

Huang, Chun-chieh 黃俊傑, ed.:

***The Study of East Asian Confucianism: Retrospect and Prospect* (東亞儒學研究的回顧與展望)**

(525 pages, 2005, Taipei: National Taiwan University Press)

The present book has been published as a part of the research program of East Asian Confucianisms in the Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, National Taiwan University, which has been established at the National Taiwan University in 2006. The research program was focused upon East Asian Confucianisms and it resulted, among others, in seven extensive book series.

The book *Retrospect and Prospects of the Research in Eastern Asian Confucianism* has been edited and published by Chun-chieh Huang, one of the most well-known experts on Confucianism in contemporary Taiwan. The editor (who is also author of several contributions included in the book), is National Chair Professor of Ministry of Education, Taiwan, a research fellow at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy at the Academia Sinica in Taipei, Honorary President of Chinese Association for General Education and Dean of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the National Taiwan University in Taipei. In his function of the director of the Program of East Asian Confucianisms at this university he has edited several books on this traditional stream of thought in the scope of his comprehensive book collection on East Asian Civilizations (東亞文明研究叢書) which has been brought to life due to the increasing relevance of these regions on the global level.

In the 21st century, East Asian societies have namely redraw the map of progress: the balance of economic—and increasingly also political—power, is shifting from the Euro-American to the East Asian areas. This shift confronts us with many new questions linked to transformations of material and intellectual paradigms, defining not only the development of East Asian societies as such, but also decidedly influencing international relations. Strategic solutions to these issues need to consider broader perspectives within the context of particular cultural backgrounds. They are not limited to economic and ecological issues, but also include political and social roles of ideologies and culturally conditioned values, representing the central epistemological grounds on which the most

characteristic and enduring institutions of these societies are resting. Hence, the series is dealing with many crucial aspects defining these idea foundations, including a several volumes dedicated to the research of Confucian theories and practices. The present book represents one of the most comprehensive volumes of this series and an indispensable source of valuable information for every scholar dealing with East Asian Confucianism.

Speaking of Eastern Asia as a concept, however, can be a risky issue. Thus, Prof. Huang Chun-chieh clarifies the notion already in the Foreword. He points out that such a clarification is important, for in the academic worlds within these areas, there are still many prejudices and “unnecessary misunderstandings” regarding the notion of Eastern Asia. The concept has namely often been understood as implying certain historical connotations linked to the Japanese imperial tendencies in the respective geographic area. Prof. Huang lays stress upon the fact that in the present anthology, the term East Asia has by no means been applied in such a universalistic and/or essential manner. It has rather been understood as a term, implying multicultural dimensions and rooted in a free interaction between multifarious Eastern Asian cultures on the one hand, and in the historical contemporary interrelations between them and other cultures of our common world.

Thus, the notion of Eastern Asia as has been implied in the present anthology, is not following the strict demarcation lines between the “Center” and “Periphery” as applied in Wallerstein’s world system theory and similar earlier discourses within the postcolonial studies. In the two millenniums of history which delineates the scholarly research of which the present book is consisting, these demarcation lines were never static enough to form such categories; they were a dynamic part of mutually influencing cultures and histories and have in their courses undergone several profound changes.

In my opinion, however, the importance of the book introduced in the present review is easy to understand, especially regarding the fact that for centuries, Confucianism has represented the central foundation of cultures in the majority of East Asian regions and that it still forms many aspects of their contemporary value systems. Here, we could mention another common cultural ground which bounded the area together during longstanding centuries, namely the pictographic writing.

The main goal of the present anthology is thus twofold: first, through the lens of researching their common Confucian grounds, it aims to introduce comparisons

and mutual influence between the major East Asian countries, namely China, Japan and Korea, and, secondly to evaluate the interaction in this research field between these countries and the Western world.

The anthology consists of nine comprehensive studies, dealing with various aspects of East Asian research in Confucianism. It opens with a study written by Huang Chun-chieh, the editor of the entire anthology. This study contains a detailed general introduction of the present state and the future prospects of interpreting Confucian classics in Eastern Asia. The introduction and the critical evaluation of the present state in these research areas forms a basis that enables the author to delineate the most probable future directions and guidelines in the research of Confucian classics on the one hand, and to design the most relevant research questions still open to investigations in this field that has, as the study shows, an immense potential for further development. As the author points out, the study does not represent a catalogue of all works that were written in this research field in Eastern Asia, but rather a theoretical evaluation of the respective discourses, focusing upon problems, linked to their scope, their contents, as well as to their cultural and social backgrounds, mainly aiming to raise awareness on these issues.

The second study that has been compiled by the Japanese scholar Masayuki Sato, contains six chronologically structured sections introducing the Japanese research in Xunzi during the 20th century. This overview does not represent a critical evaluation of the material, but rather aims to introduce the main Japanese currents, works and authors, working in this research field, to the Chinese academic readership. This section is followed by a chapter on the Ritual books from the Tang and Song dynasties through the lens of the controversial thesis, according to which the end of the Tang and the beginning of the Song dynasties represent the demarcation line between ancient China and the Chinese middle age. Chang Wen-Chang, the author of these six chapters has based his investigation on previous research results derived from Japanese scholars who carried out a broad scope of research in the reforms and social transformation that have been taking place in both abovementioned dynasties. The relatively detailed analyses of their ritual books which, of course, were containing the main criteria and central codes for formal social interactions, were carried out in order to shed further light upon the abovementioned controversy.

Lee Bong Kyoo introduced some focal points and central issues guiding the Korean research in Confucianism in the next chapter. This chapter concentrates especially upon the Korean investigations and elaboration of the Jeong Yak-yong's (wider known as Dasan) teachings, that have been later even more extensively elaborated in Huang Chun-chieh's book *The East Asian Perspective of the Dasan Discourse and the Korean Confucianism* (東亞視域中的茶山學與朝鮮儒學) which has been published in 2006 in the scope of the same series as the present anthology. Divided into seven different sections, this chapter offers a comprehensive introduction of the Korean research material on this important scholar who wrote highly influential books about philosophy, science and theories of government, held significant administrative positions, and was noted as a poet. His philosophical position is often identified with the Neo-Confucian school of practical learning 實學 (in Korean: Silhak), focusing upon the research in his philosophy, his interpretations of the Confucian classics and rituality, as well as on his theories on statecraft.

The next chapter, written by Hung Yueh Lan, is dedicated to the research and a critical evaluation of Japanese Confucianism. In six sections, it analyses the post-war Japanese interpretations of Masao Maruyama's classical work *Investigations in the Japanese Political Thought* and establishes a fundamental critique of Maruyama's theories. These theories were rooted in a search for the specific origins of Japanese enlightenment and modernity through the analysis of Dong Zhongshu's reformed Confucianism, known under the name Dezhou Confucianism. Through this critique and through the exposition of certain errors in interpretation, the author aims to underline the future guidelines for possible directions in researching Dezhou Confucianism. These essays are followed by another chapter which also focuses upon the Confucian research in Japan. It is written by Kun-Chiang Chang and mainly deals with the Japanese research in the teachings and discursive developments of the most important represent of the Neo-Confucian School of the Heart-mind (Xin xue 心學), namely with Wang Yangming's work. The chapter which is subdivided in eight different sections, points out the importance of this Japanese research field due to its contribution to the widening and the internationalization of the influential sphere of this important philosopher. Because of respective Japanese research works, Wang Yangming's philosophy and its theoretical implications were not only upgraded, but also placed in a broader East Asian context. In this sense, they represent a good example of

fruitful cooperation and interaction between particular cultures that were (and still are) profoundly influenced by Confucian philosophy.

Chapter 7, which was written by Shyu Shing-Ching, deals with the Chinese and Japanese research of the works created by Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水 (Shu Shun-Sui, 1600–1682), a Chinese scholar from the Ming dynasty who lived and worked in Japan, thus contributing immensely to the exchange between China and Japan, as well as to Japanese education and intellectual history.

The next chapter that has also been written by the main editor of this anthology, Prof. Chun-Chieh Huang, represents an important excursus to the main line of writings that have primarily been focused upon East Asian research in Confucianism. It namely deals with the post-war Confucian research that has been carried out in the period between 1950 and 1980 by sinologists from the USA. This excursus is significant because it widens the horizon of the central conceptualization of the discussed book which is based upon exposing the intercultural dimensions of Confucian research. The author points out that in contrast to European Sinology which dates back to the 13th century and which has been well documented especially regarding its research in the area of Confucian studies, the North American research in this field has hitherto not been considered enough. Thus, he decided to order and introduce to the wider Chinese academic public the immense amount of respective research work implemented by American sinologists, especially regarding the fact that after the WWII, the leading guidelines of Chinese, and also of Confucian studies in respect of both, their methodology as well as their contents, were gradually shifted from the European to the North American region. Previous research that has been heavily relying upon the philological research has thus been replaced by more topical methods that concentrate upon placing the particular subject matters of Confucian research into their respective social, political and historical contexts. Chun-Chieh Huang points out that after the beginning of the seventies of the previous century, American sinologists have, however, also begun to apply certain modernized text bounded research methods, implying the analyses of conceptual and axiological aspects of Confucian teachings. The author concludes that both methods that have still been applied by foreign scholars are mutually complementary and can contribute a lot to the further development of Confucian research not only in the East Asian, but also in the wider, global context.

The last, eight chapter of the anthology was written by Chao-yang Pan introduces the specific features of the post-war Confucian research in Taiwan, focusing upon both, its central problems as well as upon its broader significance. The author points out that Taiwanese research in traditional Chinese philosophy cannot be divided from its social and political contexts including its colonial past as well as its Westernized present. Hence, the chapter exposes that a reconstruction of the core traditional values prevailing in classical Chinese philosophy and their incorporation into the modern Taiwanese society belongs to the main tasks that should direct the future Taiwanese research in Confucianism.

We could add that in this way, modern investigations in Confucianism could be significantly contributing to the re-establishment of the local cultural identities, shaping new, modernized images not only of the Taiwanese, but also of Chinese and East Asian cultural heritages. The book that has been introduced in the present review is representing an important step on this significant path of academic inquiry.

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