang Technological University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/chenyang_li/34/
on this list, are already several decades old). And there is certainly nothing in this volume to point to future concerns and tendencies in Japanese philosophy.

On the other hand, given the book's content, a positive feature is that the translators have fulfilled an important goal of choosing selections that have not previously appeared in English but which are nevertheless representative and crucial for understanding the overall significance of each thinker's approach. Therefore, *Sourcebook for Modern Japanese Philosophy* will serve as a beneficial supplement or complement to existing sources. It is a handy compendium that puts readers in touch with the full variety of Kyoto School philosophers, including those who vary from and argue with Nishida.

By the late 1990s, it had become impossible to discuss Nishida and the Kyoto School without dealing at least in part with the question of political implications: to what extent, if any, were these thinkers involved in supporting and promulgating the doctrine of the imperial order, which sought hegemony throughout Asia. The key figures, especially Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, participated in official colloquia to discuss the new world order and published works expressing the standpoints emerging in these discussions. Tanabe's main philosophical work, *Philosophy as Repentance*, published in 1945, was an admission and apology for his involvement in wartime rhetoric. Nishida died the same year and was thus unaccountable, and Nishitani never acknowledged the problem.

The translators take on this issue but dismiss the frequently heard criticism of Nishida (*Nishida hihan*) as Marxist rhetoric that had already been anticipated and refuted by Nishida. According to the introduction to the Nishida chapter, Nishida's publications during the war were "not an ambivalent, jingoist endorsement of the militaristic, ultra-nationalist strains of ideology . . . but brilliantly consistent applications of Nishida's cultural, existential, and metaphysical templates to the contemporary realities of the China and Pacific wars and to the envisioned intercivilizational prospects of the postwar era" (pp. 16–17). However, the translators' argument concerning Nishida's emphasis on the existence of a separate, individual kokutai (national polity) during the imperial rule seems to defy credulity when they include translated passages like the following one from "On the National Polity," written in 1944: "The Imperial Household is a symbol that envelops the past and the future; and thus the fact that, as a self-determination of the absolute present, everything takes the Imperial Household as its center and is vitally developing, is attributable to the glory of our national polity" (p. 85). Nevertheless, the translators are to be commended for tackling the issue head-on, and readers can draw their own conclusions about the intentionality of Kyoto School philosophers.


Reviewed by Chenyang Li Central Washington University

*Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Sung-Ming,* by Shu-hsien Liu, a leading contemporary Neo-Confucian scholar, aims to present the Confucian tradi-
tion from a contemporary Neo-Confucian perspective and purports to provide some background clues to what has led to the Third Epoch of Confucianism, that is, the emergence of the contemporary Neo-Confucian movement.

As its title suggests, the book is divided into two parts. Part 1 deals with Classical Confucianism, and part 2 is a study of Sung-Ming Confucian philosophy. The Classical period begins with an informative chapter on the historical background to the emergence of Confucian philosophy, which is particularly useful if the book is to be used as a university-level text. The historical chapter is followed by chapters on Confucius (Kong Zi), Mencius (Meng Zi), The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean, and the Book of Changes. Part 1 ends with a chapter on the transformation of Confucianism since the Han dynasty. Compared with similar books on Confucian philosophy, the chapter on Confucius appears sketchy, but its treatment of Confucius' central concept, jen (ren), is first-rate, clear, and insightful. The chapter on Mencius is more elaborate. It surveys virtually every key concept of Mencius' philosophy. As with similar works by Chinese scholars, the sheer number of quotations in this chapter may appear excessive to Western readers. Hsün Tzu (Xun Zi), another key classical Confucian philosopher, is only mentioned in passing, although this is not surprising in a book written from a Neo-Confucian perspective; in the Neo-Confucian tradition Hsün Tzu is considered unorthodox.

The chapter on the Book of Changes is a breath of fresh air in that it has adopted a developmental point of view. The author argues that there are four layers of meaning in the work: it offers a system of mystical symbolism, a system of rational/natural symbolism, a system of cosmological symbolism, and finally a system of ethics/metaphysical symbolism. Professor Liu says of the four systems, "each one succeed[s] the other and yet interpenetrate[s] the other" (p. 74). Overall, Classical Confucianism is analyzed according to three inseparable aspects—spiritual, political, and popular—which define the heritage as well as the burden of this tradition.

At first I was a bit surprised to see that the chapter on "The Characteristics and Contemporary Significance of Sung-Ming Neo-Confucian Philosophy" is at the beginning, not at the end, of part 2 on Sung-Ming Neo-Confucian philosophy. But it turns out that this chapter contains a brief survey of some major Neo-Confucian philosophers of the period and serves well as an introduction to part 2. Recognizing Chu Hsi's (Zhu Xi) contribution to the movement of the Second Epoch, Liu spends two chapters out of six on this great Sung philosopher. The chapter on Wang Yang-ming aims "to destroy the myth once and for all that there is no discrepancy between Lu [Hsiang-shan] and Wang and that there is not a close relationship between Wang and Chu [Hsi]" (p. 198). This goes against a widespread misconception that Wang and Chu represent two distinct lines of Neo-Confucianism.

Part 2 ends with a chapter on Huang Tsung-hsi (Huang Zongxii), arguably the most liberal of all Sung-Ming Neo-Confucian philosophers. Liu regards Huang as the culmination of an unfinished Sung-Ming Neo-Confucian philosophical tradition, from which the contemporary Neo-Confucian movement should take up the cause. Altogether, part 2 is not as systematic in introducing Sung-Ming Neo-Confucian philosophy as is part 1 on Classical Confucianism.
As a synthesis of various articles previously published by the author over a twenty-five-year period, the book bears both the strengths and the weaknesses of works of this kind: there are in-depth studies focused on specific topics of particular interest in the Neo-Confucian movement, but there is occasionally a lack of smooth transition from one chapter to another or even within the same chapter. Chapter 11, for instance, is clearly a combination of two articles that have been put together without adequate revision. The introductory paragraph at the beginning of the chapter covers only the first half of the chapter’s content, and in the middle there is a rather abrupt change to a different subject, Wang Yang-ming. There are some issues that are disputable. For instance, following Wing-tsit Chan, the author renders “Hao Ran Zhi Qi” 浩然之气 as “strong, moving power” (p. 42), which is both rather inadequate and inaccurate. Liu also renders “Ya-sheng” 假聖 as “second only to the sages” (p. 33). It is more accurate to render it as “second only to the sage.” “Ya-sheng” has been used with reference to “Zhi-sheng” 至聖, “the ultimate sage,” namely Confucius. Liu also asserts that clearly “Confucianism does not occupy a place in mainstream Chinese thought in the present century” (p. 260). If by this he means that Confucianism does not occupy a central place in mainstream scholarly discourse or government ideology, he is undoubtedly correct. But this cannot be said if we have in mind Confucianism as the cultural/ethical philosophy that influences the daily lives of the common people in China. Having spent many years in rural China, I can attest that in the rural areas, even during the Cultural Revolution, Confucianism has continued to exert a most important influence on people’s lives.

I did not detect any major misstatements in this book. The arguments are well made and well supported, based on solid research and first-rate scholarship. It is a book that should be read by anyone who is interested in a holistic representation of Confucian philosophy from a contemporary Neo-Confucian perspective. Liu indicates in the Epilogue that this book is to be followed by a volume on contemporary Neo-Confucian philosophy. I very much look forward to the next volume.


Reviewed by John S. Major

The eight essays in this collection (six of them previously published) show the combination of boldness and erudition that is characteristic of all of Edward Shaughnessy’s work. The results of his investigations are always interesting and felicitously expressed, and if one sometimes resists following the author quite so far down the evidentiary and interpretive road as he himself is willing to go, the intellectual journey is always a rewarding one.

The common thread in these essays is Shaughnessy’s belief that the Chinese classics, although admittedly written in their final form at a time well after the era